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## Introduction

In 1910, George Tyrrell suggested that research was producing different versions of Jesus as though the scholars at work were simply painting portraits of themselves in first-century clothing. Crossan writes of the “academic embarrassment” resulting from this problem that continues in modern portraits.<sup>1</sup> For a number of years I have been a student of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Anyone who has devoted even a minimal amount of time to this question realizes that the varied results of research by scholars on this subject are reminiscent of what we find in historical Jesus research, if not more so. Major scholars such as Allison, Brown, Carnley, Catchpole, Craig, Crossan, Dunn, Ehrman, Habermas, Lüdemann, Marxsen, O’Collins, Swinburn, Wedderburn, and Wright have all weighed in on the topic during the past three decades and most of them have arrived at different results on a number of related issues.<sup>2</sup>

Classicist historian A. N. Sherwin-White caught my attention when he noted approaches taken by biblical scholars that differed from those of classical historians. He expressed surprise over the loss of confidence for the Gospels and especially Acts by New Testament scholars. On Acts he added that attempts to reject its basic historicity “appear absurd” and that “Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”<sup>3</sup> On the Gospels, Sherwin-White asserted that “it is astonishing that while Graeco-Roman historians have been growing in confidence, the twentieth-century study of the Gospel narratives, starting from no less promising material [than what Graeco-Roman historians work with], has taken so gloomy a turn in the development of form-criticism.”<sup>4</sup> The prominent theologian John McIntyre similarly observed that although historical positivism was “severely criticized” in the practice of history “in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, it has lingered on to have a quite devastating effect upon biblical criticism and theological definition in the

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent treatment has attempted to identify how this quagmire might be resolved, see Denton (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Dale C. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005); Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (1973), Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (1987), David Catchpole, *Resurrection People: Studies in the Resurrection Narratives of the Gospels* (2002); William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1989); John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (2003); Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (1999); Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (2003); Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ* (2004); Willi Marxsen, *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* (1990); Gerald O’Collins, *Easter Faith: Believing in the Risen Jesus* (2003); Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (2003). Moreover, a number of books with numerous contributors have been published on the topic: Gavin D’Costa, ed. *Resurrection Reconsidered* (1996); Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins, eds. *The Resurrection* (1998); Stewart, ed. (2006). The hypercritical community has also recently weighed in with Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder, *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (2005). The first theme issue for the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 3.2 (June 2005) was devoted to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Craig, Habermas, and Swinburne are philosophers and conclude that Jesus rose. Marxsen (1990) comments, “There are almost as many opinions about ‘the resurrection of Jesus’ as there are books and essays which have been published on this subject” (39).

<sup>3</sup> Sherwin-White (1963), 188-89.

<sup>4</sup> Sherwin-White (1963), 187.

twentieth century. A curious aspect of this circumstance is that historical positivism has not had that kind of overwhelming influence upon general historiography.”<sup>5</sup>

I began to wonder whether the reason why a more unified conclusion on these matters eludes scholars is because biblical scholars are ill-prepared for such investigations. That is not to say that biblical scholars are not historically minded. Troeltsch made a serious attempt to form historical criteria and even today debates are taking place over what criteria and methods are appropriate for investigating the sayings of Jesus and the degree of certainty that may be attained.<sup>6</sup> While these are helpful for identifying potentially authentic logia of Jesus and some of his acts, are they the most appropriate for investigating the claim that Jesus rose from the dead? After all, criteria for identifying authentic logia are not very helpful in verifying Caesar’s crossing the Rubicon in 49 BC and Augustus’ defeat of Antony in 31 BC.

What approach should be taken for an investigation involving the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection? When writing on the resurrection of Jesus, biblical scholars are engaged in historical research. Are they doing so without adequate or appropriate training?<sup>7</sup> How many had completed so much as a single undergraduate course pertaining to how to investigate the past?<sup>8</sup> Are biblical scholars conducting their historical investigations differently than professional historians? If professional historians who work outside of the community of biblical scholars were to embark on an investigation of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, what would such an investigation look like?

Gary Habermas is a professional philosopher noted for his specialization in the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. He served as director of my master’s thesis, which pertained to the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. Habermas has compiled a massive bibliography consisting of approximately 2,500 journal articles and books written by scholars on the subject of the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection in English, German, and French between 1975 through the present.<sup>9</sup> He has extensive knowledge of the relevant literature, the major contributors, the positions they maintain and the reasons why they maintain them. I asked Habermas if he was aware of any

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<sup>5</sup> McIntyre (2001), 11. ‘Historical positivism’ is the position that authentic knowledge only comes from historical investigation. Accordingly, failure to prove something means that it has in essence been disproved.

<sup>6</sup> Troeltsch (1913). For more recent examples, see Eve (2005), Hooker (1972), and Theissen and Winter (2002).

<sup>7</sup> C. A. Evans (2006): “Eventually I learned that many scholars engaged in the study of the historical Jesus have studied Bible and theology, but not history. These Jesus scholars *are not historians at all*. This lack of training is apparent in the odd presuppositions, methods and conclusions that are reached” (252n16). In a personal dinner discussion with Richard Bauckham and Gary Habermas in San Diego on 11/15/07, Bauckham made a similar comment, which I paraphrase: New Testament scholars need to take courses in how to conduct historical investigation. Very few have training in this area and are simply using the same methods as those before them.

<sup>8</sup> A search through the catalogues of courses and degree requirements revealed that few to no courses in the philosophy of history and contemporary historical method are offered by the departments of religion and philosophy at the nine Ivy-League institutions for the 2007 fall semester and 2008 spring and fall semesters. The only clear case is a Ph.D. seminar offered by Princeton Theological Seminary (CH 900 Historical Method).

<sup>9</sup> At the time of my writing, Habermas was in the process of formatting this bibliography for publishing. Of interest is Habermas’ observation that “by far, the majority of publications on the subject of Jesus’s death and resurrection have been written by North American authors” and that these have “perhaps the widest range of views” ([“Resurrection Research,” 2005], 140; cf. 138, 140).

professional historian outside of the community of biblical scholars who had approached the question of the resurrection of Jesus. He was aware of only a handful who had contributed a few journal articles and one who had written a short book on the subject. At that time, he could not recall any treatment by a religious scholar or philosopher who had laid out a detailed philosophy of history and proposed methodology for approaching the question pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. My interest in taking this direction for doctoral research intensified and I began in March 2003.

Within two months of my beginning, N. T. Wright's monumental volume on the resurrection arrived: *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Later that same year the first volume of James D. G. Dunn's work on the historical Jesus was published: *Jesus Remembered*. These authors gave unprecedented considerations to hermeneutics and method, as would Allison two years later in *Resurrecting Jesus*. Even after these works, a void remained when it came to having a carefully defined and extensive historical method to the degree I imagined would be typical of professional historians.

So, how does my research differ from previous treatments? In the pages that follow I will investigate the question of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection while providing unprecedented interaction with the literature of professional historians outside of the community of biblical scholars on both hermeneutical and methodological considerations.<sup>10</sup>

In chapter one, I will discuss a few matters pertaining to the philosophy of history and historical method. I will discuss such topics as the extent to which the past is knowable, how historians gain knowledge of it, the impact biases have on investigations and steps that may assist historians in minimizing their biases, the role a consensus should or should not play in historical investigations, who shoulders the burden of proof, the point at which a historian is warranted in declaring that the question has been solved, and a few others. My objective in this chapter is to determine how historians outside of the community of biblical scholars proceed in their investigations involving non-religious matters in order to establish my approach for proceeding in my investigation of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

In chapter two, I will address objections to the investigation of miracle-claims by historians from a number of prominent scholars. This is very important for the present investigation, since we can go no further if historians are barred from the task. I will address the objections mounted by David Hume, C. B. McCullagh, John Meier, Bart Ehrman, A. J. M. Wedderburn and James D. G. Dunn. My conclusion is that their objections are ill-founded insofar as they prohibit a historical investigation of Jesus' resurrection, although they warn us to proceed with caution. I will provide further discussion on the issue of burden of proof given the added consideration of a miracle-claim.

Historians must identify the relevant sources from which they will mine data for their investigations. In chapter three, I will survey the primary literature relevant to our investigation and rate them according to their value to the present investigation. I will

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<sup>10</sup> To be clear, historians outside of the community of biblical scholars have these discussions. But an application of them to the question of Jesus' resurrection has not been performed to the extent herein.



limit this survey to sources that mention the death and resurrection of Jesus and that were written within two hundred years of Jesus' death. These sources include the canonical literature, non-canonical Christian literature (including the Gnostic sources), and non-Christian sources. I will then rate each of these according to the likelihood that it contains data pertaining to Jesus' death and resurrection that go back to the earliest Christians, and identify the sources most promising for the present investigation.

In chapter four, I will mine through the most promising material identified in the previous chapter and form a collection of facts that are so strongly evidenced that they enjoy a heterogeneous and nearly universal consensus granting them. These will comprise our historical bedrock upon which all hypotheses pertaining to Jesus' fate must be built. Facts that do not qualify as historical bedrock will not be allowed in the weighing of hypotheses in chapter five unless needed in the event of a tie-breaker, addressed by a particular hypothesis, or included in the footnotes.

In chapter five, I will apply the methodological considerations discussed in chapter one and weigh six hypotheses largely representative of those being offered in the beginning of the twenty-first century pertaining to the question of the resurrection of Jesus. I will start with the contention of Geza Vermes that we do not know whether Jesus rose from the dead, followed by the proposals of Michael Goulder and Gerd Lüdemann that draw exclusively upon psychohistory and provide naturalistic explanations for the beliefs of the earliest Christians that Jesus had been raised. I will then assess John Dominic Crossan's contention that a combination of psychological conditions, unique exegetical interpretations, competing reports in often ignored sources that contain earlier Christian teachings, Paul's mutation of the Jewish concept of the general resurrection, and the use of resurrection as a metaphor, contributed to the view that God's cosmic clean-up of the world had begun and that a literal understanding of resurrection as the revivification of Jesus' corpse would have been repulsive to the earliest Christians, including Paul. I will then move onto Pieter Craffert's hypothesis that attempts to take the biblical reports seriously while explaining them in natural terms by drawing on the social sciences. Finally, I will assess the Resurrection hypothesis.

Allison refers to the question pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus as the "prize puzzle of New Testament research."<sup>11</sup> It is my hope that this work will assist us in coming closer to solving the puzzle.

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<sup>11</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 200. See also Watson (1987): "The resurrection of Jesus has recently become a *cause célèbre* second only to the controversy about the ordination of women" (365).

# Chapter One

## Important Considerations on Historical Inquiry Pertaining to the Truth in Ancient Texts

Excessive epistemology becomes cognitive cannibalism. But a little bit of it is important as a hedge against easy assumptions and arrogant certainties in any branch of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

*Luke Timothy Johnson*

### 1.1. Introductory Comments

In *The History Primer*, J. H. Hexter asked his readers to consider the difference between grading an examination in mathematics and one in history. In the former, students either get it or they do not. “Really bad mathematics, therefore, is the consequence of an utter failure of comprehension and results in answers that are simply and wholly false. This sort of total disaster is far less likely in a history examination.” When writing about the past, “even an ill-informed stupid student is not likely to get everything all wrong. A slightly informed, intelligent student will do better. . . . [While n]obody bluffs his way through a written mathematics examination,” the same cannot be said of students of history. “Partly because writing bad history is pretty easy, writing very good history is rare.”<sup>2</sup>

And so our journey begins. What is *history*? One might think this question would be easy to answer and that professional historians would all agree that history is a synonym for the past. Indeed, a number of historians and philosophers define history in this manner. Philosopher of history Aviezer Tucker defines history as “past events.”<sup>3</sup> Philosopher Stephen Davis asserts that “*history is understood as the events that occurred in the real past and that historians attempt to discover [ital. his].*”<sup>4</sup> However, it turns out that many others have provided differing definitions. Indeed, the term *history* may be referred to as an *essentially contested concept*, which is a word for which no consensus exists related to its meaning.<sup>5</sup> What are some other definitions of *history* that are offered? Historical Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan offers the following: “History is the past reconstructed interactively by the present through argued evidence in public discourse.”<sup>6</sup> Samuel Byrskog defines history as “*an account of what people have done and said in the past, which means that various kinds of biased, pragmatic and didactic features can be part of the writing of history.*”<sup>7</sup> Historian Michael Oakeshott offers this definition: “‘What really happened [is] what the evidence obliges us to believe.’ The historical past, itself a construction based on reasoning from evidence, is ultimately a construction within the historian’s

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<sup>1</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Hexter (*The History Primer*, 1971), 59.

<sup>3</sup> Tucker (2004), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Davis (1993), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Bryce Gallie introduced the term *essentially contested concept* in a paper delivered on March 12, 1956 to the Aristotelian Society.

<sup>6</sup> Crossan (1998), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Byrskog (2002), 44, emphasis in original.

‘world of ideas.’”<sup>8</sup> New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson offers the following: “History is, rather, a product of human intelligence and imagination. It is one of the ways in which human beings negotiate their present experience and understanding with reference to group and individual memory.”<sup>9</sup> Philosopher of history Hayden White offers this definition: “the term *history* refers both to an object of study and to an account of this object” and “can be conceived only on the basis of an equivocation . . . in the notion of a general human past that is split into two parts one of which is supposed to be ‘historical,’ the other ‘unhistorical.’”<sup>10</sup> More definitions can be found in abundance.<sup>11</sup> Although much discussion is to follow, throughout this dissertation I will use Tucker’s definition and refer to history as *past events that are the object of study*.

Historiography is another essentially contested concept. White writes that historiography concerns quests *about* history and questions *of* history. It is both philosophy and method.<sup>12</sup> Tucker refers to it as “representations of past events, usually texts, but other media such as movies or sound recordings.”<sup>13</sup> According to this definition, Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews*, Tacitus’s *Annals*, and Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* are all examples of historiography. Thus, historiography can be defined as the history of the philosophy of history and as writings about the past. Historiography is not historical method but includes it, since method enables one to write about the past. Throughout this dissertation I will use the term *historiography* to refer to matters in the philosophy of history and historical method. Philosophy of history concerns epistemological approaches to gaining a knowledge of the past. It attempts to answer questions such as “What does it mean to *know* something?” “How do we come to know something?” “Can we know the past and, if so, to what extent?” “What does it mean when historians say that a particular event occurred?”<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2. Theory

### 1.2.1. Considerations in the Philosophy of History

There are numerous challenges to knowing the past. Since the past is forever gone, it can neither be viewed directly nor reconstructed precisely or exhaustively.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1933), 107, cited by Rex Martin (2005), 140.

<sup>9</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 81-82.

<sup>10</sup> White (1987), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Anchor (1999), 121; Barnett (*Crux*, 1997), 3; Blackburn (2000), 272; Fasolt (2005), 10; Holscher (1997), 322; Iggers (1983), 68.

<sup>12</sup> White (1978), 81. Gilderhus (2007) refers to historiography as “the history of historical writing” (16).

<sup>13</sup> Tucker (2004), 1. See also R. J. Miller, “Back to Basics: A Primer on Historical Method” in Scott, ed. (2008), 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Historicism* is another essentially contested concept. Although I will not be using this term throughout this dissertation, I will here list a few definitions of the term throughout the literature: Momigliano (1977): “historicism is the recognition that each of us sees past events from a point of view determined or at least conditioned by our own individual changing situation in history” (366); Ankersmit (2003): “a dialogue with the past in order to gain true historical insight” (255, also see 254 where Ankersmit identifies *historicism* as an essentially contested concept); Pieters (2000): *new historicism* determines what meaning there is to be found in a past event; Zammito (1998): *historicism* is a realist historian (331).

Accordingly, historians cannot verify the truth of a hypothesis in an absolute sense.<sup>15</sup> Our knowledge of the past comes exclusively through sources. This means that, to an extent, our only link to the past is through the eyes of someone else, a person who had his own opinions and agendas.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, just as two newspapers offering reports of the same event can differ significantly due to the political biases of the journalists,<sup>17</sup> reports coming to us from ancient historians have likewise been influenced to varying degrees by the biases of the ancient historian. Moreover, many ancient historians lacked interest in their past. Instead, they were more concerned with having their present remembered.<sup>18</sup>

Historians, ancient and modern alike, are selective in the material they report. Data the reporting historian deems uninteresting, unimportant, or irrelevant to his purpose in writing are usually omitted.<sup>19</sup> For example, Lucian complained when he heard a man tell of the Battle of Europus in less than seven lines but afforded much more time to the experiences of a Moorish horseman.<sup>20</sup> Amazingly, neither Philo nor Josephus, the most prominent non-Christian Jewish writers of the first century, mentioned the Emperor Claudius's expulsion of all Jews from Rome in c. AD 49-50. Only Suetonius and Luke mention the event and each gives it only one line in passing.<sup>21</sup> A contemporary example is found in Ronald Reagan's autobiography, in which he

<sup>15</sup> Harris (2004), 198-99. See also Gilderhus (2007), 124. Rex Martin (2005) complains that "we most often have no such access to that past at all (not even in memory); we are not in that past now, never have been, and never will be" (141). R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Droysen (1893): "How superficial, how unreliable our knowledge of earlier times is, how necessarily fragmentary and limited to particular point the view which we can now gather therefrom" (118). Willitts (2005) is more pessimistic than most regarding the historical Jesus: "The fact is our knowledge of Jesus is always mediated to us through sources. It seems to me that probity whispers that the quest for 'what actually happened' is not possible, and we should be more attentive to its voice" (105).

<sup>17</sup> On February 26, 1987, "The Tower Commission Report" was released and listed the results of the committee's investigation of the Iran-Contra scandal that occurred during the U. S. presidency of Ronald Reagan. I recall being surprised on the following morning when reading the quite contradictory reports of what the Commission concluded on the front pages of the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times*.

<sup>18</sup> Finley (1965): "The plain fact is that the classical Greeks knew little about their history before 650 B.C. (or even 550 B.C.), and that what they thought they knew was a jumble of fact and fiction, some miscellaneous facts and much fiction about essentials and about most of the details" (288). Finley goes on to demonstrate that Thucydides devoted little space to Greece's past and that he was primarily concerned with the present. In his past, he employs "astonishingly few concrete events," he employs myth, and we have no independent accounts by which we may check him (289). "These mistakes, coupled with the absence of all dates and virtually all fixed events between 1170 and 700, destroy any possibility of a proper history of early Greece" (290). On the historiography of Herodotus, see Hartog (2000), 384-395; Barrera (2001), 190-205. On Mesopotamian historiography, see A. K. Grayson, "Mesopotamian Historiography" in Freedman, ed. (1992), 205-06. On Israelite historiography, see Thompson in Freedman, ed. (1992), 3:206-12. Thompson is a minimalist who adopts a methodologically skeptical approach. See also I. Provain, V. P. Long, and T. Longman III (2003), Part I, "History, Historiography, and the Bible" (1-104); D. M. Howard Jr. and M. A. Grisanti, eds. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003). On Greco-Roman historiography, see D. Lateiner, "Greco-Roman Historiography," in Freedman, ed. (1992), 3:212-19.

<sup>19</sup> See also Byrskog (2002, 257-58) who provides as examples Herodotus (1:16, 177), Thucydides (III 90:1; IV 50:2), Polybius (I 13:6; 56:11; 79:7; XXIX 12:6), Xenophon (*Historia Graeca* IV 8:1; V 1: 3-4; 4:1; VI 2:32). B. Fischhoff, "For those condemned to study the past: Heuristics and biases in hindsight," in Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, eds. (1982) observes, "The eye, journalist, and historian are all drawn to disorder. An accident-free drive to the store or a reign without wars, depressions, or earthquakes is for them uneventful" (338).

<sup>20</sup> Lucian, *How to Write History*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius* 25; Acts 18:2.

comments on his first marriage. However, readers desiring to learn about this relationship will be disappointed, since Reagan offers a total of two sentences:

The same year I made the Knute Rockne movie, I married Jane Wyman, another contract player at Warners. Our marriage produced two wonderful children, Maureen and Michael, but it didn't work out, and in 1948 we were divorced.<sup>22</sup>

My wife's grandfather kept a daily diary for years. His entry for April 2, 1917, the day the U.S. entered WWI against Germany, was as follows:

The weather was cloudy and windy today. {Born to Herman and Edyth to-day a son.} Pa and I cultivated in oats again to-day.

The following Sunday (Easter, April 8, 1917), he wrote the following:

The weather is very nice and warmer. The ground is very much [?]. Pa {ect.} [sic.] didn't go to church to-day. I went alone on Pearl [a horse]. There were quite a few there in spite of the mud. In the afternoon we all went up to Fred's.

Albert Weible contributed entries every day. Yet he never mentioned the war. If we think of history as an exhaustive description of the past, then history is certainly unknowable. However, if we regard history as an adequate description of a subject during a specific period, we are in a position to think that history is knowable to a degree. Although incomplete, adequate descriptions provide enough data for answering the questions being asked. "Bush was the President of the United States in 2006" is an accurate statement. It is incomplete, since it fails to mention that he was also a husband and father during the same time. Whether the statement is adequate or fair depends on the purpose of writing and the questions being asked. The Evangelists never actually described the physical features of Jesus because it was not relevant to their purpose in writing. This omission can hardly be said to hinder us regarding many questions of historicity. Thus, an *incomplete* description does not necessitate the conclusion that it is an *inaccurate* description.

The selectivity of historians goes beyond the events or narratives they choose to report. Historians select data because of their relevancy to the particular historian and these become evidence used by them for building their case for a particular hypothesis. Detectives at the scene of a crime survey all of the data and select specific data that become evidence as they are interpreted within the framework of a hypothesis of what occurred. Data that are irrelevant to that hypothesis are archived or ignored. Historians work in the same manner. Suppose an ancient historian selected specific data while discarding other data deemed irrelevant. If the ancient historian was mistaken in his understanding of what occurred, modern historians may find themselves handicapped, since what may be data relevant to the questions they are asking may now be lost, unless it is reported or alluded to in a different source. Therefore, historians may inquire whether there is a high probability that data no longer extant would serve as evidence. Of course, this speculation would produce an

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald Reagan (1990), 92.



argument from silence and an *ad hoc* component to any hypothesis. But this is sometimes necessary when historians suffer from a paucity of data.

Memories are selective and are augmented by interpretive details. In time, they may become uncertain, faded, or distorted. Authorial intent often eludes us and the motives behind the reports are often difficult to determine.<sup>23</sup> This is a challenge when we consider the four earliest extant biographies of Jesus, known as the canonical Gospels. There is somewhat of a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*). *Bioi* offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material, inventing speeches in order to communicate the teachings, philosophy, and political beliefs of the subject, and often included encomium. Because *bios* was a flexible genre, it is often difficult to determine where history ends and encomium begins.<sup>24</sup>

Another factor that contributes to the difficulty of knowing the past is the occasional unreliability of eyewitness testimony. Lucian writes of those who lie about being eyewitnesses, when in fact they were not.<sup>25</sup> But even reports by eyewitnesses attempting to be truthful have challenges. Zabell notes that the eyewitness must “(1) accurately perceive it; (2) remember it with precision; (3) truthfully state it; and (4)

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<sup>23</sup> Zammito (1998), 334.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3.2.1. The only manual pertaining to proper historiography that has survived from antiquity is Lucian’s *How to Write History*, written in the latter half of the second century AD. Lucian provides minimal information concerning the genre of history writing (*How to Write History* 7 in *Lucian*, Volume VI in Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959]). The purpose of history was to report what was of profit or benefit to the readers. The reporting should be truthful (9, 51). Lucian (42) cites Thucydides’ statement that he is writing so that future readers who find themselves in a similar situation may gain wisdom. We also observe examples of this feature in Eusebius and Tacitus. In *Ecclesiastical History* 8.2.3, Eusebius admits that in his history of the Church he will not include reports of Christians who abandoned their faith as a result of the heavy Roman persecution that began in March 303, but will only include reports that will be useful to Christians in his day and for their posterity. Tacitus states a similar purpose in *Annals* 3.65: “My purpose is not to relate at length every motion, but only such as were conspicuous for excellence or notorious for infamy. This I regard as history’s highest function, to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds” (Translation, Perseus Project: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0078&layout=&loc=3.65> [accessed October 3, 2006]). Lucian (*How to Write History* 9) taught that “history has one task and end: τὸ χρήσιμον (useful, beneficial, profitable), “which is gathered only from the truth.” For Lucian, praise for the subject was acceptable within reasonable limits (9). Complete fiction and excessive praise, especially when taken to the point of lying, were to be avoided (7), although Lucian claims many historians were guilty of going too far in order to gain favor with those they praised and for financial gain (10, 13, 40). Instead, the historian should write without fear of retribution or hope of profit from his subject (38). Although a chronological order of events was preferable, ancient historians were permitted to rearrange them. However, misplacing a location by a large margin was unacceptable (24, 49, 51). An understanding of politics and a gift for explanation are the most valuable qualities to be possessed by historians (34, 51). Truth was not to be sacrificed for the sake of hurting an enemy or protecting a friend. He writes for future readers, rather than the historian’s peers (39–41, 61). The historian should either be an eyewitness or get his information from sober and reliable sources (47). A speech could be invented with the conditions that the language and content employed suited the subject delivering it and if it could be supported by evidence. The historian was permitted to exhibit his oratory skills at this point (58–59). For writing history apart from biography, Lucian’s dictum was “The sole mission of the historian is this: To tell it as it occurred” (39). Finley (1965) is unsatisfied with Lucian, commenting that his “one point of interest for us is that five hundred years after Aristotle, Lucian was still steering history against poetry” (282).

<sup>25</sup> *How to Write History* 29. Lucian provides an example in *The Passing of Peregrinus* 40.

successfully [sic.] communicate it to others.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, even bona fide eyewitnesses who were both sober and sincere often provide conflicting testimonies. Did the *Titanic* break in half as many eyewitnesses claimed or did it go down intact according to other eyewitnesses? What really happened in the exchange between Wittgenstein and Popper at Cambridge the evening of October 25, 1946? Did Wittgenstein throw down a hot poker, storm out of the room and slam the door behind him or was this a “gross exaggeration” of the event? There are numerous reports from eyewitnesses that are in conflict.<sup>27</sup>

The past has come to us fragmented. Ancient historians were selective in what they reported and much of what was written has been lost. Approximately half of the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus have survived. All but a fragment of Thallus’s Mediterranean history written in the first century has been lost. Suetonius is aware of the writings of Asclepiades of Mendes, but they are no longer extant. Nicholas of Damascus was the secretary of Herod the Great and wrote a *Universal History* in 144 books, none of which has survived. Only the early books of Livy and excerpts from his other writings have survived. Although Papias was an influential leader in the early second-century Christian church, only a few citations and slight summary information remain from his five books titled *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*. Around the same time, another church leader named Quadratus wrote a defense of the Christian faith for the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Had Eusebius not mentioned his work and quoted a paragraph from it in the fourth century, all traces of it would probably have been forever lost. Hegesippus’s *Recollections*, contained in five books written in the second century, likewise survive only in fragments preserved mostly by Eusebius.<sup>28</sup>

A watchword with some revisionist historians is *history is written by the winners*.<sup>29</sup> When attempting to understand the past, we look primarily at sources that tell a narrative of a battle, an era, a person, etc. Usually the narrative is written by someone from an advantaged position. Therefore, we are getting our story from the perspective of the party in power rather than from those who are not. For example, our knowledge of ancient Rome comes primarily from ancient historians such as Suetonius, Tacitus, Cicero, Caesar, Livy, Priscus, Sallust, Plutarch, and Josephus. Nearly all of these were Romans. Thus, the history of Rome to which we are privy is

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<sup>26</sup> Zabell (1988), 334.

<sup>27</sup> See Edmonds and Eidinow (2001), 1-5 for the story and the Appendix (306-12) for the conflicting eyewitness testimonies.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that although crucifixion was widely practiced throughout the Roman Empire, archaeology has produced only a single artifact confirming crucifixion. The skeletal remains of a young man named Yehohanan Ben Hagkol were discovered in Jerusalem in 1968. Embedded in one of his ankles was one of the nails used. Those who removed him from the cross and buried him were apparently unable to remove it. The artifact is catalogued as Israel Antiquities Authority, 95-2067/5.

<sup>29</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 2. George Orwell seems to have originated the maxim “History is written by the winners”; see Orwell, “As I Please,” *Tribune*, 4 Feb. 1944, in G. Orwell, *As I Please, 1943-1945*, Collected Essays, Journalism & Letters 3, ed. S. Orwell and I. Angus (Boston: David R. Godine, 2000), 88. In his novel *1984*, Orwell provided a frightful picture of how “winners” can control history. Also see Franzmann (2005): “It is a truism that official history is written by the winners, and stars the winners only. The history of Christianity reads as a long list of those religious professionals who either won in the debates over major doctrinal issues, or managed to consolidate positions of power through political alliance. History focuses on them as the ones who define and maintain orthodoxy. On the other hand, heretics are relegated to the edge of the histories; they are the opponents, the losers” (127).

largely from a Roman perspective. Even Josephus had been conquered and was writing from a perspective in support of Rome. Thus, it might be argued that what we read is biased and slanted from a pro-Roman position. However, it is not always true that history is written by the winners. Thucydides and Xenophon are two of our most important ancient historians and they both wrote from the losing side. Moreover, as Zagorin notes, “A significant part of contemporary German historiography is the work of scholars of a defeated nation seeking to explain how the German people submitted to the Nazi regime and the crimes it committed.”<sup>30</sup>

Ehrman and Pagels argue that there were a number of groups which thought of themselves as Christians but were rejected as heretical by the group who eventually won acceptance by the majority. Accordingly, they argue, the history of Jesus and the early church was written by the winners, the Proto-Orthodox, and the church now reads their writings as authoritative.<sup>31</sup> Had the Gnostic Christians won, we would instead be reading a different set of canonical Gospels and other writings regarded as authoritative.

While this assertion is true to an extent, there are a number of major obstacles weighing against the conclusion it attempts to support. We may note primarily that it is often proper for those Christians who side with orthodoxy to say that the Gnostics got things wrong when referring to the teachings of the historical Jesus and his disciples. The Gnostic literature is later than the New Testament literature, usually quite later. Moreover, that the Gnostic literature contains authentic apostolic tradition is dubious, with the possible exception of the *Gospel of Thomas*. But there is even uncertainty regarding *Thomas*. Pagels dates the *Gospel of Thomas* c. A.D. 80-90 and admits to not knowing who wrote it or if the community from which it came (if it actually came from a community) was linked at all to the apostle Thomas<sup>32</sup> or if any of its unique logia originated with Jesus.<sup>33</sup> However, she maintains that an original disciple of Jesus is behind the *Gospel of John*.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, there are good reasons for holding that many of the writings of the New Testament contain apostolic teachings. We are now a few decades removed from the day when New Testament scholars held that Paul invented present orthodox Christian doctrines. Instead, there are good reasons for holding that Paul’s teachings were compatible with the teachings of the Jerusalem apostles.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, many New Testament scholars believe that the apostolic teachings are enshrined in the sermon summaries in Acts.<sup>36</sup> Thus, there is a high probability that we can identify a significant core of the apostolic teachings.

The past only survives in fragments preserved in texts, artifacts, and the effects of past causes. The documents were written by biased authors, who had an agenda, who were shaped by the cultures in which they lived (and which are often foreign to us), who varied in both their personal integrity and the accuracy of their memories, who had access to a cache of incomplete information that varied in its accuracy, and who

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<sup>30</sup> Zagorin (1999), 13. See also R. Evans (1999), 182.

<sup>31</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 3-14; Pagels (1989), 102-18.

<sup>32</sup> Pagels (2003), 57.

<sup>33</sup> See my television discussion with Pagels, segment 5 at <http://www.4truth.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=hiKXLbPNLrF&b=784449&ct=1201303>.

<sup>34</sup> Pagels (2003), 59.

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>36</sup> Dodd (1964), 1-32; Hemer (1990), 415-33; Stanton (1974), 67-85. See chapter 3.2.3.3.



selected from that cache only information relevant to their purpose in writing. Accordingly, all sources must be viewed and employed with prudence.

### 1.2.2. Horizons

Horizon may be defined as one's "pre-understanding."<sup>37</sup> It is how historians view things as a result of their knowledge, experience, beliefs, education, cultural conditioning, preferences, presuppositions, and worldview. Horizons are like sunglasses through which a historian looks. Everything she sees is colored by that horizon. Take baseball, for example. In a baseball game, if there was a close play at second base, do you think the runner was safe or out? Depends on whether your son is the guy stealing second or the shortstop tagging him. When we read books about Jesus, we find ourselves in agreement or disagreement with certain authors, which is usually on the basis of whether the Jesus they reconstruct is like the one we prefer.

For better and for worse, historians are influenced by their culture, race, nationality, gender, ethics, as well as their political, philosophical, and religious convictions. They cannot look at the data vacuous of biases, hopes, or inclinations. No historian is exempt.<sup>38</sup> Horizons are of great interest to historians, since they are responsible more than anything else for the embarrassing diversity that exists among the conflicting portraits of the past offered. How can so many historians with access to the same data arrive at so many different conclusions regarding what actually occurred? Horizons.

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<sup>37</sup> Meyer (1979), 97. Pre-understanding is the hearer's total relationship (intellectual, emotional, moral) to the thing expressed.

<sup>38</sup> Allison ("Explaining," 2005): "to observe the obvious, people's arguments regarding the origins of Christianity are unavoidably driven by large assumptions about the nature of the world, assumptions that cannot often if ever be the upshot of historical investigation" (133); R. Evans (1999): "We know of course that we will be guided in selecting materials for the stories we tell, and in the way we put these materials together and interpret them, by literary methods, by social science theories, by moral and political beliefs, by an aesthetic sense, even by our own unconscious assumptions and desires. It is an illusion to believe otherwise" (217); McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998): "I conclude that the cultural bias now being discussed, which does not involve false or misleading descriptions of the past, is inescapable, and provides the main reason for saying that history is subjective. In this way I agree that history is subjective" (35); Meier (1991): "Whether we call it a bias, a *Tendenz*, a worldview, or a faith stance, everyone who writes on the historical Jesus writes from some ideological vantage point; no critic is exempt" (5); Moore-Jumonville (2002): "In the end, differences in hermeneutical method around the turn of the century (as today) had to do with one's presuppositions and the relationship one constructed between theology and criticism" (167); A. G. Padgett, "Advice for Religious Historians: On the Myth of a Purely Historical Jesus" in Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins, eds. (1998): "World-views don't just give us the questions we ask; they also affect our understanding of the evidence and our historical judgment. There just is no such thing as data apart from some interpretation" (293-94); Waterman (2006): "we as observers must bear in mind an inevitable bias in our own theological interests. The latter is the so-called 'historian's subjectivity,' which is influential in choosing and judging historical materials" (86-87; cf. 12). Contra is Thompson (2006) who, in answer to Alan Millard's claim that skeptical scholars allow their personal beliefs to direct their investigations as much as his own faith guides his, opines that Millard's claim is "a most serious and, to my knowledge, untrue allegation" (7). Thompson may be correct that a believer's "faith-oriented fantasy" is "capable of recreating myths of the past in which the voice of the text can find resonance and confirmation" (12). However, no less can be said of the created myth of skeptics. In "The Practice of American History: A Special Issue" of *The Journal of American History* 81:3 (Dec., 1994), "A Statistical Summary of Survey Results" provided data, some of which is germane to our present discussion. Of particular interest is the response of historians to the question of "allegiances or identities as important to them as historians." The leading answer was "Ideological commitments" (41%), followed by "Education" (38.7%), then "Nationality" (31.3%). "Religion" (14.8%) placed seventh (1193). Biases and agendas come in many forms.

Elton writes, “The historian who thinks that he has removed himself from his work is almost certainly mistaken.”<sup>39</sup> Iggers comments that historians “have increasingly recognized the limits of objectivity . . . [and have] become more aware of the biases that compromise their honesty.”<sup>40</sup> He adds that “objectivity is unattainable in history; the historian can hope for nothing more than plausibility . . . [which] assumes that the historical account relates to a historical reality, no matter how complex and indirect the process is by which the historian approximates this reality.”<sup>41</sup> Anchor notes that our thinking of the past cannot be “sharply divided between a realm of ‘facts,’ which can be established beyond controversy, and a realm of ‘values’ where we are always in hopeless disagreement.” Rather, “our subjectivity is in large part itself a product of the historically evolved communities to which we belong.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, “historians, like everyone else, are historically situated, and that their reconstructions of the past are inevitably informed by their various existential interests and purposes; hence the multiplicity of their perspectives of the past.”<sup>43</sup> Iggers writes that “[h]istorical scholarship is never value-free and historians not only hold political ideas that color their writing, but also work within the framework of institutions that affect the ways in which they write history.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Elton (1967), 105.

<sup>40</sup> Iggers (2005), 144.

<sup>41</sup> Iggers (2005), 145.

<sup>42</sup> Anchor (1999), 116-17.

<sup>43</sup> Anchor (1999), 114. See also Padgett in Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, eds. (1998), 295.

<sup>44</sup> Iggers (2005), 475. See also Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994): “No longer able to ignore the subjectivity of the author, scholars must construct standards of objectivity that recognize at the outset that all histories start with the curiosity of the particular individual and take shape under the guidance of his or her personal and cultural attributes. . . . Our version of objectivity concedes the impossibility of any research being neutral (that goes for scientists as well) and accepts the fact that knowledge-seeking involves a lively, contentious struggle among diverse groups of truth-seekers. Neither admission undermines the viability of stable bodies of knowledge that can be communicated, built upon, and subjected to testing” (254); Eddy and Boyd (2007): “if the postmodern turn has taught us anything, it is that there is no such thing as an unbiased, objective author/reader” (398); Gorman (2000): “We all bring philosophical baggage to our reading” (253); Gowler (2007): “although many recent studies attempt—or say that they do—to bracket theological concerns from their investigations, such objectivity is, in practice, impossible” (27-28); Haskell (1990), 150; Jenkins, “Introduction,” in Jenkins, ed. (1997): “For the attempt to pass off the study of history in the form of the ostensibly disinterested scholarship of academics studying the past objectively and ‘for its own sake’ as ‘proper’ history, is now unsustainable” (6); Kofoed (2005): “There is no such thing as an ‘impartial historian.’ No history is written without some kind of ‘grid,’ some larger narrative with all the oversimplifications and blind spots that entails, and either ‘camp’ in the battle between maximalists and minimalists need to recognize the ‘path-dependent’ character of their results” (110); Meyer (1994) comments that conflicting views in New Testament studies “are not disagreements grounded in the limitations of evidence, which yield forthwith as sufficient evidence comes to light; they are disagreements grounded in disparity of horizons, which rarely find a resolution without some change of horizon” (59). Regarding the components of the horizon of the historian he concludes that “in the end they account more fundamentally and adequately than anything else for the kind of history he produces” (110); O’Collins (2003): “There is no such thing as a view from nowhere or presuppositionless research, and it is neither possible nor desirable to undertake such research” (2); Thiselton (1992): “Understanding thus has the structure of seeing ‘something as something’. But what we see it as depends on our horizons, our world, and the set of concerns which determine what is ready-to-hand” (280); Willitts (2005): “the glaring reality that every scholar functions within some confession, whether this confession is the theological tenets of the church or of tradition criticism or of something else” (104). See also Linda Orr, “Intimate Images: Subjectivity and History—Staël, Michelet, and Tocqueville” in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 89-107.

When the historicity of Jesus in general and the resurrection in particular are the subjects of inquiry, the horizon of the historian will be in full operation throughout the entire process.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, it is of no surprise to find similar comments in reference to a history of Jesus and discussions on his resurrection. Craffert asserts, “[W]idely acknowledged but poorly understood in the traditional debate about Jesus’ resurrected body, is the role that world-view elements or one’s understanding of reality plays in these questions.”<sup>46</sup> Grant notes that “the life of Jesus is a theme in which the notorious problem of achieving objectivity reaches its height” so that “it is *impossible* to be objective.”<sup>47</sup> Smit writes that “for us no innocent reading of the resurrection message is possible.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, what is granted membership by some historians into their club of historical facts is rejected by others.<sup>49</sup> Dunn writes, “The simple and rather devastating fact has been the Gospels researchers and questers of the historical Jesus have failed to produce agreed results. Scholars do not seem to be able to agree on much beyond a few basic facts and generalizations; on specific texts and issues there has been no consensus. The lengthy debate from the 1960s onwards about appropriate criteria for recognition of the actual words of Jesus has not been able to produce much agreement about the criteria, let alone their application.”<sup>50</sup> Also referring to Jesus research in the Gospels, Sanders writes, “one should begin with what is relatively secure and work out to more uncertain points. But *finding agreement about the ground rules* by which what is relatively secure can be identified is very difficult.”<sup>51</sup>

Anchor observes that our concept of history, realist or postmodern, and our concept of our external world, theist or otherwise, largely determine our conclusions.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the nature of reality itself is at stake.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, those historians who believe they have experienced the supernatural will have a different pool of interpretations of present reality than those historians who have had no such experiences. Theistic or Christian historians may be accused of allowing their horizon to muddy their ability to

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<sup>45</sup> Willitts (2005): “Presuppositions consist of everything one brings to the texts one is handling—philosophical beliefs, theology, and culture—and they influence decisions at every stage in the process of historical Jesus study” (72).

<sup>46</sup> Craffert (2002), 95.

<sup>47</sup> Grant (1977), 200. See also Tabor (2006): “It is impossible to gaze upon ‘facts’ without interpretation. All historians come to their investigations with selective criteria of judgment forged by both acknowledged and unrecognized predisposed interests and cultural assumptions. There is no absolutely objective place to stand. . . . When it comes to the quest for the historical Jesus our need to be aware of our own prejudices seems particularly acute. No other figure in history elicits such passionate responses nor engenders such opposite conclusions” (316-17); Wright (2003): “The challenge for any historian, when faced with the question of the rise of Christianity . . . comes down to . . . the direct question of death and life, of the world of space, time and matter and its relation to whatever being there may be for whom the word ‘god,’ or even ‘God,’ might be appropriate. Here there is, of course, no neutrality. Any who pretend to it are merely showing that they have not understood the question” (712; cf. 717).

<sup>48</sup> Smit (1988), 177.

<sup>49</sup> The “club of historical facts” metaphor is from R. Evans (1999), 67. For similar thoughts, see also Lorenz (1994), 305; Tucker (2004), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn (2003), 97. Marxsen (1990) goes even further, stating, “all attempts to reach the historical Jesus had failed and . . . they have failed for good” (13).

<sup>51</sup> Sanders (1985), 3, emphasis added. See also Marxsen (1990): “The difficulty which one now confronted was whether there are criteria which can help one reach historical judgments in spite of all the obstacles. None have been found, at least none which are acceptable to all scholars” (20).

<sup>52</sup> Anchor (1999), 120.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory (2006), 140.

make accurate assessments pertaining to the historical Jesus and his resurrection.<sup>54</sup> Many times, this is undoubtedly true. But it should also be noted that non-theist historians may be guilty of prejudice in the other direction.<sup>55</sup> Coakley writes, “New Testament scholarship of this generation . . . is often downright repressive—about supernatural events in general and bodily resurrection in particular.”<sup>56</sup> Examples of a bias against the supernatural abound. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* refers to Charles Hartshorne as “one of the most important philosophers of religion and metaphysicians of the twentieth century.”<sup>57</sup> Hartshorne wrote the following comments in reference to a debate on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus between then-atheist philosopher Antony Flew and Christian philosopher Gary Habermas: “I can neither explain away the evidences [for the resurrection] to which Habermas appeals, nor can I simply agree with [the skeptical position] . . . My metaphysical bias is against resurrections.”<sup>58</sup> Flew himself later said, “this is in fact the method of critical history. You try to discover what actually happened, guided by your best evidence, as to what was probable or improbable, possible or impossible.

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<sup>54</sup> So, Theissen and Winter (2002) write, “Christian faith makes the figure of Jesus central to its own life’s orientation—it does exactly what, from the perspective of a rigorous academic ethos, is guaranteed to corrupt objective scholarly work” (252). However, Marsden (1997) comments, “What if someone suggested that no feminist should teach the history of women, or no gay person teach gay studies, or no political liberal should teach American political history? Or—for those who see religion as mainly praxis—perhaps the analog should be that no musician should be allowed to teach an instrument that she herself plays” (13).

<sup>55</sup> McCullagh (1984), 234. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), who admits to being a “cryptic deist” (215): “It is, furthermore, evident that some we might think of as having no theological agenda are partly motivated by an animus against traditional Christian doctrine, which is in reality just another sort of theological agenda. The trite truth is that none of us is without philosophical bias or theological interest when we sit down to study Christian origins, so the alleged lack thereof seems a dubious criterion for classifying scholars who quest for Jesus” (13). Similarly J. M. G. Barclay, “The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship” in D’Costa, ed. (1996): “It is important to remain conscious that behind these historical judgements [pertaining to the empty tomb] may lie strong theological, or anti-theological, commitments” (22). He adds, “Those willing to discard the story of the empty tomb as history may also be influenced by theological factors” (23). Likewise Gregory (2006): “Traditional Christian church history . . . has in recent decades been rejected by most professional historians because of its biases for and against particular traditions” (135, see also his comments on 136-37); Meeks (2006): “So, if in many of the churches there persists a pervasive anti-intellectualism, in the universities there grows up a pervasive intellectual antireligionism” (112); W. Pannenberg, “History and the Reality of the Resurrection” in D’Costa, ed. (1996): “There are strong a priori prejudices against the possibility of such an event as well as against any affirmation of its actual occurrence. They precede any examination of the historical evidence for the early Christian proclamation of the event of Jesus’ resurrection” (62). He later adds that an a priori attitude against miracles “continues to dominate the scene.” Given this, “the [negative] verdict on the issue of Jesus’ resurrection should not be presented as resulting from historical scrutiny of the Biblical evidence, but as what it is: a prejudice that precedes all specifically historical examination of the tradition” (66); Pannenberg (1998): “Desire for emancipation from a conservative or fundamentalist background is often more influential in biblical exegesis than is commitment to sound historical judgment” (22).

<sup>56</sup> Coakley, “Response” in Davis, Kendall, O’Collins (1998), 184. Via (2002) notes that most postmodern biblical scholars tend to be atheists (113-15). See also Gregory (2006), 137. On a similar note, Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) suggests that most of what is coming from the social sciences are the results of less theological scholars who are like the liberal scholars of a century ago looking down into the well and seeing a reflection of their secularized selves. This growing secularity may constrict our ability to find a religious Jesus (1-23). Wright (2003) notes his sense of “[w]alking into the middle of this 360-degree barrage of cold epistemological water” when discussing the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (686).

<sup>57</sup> This is an online encyclopedia located at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hartshorne>.

<sup>58</sup> See the response by Charles Hartshorne in Miethe, ed. (1987), 142.



And the miracles are things that you just take to be impossible.”<sup>59</sup> A. N. Harvey confidently asserts that the biblical picture of Jesus is “incompatible with historical inquiry” and requires a “sacrifice of the intellect” to hold it.<sup>60</sup> It is clear that the horizon of atheist New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann is a driving force behind his historical conclusions when he *a priori* rules out the historicity of the ascension of Jesus reported in Acts 1:9-11 “because there is no such heaven to which Jesus may have been carried.”<sup>61</sup> Jewish scholar Alan Segal writes with a similar tone: “When a heavenly journey is described literally, the cause may be literary convention or the belief of the voyager; but when reconstructing the actual experience, only one type can pass modern standards of credibility.”<sup>62</sup> It seems that Crossan does not believe in the existence of God apart from metaphorical constructions.<sup>63</sup> If God does not exist, neither do supernatural events. Given God’s non-existence and the absence of supernatural events, Crossan is left with attempting to explain the data in natural terms and chooses metaphor. Thus, by starting out with a horizon that miracles—including resurrections—are impossible, Crossan can never conclude that Jesus was resurrected.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Flew’s comments in a transcript of a debate between him and Habermas with John Ankerberg as moderator in Ankerberg, ed. (2005), 71.

<sup>60</sup> Harvey (1997), xxvi. Bultmann (1976): “An historical event which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable” (38-39); Harrington (1986), says that believing that the corpse will one day be reanimated and transformed is to “ask too much of my credulity” (99).

<sup>61</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 114. See Viney (1989) for a similar remark (135-36) and Tabor (2006) who writes, “Women do not get pregnant without a male—ever. So Jesus had a human father . . . Dead bodies don’t rise . . . So, if the tomb was empty the historical conclusion is simple—Jesus’ body was moved by someone and likely reburied in another location” (234). Waterman (2006) takes issue with such assertions, referring to them as the results of “a naïve reductionistic view” (178). He adds that “there is no scholarly conclusion of ‘natural science’ regarding the empty tomb; in my view, [to assert otherwise] is an irresponsible and nonsensical comment in the name of science” (193). See also Padgett in Davis, Kendall, O’Collins (1998), 295-96. Craig (*Assessing*, 1989) distinguishes between “innocuous and vicious presuppositions. A presupposition remains innocuous so long as it does not enter into the verification of the hypothesis. . . . A presupposition becomes vicious, however, when it actually enters into the argumentation and purports to be a ground for the acceptance of the hypothesis” (xvii). Using Craig’s distinctions, statements from especially Hartshorne, Flew, Lüdemann, and Tabor may lead one to believe they are guilty of vicious presuppositions.

<sup>62</sup> Segal (2004), 411. A few pages later he writes, “It is always conceivable that, against our best logic, [the resurrection] actually happened” (450). A. F. Segal, “The Resurrection: *Faith or History?*” in Stewart, ed. (2006) writes that “the scholar does not make claims that go beyond the canons of rationality today” (136).

<sup>63</sup> See the comments by Crossan in Copan, ed. (1998), 50-51. This book includes a transcript of a debate between John Dominic Crossan and William Lane Craig. During the discussion period, Craig stated, “if the existence of God is a statement of faith, not a statement of fact, that means that God’s existence is simply an interpretive construct that a particular human mind—a believer—puts on the universe. But in and of itself the universe is without such a being as God. . . . It seems to me that, independent of human consciousness, your [i.e., Crossan] worldview is actually atheistic, and that religion is simply an interpretive framework that individual people put on the world, but none of it is factually, objectively true.” Buckley (moderator): “Another one of his metaphors.” Craig: “Exactly! God himself is a metaphor.” Crossan: “If you were to ask me . . . to abstract from faith how God would be if no human beings existed, that’s like asking me, ‘Would I be annoyed if I hadn’t been conceived?’ I really don’t know how to answer that question.” . . . Craig: “During the Jurassic age, when there were no human beings, did God exist?” Crossan: “Meaningless question.” Craig: “It’s a factual question. Was there a being who was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe during that period of time when no human beings existed? It seems to me that in your view you’d have to say no.” Crossan: “Well, I would probably prefer to say no because what you’re doing is trying to put yourself in the position of God and ask, ‘How is God apart from revelation?’”

<sup>64</sup> See also Tabor (2006), 233-34; Wedderburn (1999), 218.

This approach by Harvey, Segal, and others has come under criticism. For example, Miller refers to the exclusion of the possibility of miracles as “an obsolete nineteenth-century worldview.”<sup>65</sup> Wright asserts that following these scholars would be to “stop doing history and to enter into a fantasy world of our own, a new cognitive dissonance in which the relentless modernist, desperately worried that the post-Enlightenment worldview seems in imminent danger of collapse, devises strategies for shoring it up nevertheless.”<sup>66</sup> Although Robert Funk, who founded the Jesus Seminar, referred to the group’s members as “those whose evaluations are not predetermined by theological considerations,”<sup>67</sup> many scholars would be quick to disagree with him. Seminar member Bruce Chilton writes, “Several of us who have participated in the ‘Jesus Seminar,’ although we have appreciated the experience, have criticized our colleagues for voting along what seem to be ideological lines.”<sup>68</sup> Quarles makes a similar observation: “The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar have imposed their view of Jesus on the Gospels rather than deriving their view from the Gospels and other pertinent sources. The criteria utilized by the Seminar were slanted in such a way that they tended to preclude material that might have portrayed a Jesus very different from the one they think they have discovered.”<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, only the naïve would maintain that historians who are agnostics, atheists, or non-Christian theists approach the question of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus without any biases.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> R. J. Miller (1992), 17n33.

<sup>66</sup> Wright (2003), 707. Johnson (1996) notes “the spirit of modernity with its inability to stomach the miraculous” (34).

<sup>67</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 1. On the acts of Jesus, the Seminar approved of only 16% of the 176 reported events of Jesus.

<sup>68</sup> B. Chilton, “(The) Son of (The) Man, and Jesus” in Chilton and Evans, eds. (*Words*, 2002), 281.

<sup>69</sup> C. L. Quarles, “The Authenticity of the Parable of the Warring King: A Response to the Jesus Seminar” in Chilton and Evans, eds. (*Words*, 2002), 429. Similarly, Pannenberg (1998): “Unfortunately, however, what passes as the authority of historical competence in the Jesus Seminar is often claimed for judgments that are not unprejudiced” (22).

<sup>70</sup> McKnight (2005) notes that some historians of Jesus who deny being Christian claim greater objectivity in their research. However, he contends that it becomes clear upon reading their conclusions that their reconstructed Jesus “tends, more often than not (and I know of almost no exceptions), to lean in the direction of their own belief systems” (24). Moreover, agnosticism should not be confused with indeterminism and can become dogma. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) confesses that he is unable to transcend his horizon. Raised in a liberal Presbyterian home, he holds that the canonical Gospels contain more accurate tradition than is usually conceded by many scholars but that he is also a “cryptic deist” (140, 215). This “cryptic deism” appears to lock him in a position where he is unable to follow where the products of his Gospel research appear to be leading him. In other words, his horizon pulls him in opposite directions. The result is an epistemological agnosticism where Allison holds we are incapable of knowing these matters and he is unhappy with all who think otherwise. Therefore, he scolds professional philosophers Antony Flew who is a deist and conservative Christian Gary Habermas for being overly confident in their conclusions (339), elsewhere referring to Habermas as an “apologist” (“Explaining,” 2005), 124. Consider also the following statements: “Even if we naively think [the Gospel narratives] to be historically accurate down to the minutest detail, we are still left with precious little” (338). How can this be? If it could be demonstrated that every detail of the Gospels is accurate, we would know quite a lot about Jesus, even though numerous questions would remain. He also states, “Let us say, although it cannot be done, that someone has somehow convinced us, beyond all doubt, that the tomb was empty and that people saw Jesus because he indeed came to life again. Even this would not of itself prove that God raised him from the dead,” since it could just as easily be explained as a cosmic joke played on humanity by aliens (339-40). While Allison is correct in the strictest sense, William Lane Craig seems to me correct in a more professional sense when he writes, “Only a sterile, academic skepticism resists this inevitable inference [that if Jesus was raised it was God who did it]” (Craig [1981], 137). I cannot help but wonder if Allison is influenced more than he realizes by his deistic worldview.

It is no surprise that during the twentieth-century somewhat of a proverb circulated and continues to this day that historical Jesus scholars end up reconstructing a Jesus that reflects their own convictions and preferences. The comments of the Catholic scholar George Tyrrell are often cited as being true of contemporary historical Jesus research: “The Jesus that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face seen at the bottom of a deep well.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Schweitzer comments, “each successive epoch of theology found its own thoughts in Jesus. . . . each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man’s true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus.”<sup>72</sup> More recently, Johnson speaks of “a bewildering variety of conflicting portraits of Jesus, and a distressing carelessness in the manner of arriving at those portraits.”<sup>73</sup> Crossan complains of the numerous—and contradictory—portraits of the historical Jesus. For him, this “stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.”<sup>74</sup>

Allison discusses the sobering fact of the inability of most historical Jesus scholars to transcend their horizon:

[W]e may justly suspect that many or even most New Testament scholars hold the view of Jesus that they do because it was instilled in them at a young age by their education. And once they came to see things a certain way, they found it difficult to change their minds. Intellectual inertia can be obstinate. Ask yourself: Can you name any important historians of Jesus whose views in their fifties or sixties were radically different from their views in their twenties or thirties?<sup>75</sup>

We all see what we expect to see and want to see—like highly prejudicial football fans who always spot more infractions committed by the team they are jeering against than by the team they are cheering for. . . . If we hold a belief, we will notice confirming evidence, especially if we are aware that not everyone agrees with us. Disconfirming evidence, to the contrary, makes us uncomfortable, and so we are more likely to miss, neglect, or critically evaluate it.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1910), 44.

<sup>72</sup> Schweitzer (1961), 4. See also Meeks (2006), 30-31.

<sup>73</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 141.

<sup>74</sup> Crossan (1991), xxviii. Rex Martin (1998) rejoices over such diversity: “One can get a feel for the problem that would be posed by interpretational convergence in historical studies on one grand, synthetic account by reflecting on the fact that such a convergence would be analogous to there being all but universal agreement on just one *philosophical* view.” Martin notes that it would have been harmful had a universal agreement been attained on the philosophical view of the Catholic church, the Communist Party, or historians who dreamed of the hegemony of their own interpretations. Thus, “[t]he seeming-descensus that results, far from being an embarrassment to historical studies, should be regarded as one of its best features” (32). See also Gilderhus (2007), 85-86.

<sup>75</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 135. R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008): “It is rare for a scholar to examine the historical evidence and draw conclusions that go against his own deeply held religious beliefs” (16).

<sup>76</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 136. See also Davis (1993), 17-18; M. Martin (1991), 75. Martin, however, sees this only as a problem with Christians who believe Jesus rose from the dead and seems unaware that the knife cuts both ways as skeptics are also guided by their horizons.

Allison admits that he is a member of that group:

[If] in the near future, someone truly demonstrates that my sort of Jesus cannot be the historical Jesus, others would no doubt be quicker than me to home in on the truth. I would have to reconfigure my entire reconstruction of early Christianity, a task requiring courage and prolonged intellectual effort. Maybe I would not be up to it. I find this troubling. It raises embarrassing questions to which I have no answer. I am stuck with nothing better than what Chesterton says somewhere: “The nearest we can come to being impartial is to admit that we are partial.”<sup>77</sup>

Biases can lead historians to errant conclusions. Many times when prosecuting attorneys want justice for the victims in their cases, they work toward bolstering their arguments and adding new ones for the conviction of a particular suspect rather than considering all of the data objectively. Tragically, this has resulted in numerous false convictions.<sup>78</sup> In a similar manner, bias on the part of historians may actually prohibit them from arriving at an accurate description of a past event.

Horizons can serve both as assets and liabilities. If we live in a reality that is deistic or atheistic, historians maintaining a bias against the supernatural will actually be assisted in their investigations by their bias. However, if we live in a theistic reality, a bias against the supernatural may actually prohibit certain historians from making a correct adjudication on miracle claims in general and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus in particular.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the bias of theist historians may drive them to discover valuable data that non-theists overlooked or too quickly discarded.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 137. Similarly, McKnight (2005) writes, “Rarely, so it seems to me, is it the method that strikes the critic first. Instead, as we read the representation of Jesus—say in Crossan’s or Chilton’s [sic.] studies—we either assent or dissent. We do so on the basis of whether or not the Jesus represented is like the Jesus we represent him to be in our mind” (45-46). Fredriksen (1999) notes that within the study of the historical Jesus, “diversity—and controversy—dominate” (7).

<sup>78</sup> The following is a sobering true story that illustrates how devastating the consequences can be when one neglects to consider all of the data and when some of the data must be strained in order to fit a theory. A man wearing a cowboy hat with a feather abducted and then brutally beat and raped a woman three times before leaving her for dead. She managed to survive, however, and shortly following the crime, 22-year-old Robert Clark was arrested. The evidence used against him at his trial was that he was driving the car used in the crime; he hid from police in the closet when they came for him at his mother’s house; he concocted a story that a dancer at a lounge gave him the car, a story that when checked out was false; he admitted to wearing a cowboy hat with a feather; the victim picked him out of a lineup. However, other evidence did not fit. The victim told police that her attacker was slightly taller than herself at 5’7”. Clark is 6’1”. Two months later while in jail awaiting trial, Clark decided to tell the truth about how he got the car. It had been given to him by a friend named Tony Arnold, whom he was trying to protect. The detective never attempted to find Arnold, because he did not trust Clark. A witness testified that she saw Arnold rather than Clark driving the car used in the crime. But the defense attorneys decided not to use the witness since the victim was certain it was Clark and that if for some reason she did not recognize Arnold, it would be devastating to Clark. The rape kit was missing that included the two cotton-tipped swabs with seminal fluid and could have proven Clark’s innocence. Clark was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences plus twenty years. He spent the next twenty-four years in prison. The problem was that he was innocent. In 2003, the New York based *Innocence Project* which helps exonerate inmates using DNA evidence looked into Clark’s case. Although the two swabs were lost, enough evidence remained to perform new DNA tests and they showed that Clark did not commit the crime. He was released. They had convicted the wrong man (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [Dec. 11, 2005], A1, A17).

<sup>79</sup> Padgett in Davis, Kendall, O’Collins, eds. (1998): “[T]he secular unbeliever is just as distorted and warped by his prejudice and world-view as the believer is; second, who is to say that Christian faith



Horizon and bias do not necessarily prohibit historians from partial objectivity. Haskell maintains that even a “polemicist, deeply and fixedly committed as a lifelong project to a particular political or cultural or moral program” can be objective, “insofar as such a person successfully enters into the thinking of his or her rivals and produces arguments potentially compelling not only to those who already share the same views, but to outsiders as well.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, reports given by even very biased historians are not to be dismissed *a priori* as providing inaccurate information. It only calls for alertness on the part of historians when studying them. Wright observes that “it must be asserted most strongly that to discover that a particular writer has a ‘bias’ tells us nothing whatever about the value of the information he or she presents. It merely bids us be aware of the bias (and of our own, for that matter), and to assess the material according to as many sources as we can.”<sup>82</sup> McCullagh similarly writes, “The fact that people have certain preferences does not mean they cannot reach true,

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does not give us better insight into the data than unbelief does? Why should unbelief, rather than faith, lead to the best explanation of the evidence? Would it be so strange if the followers of Jesus have an inside track in the understanding of Jesus? Why is faith so damaging to reason, anyway? Granted that faith has a kind of prejudice, perhaps it is a helpful prejudice” (294-95). See also Meyer (1979), 102; R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 2:1468.

<sup>80</sup> Those strongly biased toward a particular position are motivated to note weaknesses in an opposing position. Earl Doherty is a hyperskeptic who asserts that Jesus never existed. Accordingly, Doherty (1999) takes up arms against Crossan’s portrait of Jesus, claiming that it is based on the “unaddressed and unproven assumption by Crossan and others—that there was an historical Jesus” (219). While Doherty finds himself at odds with the nearly universal consensus of contemporary scholars on that issue, his view drives him to find a weakness in Crossan’s portrait, which asserts that almost nothing in the Passion narratives reflect actual events and that it is doubtful that even the basics were known by his followers (see Crossan [1995], 145). Doherty writes, “If not even the basics were known, how could that death have made such an impact that people would bother to set it in scripture? What would have captured the imagination of preachers and believers across the empire if nothing of its historical circumstances was known or integrated into the story? What could have been the fuel that launched this amazing response to Jesus—especially since his teachings made no impact? Who would have noticed or cared if some simple, illiterate Galilean peasant had come into town with a few followers, done a bit of preaching and eating, only to get himself seized and executed by the authorities under unknown circumstances? Who would have been so overwhelmed by this event that they immediately ransacked scripture to create a story about him, delved into the full range of contemporary Greek and Jewish philosophy about intermediary forces between God and humanity and turned this illiterate peasant into the equivalent of the Logos and personified Wisdom? Who would have made him creator and sustainer of the universe and regarded that unknown, obscure death as the redemptive moment of God’s salvation history?” (245).

<sup>81</sup> Haskell (1990), 135. He also chides those who suggest that we are obligated to ignore historians who are biased: “the idea that political activists might be read out of the profession is laughable: several recent presidents of the Organization of American Historians would have to be placed high on the list of deportees” (150). Elsewhere, “I see nothing to admire in neutrality. My conception of objectivity (which I believe is widely, if tacitly, shared by historians today) is compatible with strong political commitment. . . . scholars are as passionate and as likely to be driven by interests as those they write about. [Objectivity] does not value even detachment as an end in itself, but only as an indispensable prelude or preparation for the achievement of higher levels of understanding” (134). McCullagh (2000) opines that detachment does not require a position of non-committal; but detachment “from preferred outcomes while inquiry proceeds” (55). See also Byrskog (2002): “an apologetic aim in no way necessitates rhetorical and narrative forgery” (249); Dunn (2003), 106.

<sup>82</sup> Wright (1992), 89. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): “Typically, and even when we seek to be as conscientious as possible, we often no doubt end up seeing what we want and expect to see. . . . The truth one discerns behind the texts is largely determined by desires, expectations, and religious and philosophical convictions already at hand. We cannot eschew ourselves. If this is the right conclusion, then we need to scrutinize not just the texts but also ourselves” (343).

justified conclusions about the past. Their descriptions might be biased, unfair in some way, but they could still be true as far as they go.”<sup>83</sup>

### 1.2.3. On the Possibility of Transcending Horizon

How may historians manage their horizons and reduce their negative impact? Horizons are very difficult to control. The stronger the commitment of the historian to his worldview, the lesser the likelihood is that he will be open to accepting a historical description that is in conflict with his worldview. Our horizons heavily influence the way in which we interpret facts. Thus, justifying our historical description may require justifying the horizon behind it. How can we do that if the facts that support it are interpreted according to that horizon? It seems that we are left arguing in a circle, justifying our historical description by justifying the horizon behind it, using facts interpreted by that horizon. We would appear to be at an impasse, caught in somewhat of a circle, a spiral of discourse between the historian and the subject. However, things are not as bleak as they first appear, since at least a few appear to have been capable of deciding in favor of positions that are contrary to their horizon. For example, Geza Vermes left Catholicism for Judaism. Former Bultmanian Eta Linnemann is now a biblical conservative. Former biblical conservative Bart Ehrman is now an agnostic.<sup>84</sup> Former atheist Craig Keener became a biblical conservative. Oxford’s Alister McGrath describes his move from atheism to Christianity as an “intellectually painful (yet rewarding) transition [since] [e]very part of my mental furniture had to be rearranged.”<sup>85</sup> C. S. Lewis converted from atheism to Christianity.<sup>86</sup> Antony Flew, perhaps the most influential atheist philosopher of the final two decades of the twentieth-century, became a deist in 2004.<sup>87</sup> It also appears that the apostle Paul broke through his horizon, having been a Jew who persecuted the early Christian church to become one of its most aggressive promoters.

Thus, numerous examples demonstrate that it is possible to reduce the influence of one’s horizon. Although conversion is a strong sign that one’s horizon has been transcended, it does not follow that those historians who do not convert were unable to transcend their horizon or be objective in their inquiry. It could be that the historian was objective yet believed that the data confirmed the accuracy of her existing horizon. Once atheist and now deist Antony Flew would not necessarily accuse a lifelong deist of failing to be objective because he remained a deist upon examining the data.

Granted, most historians do not obtain this level of objectivity and some hold their horizon so tightly that they are unable even to come close. Is there any way to adjudicate whether the historian has broken through when conversion to a different horizon has not taken place? A strong logical argument based on solid data is only consistent with a breakthrough, but it cannot establish that a breakthrough has taken

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<sup>83</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 171. Also see Hemer (2001), 86.

<sup>84</sup> Ehrman (*God’s Problem*, 2008), 4.

<sup>85</sup> McGrath and McGrath (2007), 19; cf. 8, 9, 15.

<sup>86</sup> See Lewis (1955).

<sup>87</sup> Some may suspect that Flew converted in his old age in response to a fear of dying. But Flew entertained the possibility of God’s existence for several decades prior to his conversion. Moreover, Flew still does not believe in an afterlife.

place. However, the probability of accuracy increases with stronger supporting arguments and weaker competing hypotheses.

How can historians work toward transcending their horizons? Below, I propose six tools that, when combined, can be effective guides that bring us closer to objectivity. Total neutrality may never exist and even if some historians are able to achieve it, an incomplete horizon resulting from our inaccurate or insufficient understanding of reality may still prevent them from arriving at a correct judgment. Let us now look at a few important guidelines.

a) *Method* can serve as a means toward achieving greater objectivity. Method encompasses many parts including the manner in which data are viewed, weighed, and contextualized, criteria for testing the adequacy of hypotheses and the fair consideration of competing hypotheses. Of course, method is not a sure means for avoiding too much subjectivity, but it is helpful. McCullagh writes, “Even scrupulous attention to the standards of justification set out here may not prevent the most prevalent forms of bias in history, namely the failure to consider alternative possibilities as a result of commitment to one’s preconceptions. Only methodological procedures can save historians, to a large extent, from this.”<sup>88</sup> But method only takes us so far in overcoming horizons. Denton has made a compelling case for holism over tradition criticism.<sup>89</sup> But one must question whether the differences between the two methods constitute the major reason for the different portraits of Jesus resulting. These differ radically even among those employing tradition criticism like Crossan and John Meier. Substantive gaps exist in the portraits produced by holists E. P. Sanders and Wright. In fact, Meier’s portrait of Jesus is closer to Wright’s than is Sanders’. Thus, differences between these two methods do not seem to be able to account for the large differences present in the portraits that result. Because the historian’s objective is often to discover a Jesus palatable to his own tastes, this pushes the deciding factor behind the historian’s portrait to horizon more than method. He finds what he was looking for. Therefore, attention given to method may reduce the amount of control the horizons of historians have on their research, but is inadequate alone.<sup>90</sup>

b) *The Historian’s Horizon and Method Should Be Public*. It is certain that at least portions of the historian’s horizon can be public or open to scrutiny. For example, historians who hold to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus most likely have a

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<sup>88</sup> McCullagh (1984), 234. See also McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 308.

<sup>89</sup> Denton (2005). By holism, I mean the analysis and use of data within a larger narrative construct such as understanding Jesus as, for example, an apocalyptic prophet within the Messianism of Second Temple Judaism. By tradition criticism, I refer to the practice of attempting to identify and peel away redaction within a text in order to get back to what was originally written or said and what that meant within its original context.

<sup>90</sup> By method, I am more concerned with weighing hypotheses than a hermeneutical approach to texts, which is itself often guided by horizon and yields results of great variances. See Barrera (2001): “the idea that a historical method exists is hardly sustainable because the possibility of interpretation always remains open. Every text can be read in different ways; there is not only one kind of hermeneutics to its reading” (200); G. Clark, “General Hermeneutics” in McKnight and Osborne, eds. (2005): “Secondary sources regularly describe the variety of hermeneutical approaches practiced today as ‘dizzying’” (115) and “Hermeneutics as a discipline is as wild and woolly as it has ever been” (117); Fredriksen (1999): “Even though all scholars who work on Jesus look more or less to the Gospels as the mother lode to mine for data, a priori commitments to different methods mean that they actually read different texts” (7).

theistic component to their horizons and this component may be challenged. Methodological naturalists who do not allow for the possibility of the supernatural in historical investigation should have their horizons open to challenge.<sup>91</sup> Historians should likewise be clear about the methods they employ for achieving results.<sup>92</sup>

c) *Peer Pressure* may also be helpful in minimizing the impact of horizon on the historian's work. Judges of a sporting event such as gymnastics seem to be able to lay aside or at least minimize their prejudices and national pride when acting in the capacity of a judge. How is this accomplished when national pride and prejudice can be so strong? Perhaps it is the knowledge that a number of other judges who are similarly challenged are making judgments and that, if the judgment of a particular judge is far different than those rendered by the other judges, it may reflect a personal bias of a sort. Thus, peer pressure can act as a check on bias and can serve to minimize the effects of horizon. Whether it can serve an adequate role by itself is another question. Peer pressure in academia can be effective, but it can also be a hindrance. As noted earlier, prior to the last decade of the twentieth century, a general consensus among New Testament scholars had emerged that viewed the Gospels as a unique type of mythical genre. This consensus has made a dramatic turnaround as it now views the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography. Stanton admits that he began to arrive at a similar conclusion fifteen years earlier and that he should have been "less timid."<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, fear of going against the majority could hinder breakthroughs in historical research. Therefore, while a scholarly consensus can have the positive impact of serving to keep creativity from going off the deep end, a fear of losing respect from a large segment of the academic community in which one lives can be a hindrance to breakthroughs in knowledge. This is especially visible in the field of anthropology, where a strong bias against the supernatural by the consensus of

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<sup>91</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 174; Swinburne (2003): "What tends to happen is that background theological considerations—whether for or against the Resurrection—play an unacknowledged role in determining whether the evidence is strong enough. These considerations need to be put on the table if the evidence is to be weighed properly" (3). See also Blackburn (2000) who notes that certain epistemological considerations are rarely considered, such as warrants behind historical descriptions that include a cause or causes and whether these descriptions are simply a matter of guesswork that are motivated by the historian's bias or actual events in history (271). Dawes (1998) asserts, "Without critically examining the particular assumptions which shape the historian's judgements, we cannot conclude that the historian's Jesus must on all occasions be preferred" (34). However, one should not make the mistake of thinking that the act of making one's horizon and method public allows one to proceed without placing a check on horizon and method. Wedderburn (1999) may be faulted for such a move: "I will again and again have to stress that the argument which I am advancing goes beyond anything that any of the New Testament writers actually say, however much I may take them as a starting-point. Indeed they may at many points contradict my arguments. . . . And . . . it is far better to realize this [i.e., that the work of theologians goes beyond being hermeneutical in character] and to acknowledge it to oneself and to one's readers, than simply to do it quietly and in secret, or perhaps even to fail to see what one is in fact doing" (104). The purpose and benefit of being public with one's worldview and approach is that it subjects them to public—and hopefully personal—scrutiny so that an attempt to manage them may occur.

<sup>92</sup> Grant (1977), 201. Christian (2004) comments that most historians are self-conscious regarding the epistemological foundations of their practice. However, their reluctance to reveal them confuses all regarding just what it is that historians do (371). See also Eddy and Boyd (2007), 83, 379.

<sup>93</sup> Stanton's comments in the Foreword to Burrige (2004), ix. Waterman (2006) remains unpersuaded but writes, "Although we cannot fully accept the view that the Gospel is a Hellenistic *Bios* . . . or history, it is surely related to the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth" (115).

anthropologists in general and biologists in particular can threaten the careers of those who do not share this bias.<sup>94</sup>

d) *Submitting ideas to unsympathetic experts* may assist in minimizing the negative impact of horizon. This is taking peer pressure to the next step by submitting our interpretation of data and historical descriptions to those who are certain to have a different opinion and a motivation to locate weaknesses in a competing hypothesis. While historians are inclined to catch comments that support the view they embrace while skimming quickly through comments that oppose it, their critics are not so inclined and will labor diligently to identify and expose weaknesses within competing hypotheses. McCullagh comments, “One can be reasonably sure that historical descriptions which have won the approval of unsympathetic or impartial expert critics are not biased, but are well justified and merit belief.”<sup>95</sup> Of course, this does not guarantee that the critic will accept a hypothesis that is contrary to his horizon, even if the hypothesis is correct. Critics carry biases, too, which can handicap their objectivity.<sup>96</sup> But some critics have the integrity to allow themselves to be challenged by a hypothesis opposed to their horizon and provide helpful criticisms. Some may admit the strength of an opposing hypothesis, even if they do not decide to adopt it.<sup>97</sup> Padgett writes, “It is only in the give and take of dialogue and in the evaluation of reasons, arguments, and evidence that our pre-understanding will be found to be helpful or harmful.”<sup>98</sup> This type of dialogue takes place in peer-reviewed articles, book reviews, and papers read at conferences where criticisms from peers are

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<sup>94</sup> Atheist philosopher Quentin Smith (2001) wrote that “a recent study indicated that seven percent of the top scientists are theist [*Nature* 394 (July 23, 1998), 313]. However, theists in other fields [than philosophy] . . . never argue for theism in their scholarly work. If they did, they would be committing academic suicide or, more exactly, their articles would quickly be rejected, requiring them to write secular articles if they wanted to be published.” The truth of Smith’s statement is readily seen in what happened in early 2005 when editor Richard Sternberg at *Proceedings*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal of the Smithsonian Institution, having completed all the appropriate peer review protocol was humiliated when the journal demoted him for allowing an article on intelligent design written by Cambridge-educated biologist Stephen C. Meyer. The journal then apologized for publishing it. This action was met with strong negative press in the United States which resulted in a public viewing of the video *The Privileged Planet: The Search for Purpose in the Universe* from the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards (Washington: Regnery, 2004). The event took place on June 10, 2005 and was co-sponsored by the Director of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History and the Discovery Institute. Sternberg’s account of the incident may be found at [rsternberg.org](http://rsternberg.org) (accessed June 18, 2008). See also Marsden 1997), 7.

<sup>95</sup> McCullagh (1984), 236, cf. 234. See also Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994), 261; L. T. Johnson (1996), xi; McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 15; Meier (1991), 6; Schinkel (2004), 51; Zammito (2005), 180.

<sup>96</sup> C. A. Evans (2006): “Some scholars seem to think that the more skeptical they are, the more critical they are. But adopting an excessive and unwarranted skeptical stance is no more critical than gullibly accepting whatever comes along. In my view, a lot of what passes for criticism is not critical at all; it is nothing more than skepticism masking itself as scholarship” (46; cf. 17, 21). See also Witherington (2006): “The scholarly world also has to contend with what I call the ‘justification by doubt’ factor. Some scholars think they must prove (to themselves and/or others) that they are good critical scholars by showing how much of the Jesus tradition or the New Testament in general they can discount, explain away, or discredit. This supposedly demonstrates that they are objective. At most, all it shows is that they are capable of critical thinking. Oddly, the same scholars often fail to apply the same critical rigor and skepticism to their own pet extracanonical texts or pet theories” (5).

<sup>97</sup> One notes this objectivity with agnostic chemist Robert Shapiro, who acknowledges the integrity of molecular biologist Michael Behe’s description of the profound difficulties involved with the view that the origin of life is the result of natural causes. See Behe (1996), back cover.

<sup>98</sup> Padgett in Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, eds. (1998), 295.



provided.<sup>99</sup> Participation in panel discussions and public debate likewise exposes one's views to scrutiny by peers. No one enjoys receiving criticism that strikes hard at the foundations of one's strongly held hypothesis. However, professional historians cannot be exempt from criticism and, at minimum, even when disagreement with one's critics remains, the historian will gain valuable critical thoughts that must be considered and answered.

e) *Account for the Relevant Historical Bedrock.* Some facts are so strongly evidenced that they are virtually indisputable. These facts are referred to as 'historical bedrock,' since any legitimate hypothesis should be built upon it. If a hypothesis fails to explain all of the historical bedrock, it is time to *drag* that hypothesis back to the drawing board or to *relegate* it to the trash bin. Historical bedrock includes those facts that meet two criteria. First, they are so strongly evidenced, the historian can fairly regard them as historical facts.<sup>100</sup> Second, the majority of contemporary scholars regard them as historical facts.<sup>101</sup> Momentarily we will discuss the role of a consensus. For now, I wish to suggest that historians should begin their investigations with a collection of historical facts that belong to historical bedrock. This action does not seek a consensus regarding a particular historical description, but rather on the foundation "facts" employed in hypotheses. Others may likewise be appealed to. But all hypotheses posited to answer a historical question need to include these.<sup>102</sup> The value of such an approach is that it places a check on narrative.<sup>103</sup> When historians seek to describe the past, they place facts within the framework of a narrative. Numerous interpretations and theories can be quite imaginative.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, many times specific narratives can neither be proved nor disproved and historians from every camp often fail to place a sort of disclaimer informing readers of the tentativeness of their narrative, which is stated as fact.<sup>105</sup> Rather than writing "it could have [or probably] happened as follows" or "I am inclined to think this is what

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<sup>99</sup> Pertaining to the field of historical Jesus studies, *The Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* has an impressive board of reviewers who represent solid scholarship and who possess an impressive range and balance of theological commitments.

<sup>100</sup> McCullagh ("What Do Historians Argue About?" 2004): Some facts are supported by evidence so strong that they are "virtually certain" (22). He adds, "*why* we believe particular facts . . . can be independent of any general interpretation of which they are a part" (23).

<sup>101</sup> Meier (1991) speaks of a consensus among a Jew, a Christian, and an agnostic, all honest historians who are well acquainted with first-century religious movements who are locked up in the Harvard Divinity School Library until they hammer out a consensus statement about Jesus (1).

<sup>102</sup> McCullagh, "What do Historians Argue About?" (2004), 24.

<sup>103</sup> Rex Martin (1998), 36; McCullagh (1984), 236, cf. 234; Johnson (1996) contends that solid method may yield the recognition of "certain statements about Jesus that have an impressively high level of probability" and that these "provide the most important antidote to the less disciplined 'reconstructions'" (112).

<sup>104</sup> See R. Carrier, "The Spiritual Body of Christ" in Price and Lowder, eds. (2005), who argues that "Mark's empty tomb story mimics the secret salvation narratives of the Orphic mysteries" (163) and that the empty tomb is symbolic of the corpse of Jesus (158). Meier (1991) writes, "learned fantasy knows no limits" (94).

<sup>105</sup> Consider the statement by M. Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision" in D'Costa, ed. (1996) whose narrative presents the appearances as hallucinations and the empty tomb as an invention. When referring to the descriptions of *resurrection* as an event that happens to corpses in the Gospels and the Pauline corpus he writes, "it is now obvious that these were interpretative additions to counter the spiritual theory; and that neither the eating and touching stories nor the empty tomb story have any basis in the most primitive tradition" (58). Although many exegetes disagree with this conclusion, even many who agree would not go as far to say that Goulder's interpretation is "obvious."

happened,” we often read that “it happened in the following manner.”<sup>106</sup> When we investigate matters such as the resurrection of Jesus, historians in every camp operate with their own biases, agendas, and hopes, all of which serve as unseen advisors. By requiring hypotheses to account for the historical bedrock, a check is placed on the explanatory narratives that are constructed. Any narrative unable to account for the historical bedrock should be returned to the drawing board or be relegated to the trash bin. Of course, this is a *guideline* rather than a *law*, since the majority of scholars has been mistaken on numerous occasions in the past.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, there is a risk involved in requiring hypotheses to account for the historical bedrock before their serious consideration by other historians, since this may result in excluding a hypothesis that denies one or more of the facts belonging to the bedrock but may later turn out being mistaken in light of new information. This risk notwithstanding, minimizing the impact of biases and agendas is a serious matter and the possibility of a mistaken consensus on facts that are strongly evidenced must be weighed against the certain presence of horizons. Guidelines are not to be enforced in a wooden manner. However, when a historian ignores a number of guidelines and his method appears arbitrary and/or careless, his results are probably wrong.

f) *Detachment from Bias* is nonnegotiable. Meyer writes, “Detachment from bias is of the highest importance.”<sup>108</sup> McCullagh agrees: “[Historians], like all people, are often attached to their preconceptions. This kind of bias is the hardest of all to overcome.”<sup>109</sup> Roy Hoover articulates this principle well:

To cultivate the virtue of veracity, you have to be willing to part with the way tradition and conventional wisdom say things are, or with the way you would prefer things to be, and be ready to accept the way things really are. Veracity has to be the principal moral and intellectual commitment of any science or scholarship worthy of the name. That means, as I see it, that as a critical biblical scholar you have to be concerned first of all not with how your research turns out, not with whether it will confirm or disconfirm the beliefs or opinions or theories you had when you began the inquiry. You have to care only about finding out how things really are—with finding evidence sufficient to enable you to discover that and with finding also whether or not what you think you have discovered is sustainable when it is tested by the critical scrutiny of others. . . . but to be open-minded interminably, or to be locked open, as a colleague of mine once put it, is not a virtue. It is a failure to think, a failure to learn, a failure to decide and perhaps a failure of nerve.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> This is sometimes an indicator that there is a lack of an argument. Wedderburn (1999) comments, “Arguments of the form ‘I need it so, therefore it is so’ only need to be stated in this way for their emptiness to be apparent” (7).

<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, appeals to the historical bedrock should not be viewed as an argument that asserts that *X* is a historical fact *because* the majority of historians believe it is. Rather, the argument is that the supporting data are so good that they have convinced the majority of historians to believe that *X* is a historical fact.

<sup>108</sup> Meyer (1994), 112. See also Grant (1977) who writes, “Certainly, every such student will have his own preconceptions. But he must be vigilant to keep them within limits” (200). Marxsen (1990): “whenever we attempt some reconstruction of history, we must take pains to be unbiased” (65).

<sup>109</sup> McCullagh (1984), 235.

<sup>110</sup> R. W. Hoover, “A Contest Between Orthodoxy and Veracity” in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 127-28.

One's bias is not only difficult to overcome, but is often difficult to recognize.<sup>111</sup> This blindness to one's bias can be seen in Dan Cohn-Sherbok's criteria that must be met before he will believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He writes, "As a Jew and a rabbi, I could be convinced of Jesus' resurrection, but I would set very high standards of what is required." He requires for Jesus to appear globally to multitudes in a bombastic sense with numerous angels and glorious clouds trailing them. The event would have to be photographed, recorded on video, and published in major media. Moreover, all Messianic prophecies in the Jewish Scriptures would need to be fulfilled.<sup>112</sup> We may ask whether such an exceptionally high burden of proof is reasonable. If a syndicate of evidences for a particular view is quite strong, then one may rightly require the evidence to be quite strong for an event in conflict with that syndicate. What if the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is much stronger than the syndicate of evidence for the truth of Cohn-Sherbok's form of Judaism? His requirements seem to me more a circumlocution for "I will not be convinced no matter what the evidence." This type of move noted in Cohn-Sherbok is, of course, not unique to him. I have often asked evangelical Christians if they would abandon their Christian faith if a future team of archaeologists uncovered an ossuary containing the bones of Jesus with an old sheet of papyrus on which was written, "We fooled the world until today" and it was signed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Paul. Of course, many would suspect forgery. But let us suppose that somehow—I do not know how this might be accomplished—subsequent testing irrefutably demonstrated that these were the bones of Jesus. Since Paul asserted that if Jesus was not actually raised the faith of Christians is worthless (1 Cor. 15:17), this would disconfirm the central Christian belief that Jesus was raised.<sup>113</sup> Many evangelical Christians replied that they would not abandon their faith as a result of such a discovery.

Historians should search "for evidence inconsistent with the preferred hypothesis before being willing to assert its truth."<sup>114</sup> They should force themselves to confront data and arguments that are problematic to their preferred hypotheses. Historians must allow themselves to understand and empathize fully with the horizon of the author/agent and, furthermore, allow themselves to be challenged fully by that horizon to the point of conversion.<sup>115</sup> They must achieve full understanding of and

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<sup>111</sup> McCullagh (2000), 40. Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997) amazingly places the Jesus Seminar between the "skeptical left wing" and the "fundamentalist right" (5) as though it is representative of the middle. While one can certainly be further on the theological left than many of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar, it does not appear to be an accurate description to me to place the Jesus Seminar in the middle. This would locate agnostics such as Allison and Ehrman, as well as a number of others on the side of conservatism.

<sup>112</sup> D. Cohn-Sherbok, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish View," in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 198.

<sup>113</sup> That is, if by "resurrection" the early Christians were referring to an event that occurred to the corpse of Jesus.

<sup>114</sup> McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 33. See also McCullagh (2000), where he says that even though we cannot overcome bias completely, giving careful consideration to competing hypotheses goes a long way toward reducing it (56).

<sup>115</sup> Denton (2005), 99; Eddy and Boyd (2007): "in the name of epistemological humility and the ideal of objectivity . . . critical scholars [should] be open-minded and humble enough to try to seriously entertain claims that others find plausible, regardless of the fact that their own plausibility structures prejudice them against such claims" (85; cf. 81); R. Evans (1999): "None of this means that historical judgment has to be neutral. But it does mean that the historian has to develop a detached mode of cognition, a faculty of self-criticism, and an ability to understand another person's point of view" (219; also see 104); Fischhoff, "For those condemned to study the past: Heuristics and biases in hindsight" in



empathy for the opposing view. When this is maintained during an investigation, the historian is close to transcending her horizon. While full detachment may be unattainable, temporary detachment is attainable to some degree and provides value.<sup>116</sup> Gregory writes,

At a time when some would construe all scholarship as displaced autobiography, many regard the idea of bracketing one's own convictions as a naïve chimera. While such bracketing might well be impossible to realize perfectly, those who have had the experience of self-consciously restraining their own convictions know that it is not something of which scholars are constitutionally incapable. Imperfect self-restraint is better than none. To paraphrase the economist Robert Solow: just because a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible does not mean that one should conduct surgery in a sewer.<sup>117</sup>

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Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, eds. (1982): "to force oneself to argue against the inevitability of the reported outcomes, that is, try to convince oneself that it might have turned out otherwise. Questioning the validity of the reasons you have recruited to explain its inevitability might be a good place to start . . . Since even this unusual step seems not entirely adequate, one might further try to track down some of the uncertainty surrounding past events in their original form" (343); Gregory (2006): "The first prerequisite is one of the most difficult: we must be willing to set aside our *own* beliefs—about the nature of reality, about human priorities, about morality—in order to try to understand *them*" (147); Haskell (1990): The pursuit of history "requires of its practitioners that vital minimum of ascetic self-discipline that enables a person to do such things as abandon wishful thinking, assimilate bad news, discard pleasing interpretations that cannot pass elementary tests of evidence and logic, suspend or bracket one's own perceptions long enough to enter sympathetically into the alien and possibly repugnant perspectives of rival thinkers. All of these mental acts—especially coming to grips with a rival's perspective—require *detachment*, an undeniably ascetic capacity to achieve some distance from one's own spontaneous perceptions and convictions, to imagine how the world appears in another's eyes, to experimentally adopt perspectives that do not come naturally" (132). McKnight (2005) acknowledges that "everyone has an agenda, a motivation, and a purpose whenever studying the historical Jesus. . . . What is needed is not so much frank admission and then a jolly carrying on as usual, as if admission is justification, but instead the willingness to let our presuppositions (Subject) be challenged by the evidence (Object)" (33). Detachment should not be confused with disinterest. According to Haskell (1990), "Seeing an analogy between the role of the judge and that of the historian does not imply any overestimation of the value of neutrality: judges, like historians, are expected to be open to rational persuasion, not to be indifferent about the great issues of their day or—bizarre thought—to abstain from judgment. What we demand of them is self-control, not self-immolation. Bias and conflict of interest do indeed arouse our suspicion, not only of judges and historians, but of whomever we depend upon to be fair. The demand is for detachment and fairness, not disengagement from life. Most historians would indeed say that the historian's primary commitment is to the truth, and that when the truth and the 'cause,' however defined, come into conflict, the truth must prevail" (139). See also Meier (1991), 6, and Willitts (2005), 101-02.

<sup>116</sup> Baxter (1999): "'Pure detachment' is not available. But in this or that instance, can you not to *some* extent be detached and open-minded, guided by reality out there? An a priori 'No' betokens anti-realism and/or solipsism, and perhaps determinism" (38n9); McCullagh (2000): "Although complete detachment is a pipedream, historians can put commitment to rational standards of historical inquiry ahead of a desire for a certain outcome, thereby significantly reducing the bias of their accounts" (41). See also Eddy and Boyd (2007): "As long as we maintain an epistemological humility and refrain from transforming our psychological certainty into an unassailable metaphysical a priori, we can, in principle, continue asymptotically to strive for objective truth. As long as we remain tentative about our assumptions and our commitment to truth takes precedence over our desire for the reaffirmation of those things of which we are psychologically certain, there is hope that together we can make progress toward the apprehension of actual history, even as we grant that this goal is always approached in an asymptotic fashion" (83).

<sup>117</sup> Gregory (2006), 147.

The six actions just discussed by no means guarantee objectivity. Indeed, complete objectivity is elusive. I believe Fischhoff is correct when he writes, “Inevitably, we are all captives of our present personal perspective. . . . There is no proven antidote.”<sup>118</sup> Gilderhus opines, “the problem of objectivity no doubt will remain a source of perplexity and consternation.”<sup>119</sup> But it does not follow that history is unknowable. Historians will always differ widely in their historical descriptions. This is usually a result of a paucity of data and/or the inability of many historians, specifically those with inaccurate and immature horizons, to overcome their biases.<sup>120</sup> Accordingly, the answer to a historical question may not be unknowable in an intrinsic sense, but rather unknowable to historians who are handicapped by their horizons.

#### 1.2.4. The Role of a Consensus

Given the prominent role of the horizons of historians in every historical inquiry, we can anticipate that consensus opinions will often elude historians due to “interpretive polarities.”<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, rather than an objective and careful weighing of the data, the subjective horizons of historians, especially historians writing on religious, philosophical, political, and moral topics, exert the most influence in their final judgments.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, many member of the audience to whom historians present their research are no less biased than the presenting historians. Accordingly, what is judged as sound and persuasive research to one group may be viewed as inadequate and overly biased by another.<sup>123</sup>

Of course, no “universal consensus” should be sought, since there will always be those who make their abode on the fringe.<sup>124</sup> There are a few today who assert that Jesus is a myth who never existed, although it appears that no widely respected scholar holds this position.<sup>125</sup> There are those who deny there ever was a

<sup>118</sup> Fischhoff in Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, eds. (1982), 349.

<sup>119</sup> Gilderhus (2007), 87.

<sup>120</sup> Even when the data is abundant, a consensus interpretation may be elusive. Johnson (1996) notes that “[t]he divergent interpretations of the life and presidency of John F. Kennedy, for example, demonstrate that the availability of virtually endless amounts of information does not guarantee unanimity in its interpretation” (105).

<sup>121</sup> Rex Martin (1998), 28. See also Novick (1988) who states that it is “impossible to locate” a “scholarly consensus . . . to sustain objectivity” (572). Anchor (1999) warns that “there are many, sometimes incompatible, interpretations of the same events” and “there is no guarantee of consensus in history” (113).

<sup>122</sup> Denton (2004), 89.

<sup>123</sup> Anchor (1999): “As there are always alternative ways to interpret the traces of the past (our evidence), an essential part of the historian’s task is to figure out which among them is best, that is, which among them is *most likely* to be true.” Which explanation seems “most plausible varies not only with the cognitive expectations but also with the normative expectations of the audiences addressed” (114). See also Swinburne (2003), 3.

<sup>124</sup> Tucker (2004), 33.

<sup>125</sup> Bultmann (1958): “Of course the doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community” (13); Bornkamm (1960): “to doubt the historical existence of Jesus at all...was reserved for an unrestrained, tendentious criticism of modern times into which it is not worth while to enter here”; Marxsen (1970): “I am of the opinion (and it is an opinion shared by every serious historian) that the theory [“that Jesus never lived, that he was a purely mythical figure”] is historically untenable” (119); Grant (1977): “To sum up, modern critical methods fail to support the Christ-myth theory. It has ‘again and again been answered

Holocaust.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, a consensus can be reached due to shared biases, convictions, objectives, and a lack of knowledge. We need to be reminded every so often that a consensus of scholars does not establish the objectivity or truth of their conclusion. Communities in the past have held numerous beliefs that have since been disproved.<sup>127</sup> Crossan seems wise to me when he states, “I think it’s the job of a scholar to take on the majority every now and then.”<sup>128</sup>

A consensus opinion can be valuable for recognizing objectivity when the group is comprised of scholars on the subject under investigation from all interested camps

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and annihilated by first-rank scholars’. In recent years ‘no serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus’—or at any rate very few, and they have not succeeded in disposing of the much stronger, indeed very abundant, evidence to the contrary” (200); M. Martin (1991): “Well’s thesis [that Jesus never existed] is controversial and not widely accepted” (67); Van Voorst (2000): “Contemporary New Testament scholars have typically viewed their [i.e., Jesus mythers] arguments as so weak or bizarre that they relegate them to footnotes, or often ignore them completely” (16); Burrige and Gould (2004): “There are those who argue that Jesus is a figment of the Church’s imagination, that there never was a Jesus at all. I have to say that I do not know any respectable critical scholar who says that any more” (34); Allison (“Explaining,” 2005): “no responsible scholar can find any truth in it” (121); Maier (2005): “the total evidence is so overpowering, so absolute that only the shallowest of intellects would dare to deny Jesus’ existence” ([http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2902063/k.67B8/Did\\_Jesus\\_Really\\_Exist.htm](http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2902063/k.67B8/Did_Jesus_Really_Exist.htm), viewed July 8, 2008); R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008): “We can be certain that Jesus really existed (despite a few hyper-historical skeptics who refuse to be convinced” (10); Vermes (2008): “Let me state plainly that I accept that Jesus was a real historical person. In my opinion, the difficulties arising from the denial of his existence, still vociferously maintained in small circles of rationalist ‘dogmatists,’ far exceed those deriving from its acceptance” (ix).

<sup>126</sup> At the time of writing, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been public in his denials of the Holocaust. Al-Masaa, an official Egyptian government newspaper, defended the Iranian President’s statement, saying the gas chambers were for disinfecting clothing and that no mass extermination of Jews occurred (*World Net Daily*, Dec. 20, 2005: [http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=47989](http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=47989), viewed on August 13, 2006). Even in what many might expect to be a rational society, a poll revealed that of one thousand British Muslims aged eighteen and older, 25% have either never heard of the Holocaust or deny that it occurred. An additional 6% said they did not know. If this sample is an accurate reflection of British Muslims in 2006, nearly one third of all British Muslim adults do not affirm the historicity of the Holocaust. (See “Attitudes to Living in Britain—A Survey of Muslim Opinion” by GfK dated April 27, 2006: [http://www.imagineate.uk.com/MCC01\\_SURVEY/Site%20Download.pdf](http://www.imagineate.uk.com/MCC01_SURVEY/Site%20Download.pdf) (28) visited on August 12, 2006. The report also stated that even with Osama bin Ladin’s confession that his group was responsible for the terrorist events of 9/11, 45% of British Muslims held that these events were actually performed by the American and Israeli governments as part of a conspiracy to cast Muslims in a negative light, while another 35% of British Muslims were uncertain who was responsible. This means that 80% of British Muslims either deny or question the assertion that Muslims were responsible for the catastrophic events resulting in more than three thousand deaths on 9/11. While most Holocaust deniers are not regarded as scholars, at least one is: <http://www.dailynorthwestern.com/media/storage/paper853/news/2006/02/14/Forum/Iran-Has.The.U.s.s.Number-1920928.shtml?norewrite200608131604&sourcedomain=www.dailynorthwestern.com> (assessed August 13, 2006).

<sup>127</sup> Tucker (2004), 24-25. R. Evans (1999): “it is highly dangerous to make objectivity in this sense dependent on the existence of a scholarly community. There was, after all, a scholarly community in Germany in the 1920s which remained in existence, largely unaltered in personnel and ideology, under Hitler’s Third Reich” (99).

<sup>128</sup> Crossan in Copan, ed. (1998), 46. Indeed, this is what Burrige did with his 1992 book *What Are the Gospels?*, which was largely responsible for changing the consensus from viewing the Gospels as a unique genre to understanding them as a subset of Greco-Roman biography.

with the exception of some fringe positions.<sup>129</sup> Tucker cites agreement among historians of the Holocaust: “Jewish and Gentile, German and British, right-wing and left-wing historians agree that there was a Holocaust.”<sup>130</sup> Perhaps no other group of historians contains greater heterogeneity than the community of biblical scholars.<sup>131</sup> The Jesus Seminar awards historicity to those sayings and acts of Jesus approved by the majority of its members. However, Seminar membership is very small and consists almost exclusively of scholars belonging to the theological left.<sup>132</sup> Accordingly, a consensus opinion from this group may at best inform us of what theologians on the left regard as authentic and is no more heterogeneous than a similar vote coming from the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. A group exhibiting greater heterogeneity is the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Annual SBL meetings are attended by members of many theological and philosophical persuasions: liberals and conservatives, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, and atheists, all from numerous countries and ethnic groups from all over the world. If a consensus opinion is going to be of any value for historians, it must come from such a group. However, a consensus from even this group is valuable only when all of its members opining on a subject have personally researched that particular subject. For example, a consensus opinion of all SBL members on a matter pertaining to a recent archaeological find has little value if less than five percent of all SBL members have a significant knowledge of that find.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, little if any value should be assigned to those scholars opining on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus who have not engaged in serious research on the matter.

Even outside of historical investigations concerning religious matters, consensus is more often than not elusive. Gilderhus comments, “The body of literature on almost any historical subject takes the form of an ongoing debate. . . . By the very nature of the subject, history tends to divide scholars and set them at odds. . . . We no longer possess a past commonly agreed upon. Indeed, to the contrary, we have a multiplicity of versions competing for attention and emphasizing alternatively elites and nonelites, men and women, whites and persons of color, and no good way of reconciling all the differences. Though the disparities and incoherencies create terrible predicaments for historians who prize orderliness in their stories, such conditions also aptly express the

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<sup>129</sup> Tucker (2004), 257, cf. 20, 23, 30. R. Evans (1999) looks for “a wide measure of agreement which transcends not only individuals but also communities of scholars” (110).

<sup>130</sup> Tucker (2004), 39.

<sup>131</sup> Tucker (2004), 54.

<sup>132</sup> Johnson (1996) takes issue with the claim of the Jesus Seminar that it has “some two hundred scholars.” This is a very small number when we consider that the number of New Testament scholars who are members of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) is at least half of its 6,900 members, in addition to which there are thousands of other New Testament scholars who have chosen not to be a part of SBL. Moreover, the two hundred scholars claimed is “somewhat misleading,” since the actual number of members who meet regularly, read papers, and vote on the sayings and deeds of Jesus “is closer to forty” (2). Even in *The Five Gospels* only seventy-four fellows are claimed. “The numbers alone suggest that any claim to represent ‘scholarship’ or the ‘academy’ is ludicrous” (2-3). Johnson’s statement is now somewhat dated but still seems accurate. As of June 4, 2008 the list of fellows provided by the Westar Institute on its web site is only 145—and that includes eight members who have resigned or are now deceased.

<sup>133</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998) writes, “If an historian’s knowledge of the subject is scrappy, not at all comprehensive, then he or she is not in a position to say whether any particular narrative account of it fairly represents it or not” (61).

confusions of the world and the experiences of different people in it.”<sup>134</sup> Lorenz contends that a proper philosophy of history must elucidate the fact that historians present reconstructions of a past reality on the basis of factual research and discuss the adequacy of these reconstructions; at the same time it “must elucidate the fact that these discussions seldom lead to a consensus and that therefore pluralism is a basic characteristic of history as a discipline.”<sup>135</sup>

It is highly unlikely that a consensus will ever exist pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. While strong agreement exists regarding a number of “facts” often used as evidence to support the resurrection hypothesis, no consensus will ever exist for the conclusion that the resurrection hypothesis is an accurate description of what actually occurred. After all, how likely is it that historians who are Muslims and atheists will confess that the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation or that Christian historians will confess that the resurrection hypothesis is not the best explanation?<sup>136</sup> Yet, either Jesus rose from the dead or he did not; and historians holding one of these positions are more correct than those not holding it. Because of the uncertainty of historical knowledge, many historical descriptions will never receive a stamp of approval from the consensus of the relevant scholars. This should not restrain the historian from stating that his hypothesis is probably true. Meyer writes, “The reason why we feel vulnerable is that we cannot easily avail ourselves of a knock-down proof that everyone will accept. This honest reflection, however, overlooks the fact and issue of horizon. We should not expect that hermeneutical questions are resolvable in the sense that all will catch on and agree, and only the flat-earthers be at a loss.”<sup>137</sup>

### 1.2.5. The Uncertainty of Historical Knowledge

We have just considered various obstacles faced by historians that prohibit them from claiming absolute certainty: selective and imperfect memories, selection of content deemed important to a particular historian, interpretation, fuzziness of genre, unreliable eyewitness reports, fragmented data surviving from a foreign culture, and the bias and horizon of both our sources and of historians analyzing them. Moreover, the disciplines of history and science share the fact that on numerous occasions a hypothesis is disproved by new data. The sinking of the *Titanic* is a good example. Many eyewitnesses claimed that the ship broke in two just prior to sinking, while other eyewitnesses claimed it went down intact. Investigations by both American and British governments immediately after the maritime disaster concluded that the ship went down intact.<sup>138</sup> However, when the *Titanic* was found and examined in 1985,

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<sup>134</sup> Gilderhus (2007), 86, 113.

<sup>135</sup> Lorenz (1994), 326. See also Gilderhus (2007), 85, 86, 93, 113. Thus, I think Craffert (1989) is mistaken when he asserts that “no one has the right to use the tag historical unless it can win the respect of fellow historians” (341-43).

<sup>136</sup> Accordingly, O’Collins (2003) is mistaken when writing, “If the (historical) evidence were sufficient to establish or conclusively confirm resurrection belief, such belief should be utterly convincing to all those willing to weigh the evidence and draw the obvious conclusion from it. Yet this would be a return to Pannenberg’s position . . . and to its obvious rebuttal. If Pannenberg is correct, those best able to evaluate the evidence (i.e. historians) should be much more prominent among the ranks of those who agree with the conclusion that Jesus was raised from the dead” (49-50).

<sup>137</sup> Meyer (1994), 133-34.

<sup>138</sup> For the American report, see “‘Titanic’ Disaster: Report of the Committee on Commerce, United States Senate (Ship Sinking)”: “There have been many conflicting statements as to whether the ship broke in two, but the preponderance of evidence is to the effect that she assumed an almost end-on



the team concluded that the ship had indeed split apart and that this had occurred prior to it sinking.

How do historians handle this challenge of the uncertainty of knowledge? A strong majority is not dissuaded from historical inquiry. However, they hold that all conclusions must be held as provisional:

No historians really believe in the *absolute* truth of what they are writing, simply in its *probable* truth, which they have done their utmost to establish by following the usual rules of evidence.<sup>139</sup>

[T]he best explanation historians can think of for their evidence is not always correct. There might be a better one they have not considered, and there might be more evidence that will cast a different complexion upon the historical events that interest them. But if the evidence in support of an explanatory hypothesis is strong, and there is no alternative hypothesis supported nearly as well, it is reasonable to believe it is probably true, at least for the time being.<sup>140</sup>

Scholars do not say, ‘That’s what it was’, but, ‘It could have been like that on the basis of the sources.’ . . . Scholars never say, ‘That’s it’, but only, ‘It looks like this at the present stage of research’ . . . Scholars do not say, ‘That is our result’, but ‘That is our result on the basis of particular methods.’<sup>141</sup>

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position and sank intact” (<http://www.titanicinquiry.com/USInq/USReport/AmInqRep07.php>, accessed June 4, 2008). For the British report, see “Wreck Commissioners’ Court. Proceedings on a Formal Investigation Ordered by the Board of Trade into the Loss of the S. S. ‘Titanic’ (Final Effect of the Damage)”: “The later stages of the sinking cannot be stated with any precision, owing to a confusion of the times which was natural under the circumstances. . . . (14078) The ship did not break in two” (<http://www.titanicinquiry.org/BOTInq/BOTReport/BOTRepFinEff.php>, accessed June 4, 2008).

<sup>139</sup> R. Evans (1999), 189. See also Johnson (1996): “What is most important, however, is that the serious historian knows and acknowledges that historical knowledge deals only in degrees of probability, and never with certainty. . . . serious practitioners of the craft are characterized by deep humility. They above all know how fragile their reconstructions are, how subject to revision, how susceptible to distortion when raised from the level of the probable to the certain” (85; cf. 123); Gilderhus (2007), 4.

<sup>140</sup> McCullagh (2005), 453; cf. McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 23, 307.

<sup>141</sup> Theissen and Merz (1996), vii-viii. See also Anchor (2001): It is not a matter of the old modernist/naïve realist concept of “absolute certainty.” Today we now distinguish between “*better* and *worse* versions” (109); Dunn (2003): “any judgment will have to be provisional” (103); Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008): “All the historian can do is work to establish what probably happened on the basis of whatever supporting evidence happens to survive” (243); Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997), 6; Gilderhus (2007): “using the remnants of the past, historians reconstruct history, employing statements of probability, not certainty, and subject always to the limitations of a point of view.” (86-87); Haskell (2004) states that the consensus among historians is that historical descriptions are always provisional and subject to revision (347); McCullagh (“What Do Historians Argue About?” 2004), 26; McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004): “Historians cannot prove the absolute truth of their descriptions” (43); McKnight (2005): “all conclusions must be recognized as approximate, probabilistic, and contingent” (21); R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008): “there are no absolute certainties in history” (9); O’Collins (1998), “Historical studies team with such examples of top scholars making a solidly probable case and reaching firm conclusions that they believe do better justice to the evidence currently available. Although they cannot pretend to have reached the kind of utter certainty which means, in Carnley’s words, that ‘no further assessment’ need ever be done and that they ‘can discount [even!] the possibility that further evidence might come to light which would disprove’ their conclusions, they constantly refuse to throw up their hands and ‘responsibly’ declare the issue they are

Therefore, when historians say that “*x* occurred” in the past, they are actually claiming the following: *Given the available data, the best explanation indicates that we are warranted in having a reasonable degree of certainty that x occurred and that it appears more certain at the moment than competing hypotheses. Accordingly, we have a rational basis for believing it. However, our conclusion is subject to revision or abandonment, since new data may surface in the future showing things happened differently than presently proposed.*<sup>142</sup> Therefore, preferred hypotheses are like temporary workers waiting to see whether they will one day be awarded a permanent position.

Accordingly, it is especially true that historians interested in antiquity are never epistemically justified in having absolute certainty that an event occurred. The premises of all historical inferences are fallible. This becomes especially relevant when the data is foggy, such as when textual evidence leaves a reading uncertain. The truth of generalizations about a culture used in historical inferences is unproven. Historical inferences are mostly inductive rather than deductive.<sup>143</sup> Available evidence is fragmented and could be misleading.<sup>144</sup> If more data had been preserved, perhaps a different conclusion would have been drawn.

Notwithstanding, the inability to obtain *absolute* certainty does not prohibit historians from having *adequate* certainty. Carefully examined inferences are generally reliable and it is reasonable to believe that they correctly describe what actually occurred when the historian’s horizon is mature, he has been deliberate in serious attempts to minimize the negative impact of his horizon, and he has followed proper methodology.<sup>145</sup> Only a few of the most radical postmodernist historians may find themselves in disagreement with the following statement by O’Collins:

Mathematical calculations cannot demonstrate the existence and career of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. But converging historical evidence would make it absurd to deny that he lived and changed the political and cultural face of the Middle East. We cannot run the film backwards to regain contact with the past by literally reconstructing the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC or the crucifixion of Jesus almost a hundred years later. Such historical events cannot be re-enacted in the way we can endlessly repeat scientific experiments in the laboratory. But only the lunatic fringe would cast doubt on these two violent deaths.<sup>146</sup>

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interested in to be ‘indeterminate’” (171-72); Schinkel (2004), 51, 56; Theissen and Winter (2002): “All our knowledge is hypothetical, even the greatest certainty available to us. Everything stands under the qualification: it could have been otherwise” (256; cf. 227, 258); Tucker (2001): Core theories of historiography limit the range of possible interpretations, but historical conclusions must be held as provisional or underdetermined. This does not result in radical postmodernism. “[T]here is a fact of the matter even if historians cannot agree on it” (54); Waterman (2006): “a degree of ‘could be’ and never the degree of ‘was’” (8); Wright’s comments in Borg and Wright (1998) asserts that historical research is “always provisional” (26); Zammito (2005): “A robust historicism does not require *a priori* guarantees. It can tolerate uncertainty and indeterminacy” (179).

<sup>142</sup> Wedderburn (1999): “if they [historians] assert that something is certainly true, what they mean in practice is that something has been established ‘beyond all reasonable doubt’, that is, the level of probability has become so high that the falsehood of the assertion is highly improbable” (4).

<sup>143</sup> McCullagh (1984), 4.

<sup>144</sup> Waterman (2006), 53-54. See also Wedderburn (1999), 11.

<sup>145</sup> McCullagh (1984), ix, 4; McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 44.

<sup>146</sup> O’Collins (2003), 34.

Moreover, it must be remembered that nothing in life is absolutely certain. We fly across the Atlantic with full confidence we will arrive at our destination safely. On rare occasions, an aircraft malfunctions or is hijacked by terrorists, resulting in a change of course from what normally occurs. But this does not prevent us from having general and consistent confidence in the safety of flight across the Atlantic. “[L]ittle or nothing in real life is a matter of certainty, including the risks of eating beef, or of crossing a road, or of committing oneself to another in marriage.”<sup>147</sup> Even scientists must admit that their theories, though probably true, may be discarded tomorrow as a result of new data. Yet this does not prohibit them from stating that their theory probably describes the state of reality even though it must be held as provisional.

### 1.2.6. Postmodernist History

Thus far I have been discussing how to conduct a historical investigation or to “do history” as though there were no debate over whether history can be done. The postmodern linguistic turn and its application to the discipline of history pose just this question.<sup>148</sup> To various degrees, *postmodern historians* question whether it is even possible to know and describe the past. This is in contrast to *realist historians* who maintain that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it and our scientific statements and theories refer to this independent reality.<sup>149</sup> I will briefly examine the reasoning and conclusions of the three foremost postmodern historians: Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, and Keith Jenkins.<sup>150</sup>

Hayden White is regarded as the father of postmodern historians.<sup>151</sup> He does not deny that the past can be known to an extent. A rather simple singular description of an event or events in their chronological order may be correct.<sup>152</sup> It is when we speak of

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<sup>147</sup> Dunn (2003), 105. See Allison (“Explaining,” 2005): “We should be modest about our abilities. Robust confidence in our historical-critical conclusions is out of place” (133). See also Gorman (2000): “if knowledge requires the complete absence of any logical possibility of doubt, then knowledge itself is not possible. Yet the skeptic’s [i.e., postmodernist’s] advice that one doubt all that it is logically possible to doubt is not advice that one needs to take” (256).

<sup>148</sup> In the *premodern* period, when someone desired to know what occurred in the past he appealed to authority, namely the authority of the church. The Ages of Reason and Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries questioned and abandoned all forms of authority. *Modernity* became the dominant paradigm in Western culture and is characterized by the use of logic and scientifically controlled method for gaining knowledge. Modernity is also known for the rise of capitalism, the information explosion in the fields of science and technology, and widespread literacy. It asserts that given enough time, scientists and scholars will be able to know everything about the workings of the universe, life itself, and, through psychology, know precisely why people respond the way they do under every conceivable circumstance. Although the dates are debated, modernity may roughly be said to be the period of 1910-present, although some claim that it began in 1870 and/or ended in the 1960s with the ushering in of *postmodernity*.

<sup>149</sup> Postmodernists are also referred to as relativists, skeptics, idealists, anti-realists, anti-foundationalists, new historicists, and poststructuralists, whereas modernist historians are also referred to as realists, naïve-realists, objectivists, representationalists, and foundationalists. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to historians as being *postmodern* or *realist*.

<sup>150</sup> Three female historians have produced a frequently cited volume that presents a more moderate version of postmodernist historiography. See Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994).

<sup>151</sup> Zammito (1998), 333. McKnight (2005) refers to White as “America’s leading postmodernist” (6).

<sup>152</sup> Postmodernist Crowell (1998) agrees (229). Answering a radical postmodernism, Rex Martin (2005) comments that when we speak of artifacts, be they potsherds, inscriptions, or texts, they are remnants that survive from a past. If a past did not exist, neither would there be artifacts (140-41).



an “era” or similar construct such as the “Cold War,” the “Holocaust,” and “Apartheid” that historians must create narratives. These narratives will explain how the events are connected to some extent and provide meaning or interpretation.<sup>153</sup> This narrative is a construct of the historian who has built a frame on which the events may be understood.<sup>154</sup> Since other frames may result in varying arrangements, meanings, and interpretations that often conflict with one another, historians are simply telling stories they have invented that can never be verified. Nor can these narratives be said to be correct or incorrect, because the past does not have a frame.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, there is no identifiable line between fact and fiction and, in a sense, we have reached the death of history, since there is no means for historians to reconstruct the past as it actually was. Even if we possessed an exhaustive chronology of events, there is no history apart from narrative. The nature of historical reconstructions is much more complex than appears on the surface.

White contends that “no historical event is *intrinsically tragic* . . . For in history what is tragic from one perspective is comic from another. . . . The important point is that most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings.”<sup>156</sup> In support of White we may note the polarity of responses to the events of 9/11. While the West grieved at the tragic loss of more than three thousand lives, many Muslims in Arab and Persian countries were ecstatic over the events and cheered as though a game-winning goal had been scored at the World Cup. Narrative then occurs when historians place events within a context and provide interpretation. For example, historians can report that on September 11, 2001, a number of Muslim men took control of four airplanes, three of which were flown into buildings, causing great damage to those buildings and the loss of human life, while a few passengers on the fourth plane eventually fought back to regain control, resulting in the plane crashing in Pennsylvania. Historians may even report these events in chronological order. However, narrative presents the facts within a larger context. A historian writing within a Western context might report the following: “On 9.11.2001, a number of Muslim terrorists hijacked four airplanes and three of those planes were

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<sup>153</sup> Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994) state, “The human intellect demands accuracy while the soul craves meaning” (262).

<sup>154</sup> White (1987) (5): “But by common consent, it is not enough that an historical account deal in real, rather than merely imaginary, events; and it is not enough that the account represents events in its order of discourse according to the chronological sequence in which they originally occurred. The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence.” Theissen and Winter (2002) note that this “embedding of events in their context and the explanation of sources on the basis of the history of their effects are part of the task of every writing of history” (226). Topoloski (1999) states that inspiration from aesthetics and logical argumentation are of equal importance in historiography (199-200). Zammito (1998) asserts that historians are more interested in concrete aspects (or colligatory concepts) of the past such as the Cold War or the Renaissance than they are with singular statements (339).

<sup>155</sup> This contrasts with most historians who believe that their account gets it “more right” than alternatives (Haskell [2004], 347). See also Lorenz (1998): “The complexity of the notion of truth in the case of narratives (or scientific theories) cannot be used as an argument against it, for as long as we presuppose that historical narratives refer to a real past and thus represent knowledge of the past, historical narratives constitute truth-claims that must be elucidated and not annihilated by philosophy of history. . . . So if history is characterized by its narrative form *alone* one disregards the fuel of its motor: historians don’t claim to present just a story but a *true* story, and this truth-claim is its distinguishing hallmark” (326-27).

<sup>156</sup> White (1978), 84-85.

flown into buildings while another crashed in Pennsylvania, resulting in the tragic loss of more than three thousand lives. These events were planned by the Al-Qaeda terrorist group as a response to American troops stationed in Saudi Arabia beginning with the first Gulf War in 1990. Since then, Muslim fanatics have continued to terrorize the free and modern world as leaders from the U. S., Great Britain, France, Germany, and other countries attempt to find a solution for dealing with the Muslim problem.” In particular, the terms “terrorist,” “tragic loss,” “Muslim fanatics,” and “the Muslim problem” are interpretive constructs within a Western framework. The narrative begins with the Gulf War in 1990 and could be viewed as the beginning of a period of terrorism. However, a Jewish historian living in Israel who has witnessed consistent terrorist attacks up close for decades probably would not begin the narrative in 1990 but view the events of 9/11 as Muslim terrorism that had begun decades earlier in Israel and that is now initiating acts of terror in specific Western countries as a punishment for allying themselves with Israel. A Muslim historian may paint a different picture, describing the events as a successful response by holy men to the war against Islam started by Allah’s enemies and has been going on since the seventh century. Therefore, the events are placed and understood within a different frame of reference.

Another example plainly lies in historical Jesus research. McKnight defines the historical Jesus as “a narrative representation of the existential facts about Jesus that survive critical scrutiny.”<sup>157</sup> These “narrative representations” of Jesus offer widely differing portraits, from Allison’s millenarian prophet to Sanders’ eschatological prophet to Wright’s eschatological prophet/Messiah to Crossan’s cynic philosopher to Meier’s Marginal Jew. There is also a present demand on the street for narrative representations extending beyond Jesus to early Christianity. Consider the success of books such as Ehrman’s *Lost Christianities* (2003), Pagels’s *Beyond Belief* (2003), Tabor’s *The Jesus Dynasty* (2006), and non-academic treatments such as Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and Baigent’s *The Jesus Papers* (2006). Of course, some narratives are much more imaginative than others. Thus, when fueled by popular Western interest in a historical Jesus and an early Christianity that differs radically from New Testament portraits, the new and emerging portraits are sometimes striking. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer refer to this practice as “modern mythologizing”<sup>158</sup> in which “everything seems possible.”<sup>159</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Crossan refers to this “stunning diversity” as “an academic embarrassment.”<sup>160</sup> Via suggests that the freedom to create narratives without any boundaries on the imagination has resulted in products that keep postmodernism going strong:

Aesthetic innovation is simply an aspect of the frantic economic urgency to produce ever fresh waves of more novel-seeming goods. . . . If there are those who do not believe that the almost complete commodification of cultural products—including scholarly knowledge—is a present reality, all they need

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<sup>157</sup> McKnight (2005), 29.

<sup>158</sup> Hengel and Schwemer (1997), 147.

<sup>159</sup> Hengel and Schwemer (1997), 119. See also Braaten (1999), 149.

<sup>160</sup> Crossan (1991), xxviii.

to do to be disabused of their illusion is to attend an annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion.<sup>161</sup>

I am uncertain what Via means precisely by this statement. However, he is certainly correct if his intent is to note the publishing success of a number of prominent members of SBL such as John Dominic Crossan, Elaine Pagels, and Bart Ehrman whose approaches tend to be postmodern.

Narratives also create problems for historians when attempting to select the best explanation. White does not claim that singular events cannot be verified. However, what is often difficult to determine is the best interpretation assigned to those events.<sup>162</sup> White's point is that the frame or structure created or adopted by historians when writing narratives did not exist in the past in a concrete manner. Therefore it shares a lot in common with fiction: "The fact that narrative is the mode of discourse common to both 'historical' and 'nonhistorical' cultures and that it predominates in both mythic and fictional discourse makes it suspect as a manner speaking about 'real' events."<sup>163</sup> It is an extended metaphor.<sup>164</sup> White argues that it is easy to identify the fictive element of narrative when it appears in a historical description that is in conflict with our own. Yet, he adds, we rarely see this element in our own descriptions.<sup>165</sup> For White, while singular descriptions and chronology have the possibility of provisional verification, broader descriptions involving narrative cannot and are not far from fiction.

Frank Ankersmit is another leading light among postmodernist historians. In agreement with White, Ankersmit asserts that singular descriptions of the past often can be verified<sup>166</sup> and that the narratives constructed by historians have a metaphorical quality.<sup>167</sup> He likewise contends that narrative does not refer to a reality outside of itself and cannot be said to be true or false. The idea that historical narratives correspond in a truthful manner to what they describe "is nothing but an illusion."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Via (2002), 121.

<sup>162</sup> White (1978), 97. See also White (1978): "[I]t is wrong to think of a history as a model similar to a scale model of an airplane or ship, a map, or a photograph. For we can check the adequacy of this latter kind of model by going and looking at the original and, by applying the necessary rules of translation, seeing in what respect the model has actually succeeded in reproducing aspects of the original. But historical structures and processes are not like these original; we cannot go and look at them in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative. Nor should we want to, even if we could" (88).

<sup>163</sup> White (1987), 57. He likewise comments, "The historical narrative, as against the chronicle, reveals to us a world that is putatively 'finished,' done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience" (21). See also White (1978), 83; Rex Martin (1998), 29-30.

<sup>164</sup> Lorenz (1998), 311, uses this term to describe White's approach.

<sup>165</sup> White (1978), 99.

<sup>166</sup> Ankersmit (1994), 87; F. R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and postmodernism" in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 295. See also Crowell (1998) who contends that one can establish the reality of certain events by way of evidence. But "the canons of cognition do not reach far enough to establish the 'validity' of the historian's story" (226).

<sup>167</sup> Ankersmit in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 294; Ankersmit (2001), 12.

<sup>168</sup> See Barrera (2001), 200. Barrera speaks of the reference, sense, and symbolic connotation of a historical statement. Consider, for example, the statement "The Wehrmacht was defeated in Stalingrad." The concrete result of the particular battle is the reference. Its place within a narrative of WWII is its sense. And its connotation may be said to be its relationship to a particular value system and its "national ethnic, religious, cultural, or genre communities" (199).

The historical text that is a remnant of the past is a “substitute” for or “representation” of that past; but it is not reality, since no one-to-one correspondence with the past exists.<sup>169</sup> Accordingly, he writes, “Does not both the language of the novelist and of the historian give us the illusion of a reality, either fictitious or genuine?”<sup>170</sup>

Ankersmit describes history by providing the analogy of a painting. A painting is distinct from what it represents and is a substitute. Realist historian Zammito agrees with the portrait analogy. The “object of portrait painting is to offer a penetrating insight into the character or personality of the sitter.” However, he contends that the real issue is the debate over what is interpretative and what is literal.<sup>171</sup> This is a perplexing question that must be asked when we approach the canonical Gospels, especially the Gospel of John. Critics of the Gospels frequently note stories reported only by John and charge him with invention, concluding that there is a lack of trustworthiness in what he reports. However, no one would charge a portrait as being errant because it portrayed something in the background which was not there during the sitting but was created in order to communicate character or personality. Literary devices such as invented speeches and encomium are common traits of ancient *bioi*. Thus, in some instances, those who complain of contradictions and inventions in the Gospels are guilty of judging them for their photographic accuracy, when this may not have been the intent of the author. Still, this earmark of ancient *bioi* makes hermeneutical considerations of the Gospels all the more challenging.

But Ankersmit is a postmodernist and his interest lies neither in singular historical descriptions nor in the past itself: “In the postmodernist view, the focus is no longer on the past itself, but on the incongruity between present and past, between the language we presently use for speaking about the past and the past itself.”<sup>172</sup> “The postmodernist’s aim, therefore, is to pull the carpet out from under the feet of science and modernism.”<sup>173</sup> However, Ankersmit is not a radical postmodernist. He admits that postmodernism has yet to be demonstrated as being more successful than conventional history in practice.<sup>174</sup>

Although White and Ankersmit are bright lights among postmodernist historians, the leading light of the movement and most radical of the three is Keith Jenkins. With White and Ankersmit, Jenkins notes that since the past does not exist in the present, the histories written by historians cannot be verified. Few historians today hold that historical narratives fall “into shape under the weight of the sheer accumulation of ‘the facts.’” Imagination is required. Thus, adjudicating on the accuracy between conflicting narratives is motivated by aesthetic preference.<sup>175</sup> Jenkins, therefore, proclaims the “end of history.”<sup>176</sup> By this he means that realist history conceived as narratives describing the past with varying degrees of accuracy can no longer be sustained. He is not denying that the actual past occurred. Instead, he contends that narratives constructed by modern historians are based on extant remnants of the past

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<sup>169</sup> Ankersmit (1994), 295-96.

<sup>170</sup> Ankersmit in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 284.

<sup>171</sup> Zammito (2005), 174.

<sup>172</sup> Ankersmit in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 294-95.

<sup>173</sup> Ankersmit in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 283.

<sup>174</sup> Ankersmit (1994), 238.

<sup>175</sup> Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 10.

<sup>176</sup> Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 8, 20.

that have been critically analyzed and placed within these “synthetic” narratives. But a strict analysis of the facts alone could never result in the narratives constructed.<sup>177</sup> “In fact history now appears to be just one more foundationless, positioned expression in a world of foundationless, positioned expressions.”<sup>178</sup>

Theory can be confusing. Perhaps it would be helpful to see how postmodern history is applied. One of the best attested historical narratives is the Holocaust. Enormous quantities of documents, photographs, videos, audio recordings, and testimonies from all parties involved attest to numerous decisions and events that comprise what has come to be called the Holocaust. The Holocaust is a narrative because it is a story with a beginning and an end and because it consists of numerous events that have been interpreted through their relation to one another.

What would a postmodernist say about the Holocaust? Kellner asserts that it is an imaginative construct comprised of numerous historical events.<sup>179</sup> Braun notes that in 1990, Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész commented that only with the assistance of imagination can we form a realistic view of the Holocaust and that some historians of the Holocaust have noted that their research did not assist them in understanding the event.<sup>180</sup> In agreement with Lyotard, Knasteiner adds that survivors of Auschwitz “cannot attest to the crime committed because they did not experience the gas chambers themselves, while the victims cannot testify because they have been killed.” Therefore, they conclude that the events that occurred at Auschwitz must remain indescribable.<sup>181</sup>

Summarizing, postmodernism asserts that far too much confidence has been placed in the ability of science and its methods to do what modernity had hoped for. In historical research, the obstacles to knowing the past discussed in the previous section are only the tip of the iceberg. Further complications arise because modern historians must explain the past by analogies created by points of perceived connection, which may be false. This is especially applicable to language. Words, phrases, and sentences can change meaning in varying shades from person to person. Moreover, because historians cannot capture the full essence of the past event or state, much is omitted so that the resulting description can lead to all sorts of misunderstandings that cannot be corrected. The postmodernist says, “There are no facts, only interpretations.” There is also a denial that there is a concrete referent outside of a description that can be described. Instead it is language itself that constitutes the past, charged by the horizon of the reader and creating meaning in the reader’s image of the past. Lyotard provides a pithy definition of postmodernist history: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>182</sup> Put

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<sup>177</sup> Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 19.

<sup>178</sup> Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 6.

<sup>179</sup> Hans Kellner, “‘Never again’ is now” in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 406.

<sup>180</sup> R. Braun, “The Holocaust and problems of representation” in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 419-20.

<sup>181</sup> W. Knasteiner, “From exception to exemplum: the new approaches to Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’” in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 415.

<sup>182</sup> J-F Lyotard, “The postmodern condition” in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 36. Of interest is the comment by Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997): “postmodernity is not an ideology or position we can choose to subscribe to or not, postmodernity is precisely our condition: it is our historical fate to be living now” (3). Also see Zagorin (1999), 5, 7.



another way, evidence and critical methods do not lead us to correct descriptions of the past.<sup>183</sup>

The advent of postmodernism has challenged modernist thought to the extent that it has been generally labeled as the crisis in conventional history.<sup>184</sup> Evans writes, “The question is now not so much ‘What Is History?’ as ‘Is It Possible to Do History at All?’”<sup>185</sup> The major challenges offered by postmodernity have influenced the conventional practice of history. Abandoned is the idea of strictly objective knowledge and of facts independent of interpretation. The solution of postmodern thought to these challenges is the death of history.

### 1.2.7. Problems with Postmodernist History

Most historians are *realists* and hold that despite the claims of postmodernist historians, reality exists independently of our knowledge of it and our scientific statements and theories refer to this independent reality. Therefore, the truth of narratives can be judged for accuracy.<sup>186</sup> Realists have been quick to respond to the postmodern approaches to history. They commonly note the self-refuting nature of postmodernism.<sup>187</sup> Two realists have been so clear and decisive in their reply that I quote them at length rather than provide a summary and miss the force.

Like historians, postmodernist authors tell stories about the past that they seem to hope and believe are true and consistent with the facts. Elizabeth Ermarth, a contributor to *The Postmodern History Reader* who wishes to regard everything as a text and who aims to subvert the conception of time she associates with modernism and traditional historiography, makes many factual statements ostensibly about the past; for example, that modernity began with the Renaissance and Reformation, that the ancient Greeks had no conception of the subject, that the period of Einstein’s papers on relativity was also that of

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<sup>183</sup> Tucker (2004), 51.

<sup>184</sup> Kofoed (2005), 11.

<sup>185</sup> R. Evans (1999), 3.

<sup>186</sup> Lorenz (1994), 308.

<sup>187</sup> R. Evans (1999), 190. Fay (1998) says that there is “something deeply wrong with the current dominant metatheory . . . Postmetaphysical metatheory often seems to speak out of both sides of its mouth—to undermine disciplinary history while approving what it has accomplished and following its dictates. . . . Most postmetaphysical metatheories implode because they utilize what they deny is legitimate” (84). Postmodernism claims “to depict the way the world is (in this case that truth, rationality, and reality are related to historical epochs in a certain way). But this means that [postmodernism] implicitly rests on the idea that there is some way the world is,” which is the very thing it denies (87). Moreover, while postmodernists claim that “reason” is what a particular group decides is the correct way to think and that no objectivity can exist, this assertion cannot be proved by a “reason” that transcends the group of postmodernists. Accordingly, by their own account, there can be no reason for preferring postmodern approaches over realism. “This is why postmetaphysicalism is ultimately incoherent: it presupposes or invokes precisely what it denies” (88). Haskell (2004) notes how Rorty claims we should not care who wins the realist/anti-realist debate because of its irrelevance. He then works hard to convince his readers that realism is incorrect (347). McKnight (2005): “the claim that there is no objectivity is ultimately a claim for an alternative objectivity rather than an alternative to objectivity” (12); Meyer (1994) draws our attention to the self-refuting nature of postmodernism, noting Rorty’s “four-hundred-page philosophic argument purporting to show the non-cognitive character of philosophy and hence the futility of philosophic argument” (43). He notes, “It may be maddening, but you are not allowed to escape the consequences of cutting off the branch you are sitting on” (41).

Kafka's stories and of the cubism of Picasso and Braque, that the German Higher Criticism of the Bible historicized Christianity, and so on. She also frankly confesses that her own text about postmodernism is 'written in the language of representation [that is, realism], assumes a consensus community, and engages in historical generalization and footnotes,' a position she justifies with the ingenuous argument that 'one need not give up history to challenge its hegemony. . . .'<sup>188</sup>

Haskell shows how one of the more radical postmodernists could not live consistently with his theory:

Having warned his readers of the inescapable futility of all efforts to represent the past 'as it was,' Lyotard then embarks upon the very course he has just declared to be impossibly naïve. Having shown that the historian's pious, death-defying claim to know 'how things really were' does not deceive him in the least, Lyotard proceeds to tell us . . . well, how it really was with his friend Souyri. In spite of himself, Lyotard commits an historical representation. He makes Souyri speak. And, by all appearances, he puts his representational pants on pretty much the same way the rest of us do. He informs us that he sent his friend a letter announcing his resignation from the *Pouvoir Ouvrier* group in 1966, Souyri answered him in October. 'He affirmed that our divergences dated from long before . . . he considered it pointless to try to resolve them.' 'He attributed to me the project of. . . . He added. . . . He knew himself to be bound to Marxist thought. . . . He prepared himself. . . . We saw each other again. . . . I felt myself scorned . . . He knew that I felt this. . . . He liked to provoke his interlocutor. . . . [He was] a sensitive and absent-minded man in daily life.' And so on . . . [T]here is nothing to distinguish [Lyotard's representation of Souyri] from the representations each of us hear, read, and produce dozens of times every day, not just in writing history but in the conduct of the most mundane affairs of life. . . . Does Lyotard believe in the 'postulate of realism'? Certainly not, if we judge from what he says on the subject. But if we take into account what he does as well as what he says, he seems in the end, in practice, unable to escape it. Notwithstanding all his skeptical rhetoric, in telling us about his deceased friend he acts as if the past is real, as if some representations of it are preferable to others, and as if the criteria of preference are far from idiosyncratic.<sup>189</sup>

Additional replies are found in abundance. Western minds long for firm and absolute certainty resulting from the methods of science. Upon discovering that these methods

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<sup>188</sup> Zagorin (1999), 14; cf. 7. Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994): "Since the Greeks, a certain amount of skepticism about truth claims has been essential to the search for truth; skepticism can encourage people to learn more and remain open to the possibility of their own errors. Complete skepticism, on the other hand, is debilitating because it casts doubt on the ability to make judgments or draw conclusions. It has only paradoxes to offer" (7). Denton (2005) notes a contradiction between the early Crossan's hermeneutics and historiography. As a post-structuralist, Crossan "denies the historical referent and [maintains] an ontology that denies extra-linguistic reality while at the same time embracing a historiography that assumes both the historical referent and an extra-linguistic reality." The later Crossan seems to have become aware of this contradiction and fades his hermeneutic from the discussion (40-41).

<sup>189</sup> Haskell (1990), 155-56. His citation is from Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York, 1988), 47-48, 51.

rarely yield this degree of certainty, Cartesian anxiety results.<sup>190</sup> However, Lorenz notes that this is the product of an “all-or-nothing” fallacy, which states that if knowledge is not absolute and complete, it is relative.<sup>191</sup> Failure on the part of historians to know the whole truth and nothing but the truth does not prohibit them from having an idea of the past that is adequate relevant to a limited or more focused inquiry.<sup>192</sup> McCullagh contends that although uncertainty always exists, the meaning of a text “is often not so vague as to make it impossible to define their truth conditions. If it were, we could not communicate as effectively as we do. Historical descriptions, especially descriptions of basic facts about places, dates and events, are often precise enough to test against available evidence.”<sup>193</sup> Although they express concepts about the world, historical descriptions depict things that would have produced similar perceptions in historians had they been there. Thus, historical descriptions attempt to tell us something about a real world.<sup>194</sup>

Realists concede that postmodernists are correct in noting our inability to confirm the soundness of methods employed for knowing the past. This has been a truism among historians.<sup>195</sup> We know present events and people in our lives directly through perception. Knowledge of the past, however, is indirect. Therefore, we must employ logic and horizons to arrive at historical knowledge. Historians cannot prove that inference regularly leads them to a correct description of what occurred in the past. Notwithstanding, an inference of historicity when provided with a robust inventory of data seems coherent and reinforcing.<sup>196</sup> We prefer inference to other methods based on tarot cards and magic eight balls which have proven much less reliable. “It is a convention we all accept that sound inductive inferences regularly lead us to truths about the world, and it is a convention we take seriously, on faith.”<sup>197</sup>

Despite their critiques of postmodernism, realists find it difficult to present a positive case for realism.<sup>198</sup> It is doubtful that one is forthcoming, since meta-arguments are required. Neither historians nor philosophers can *prove* that the world is older than ten minutes at which time everything was created with the appearance of age and that we were created with memories of events that never took place and with food in our stomachs from meals we never ate. In a similar manner, historians cannot prove that their methods and hermeneutics lead them to conclusions that are true. Thus, at the end of the day, realism cannot be proved<sup>199</sup> and anti-realism cannot be disproved.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> “Cartesian” means that an idea is related to the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes. The term “Cartesian anxiety” refers to the anxiety suffered since Descartes when it is realized that absolute certainty is unattainable.

<sup>191</sup> Lorenz (1998), 314.

<sup>192</sup> Bachner (2003): “Few of us believe that language manages to communicate every aspect of the material world or of everyday sensation, yet we rarely contemplate their unspeakability” (411); Zammito (2004): “In short, robust historicism need not be crippled by a hyperbolic skepticism: total incommensurability is preposterous, and local incommensurability is surmountable” (135).

<sup>193</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 35.

<sup>194</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 39.

<sup>195</sup> Denton (2005), 106.

<sup>196</sup> Meyer (1979), 73.

<sup>197</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 33. See also Sherwin-White (1963): “From time to time external contemporary evidence of a sort less warped by the bias of personalities—e.g. the texts of laws and public accounts—confirms the conclusions drawn from the critical study of literary sources. Hence we are bold to trust our results in the larger fields where there is no such confirmation” (187).

<sup>198</sup> Gorman (2000), 256; cf. McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 33.

<sup>199</sup> McCullagh (“What Do Historians Argue About?” 2004), 25.

However, this does not leave the majority of historians despairing. Despite all of the postmodernist critiques, realism seems to work for the most part. Haskell's parable of the travelers provides a nice illustration of this point.<sup>201</sup> In this parable, some travelers are lost in the French countryside and are trying to get to Paris. They have two maps which do not agree. So, they ask a local named Jean how to decide which map is correct. Jean looks at both maps and states that neither will work, since they are mere pieces of paper which fail to convey the sensation of movement, of what the scenery is like, the aromas and sounds. Moreover, cities containing numerous and complex cultures, economies, and philosophies are compressed into a mere black dot on a map. These maps can never describe the way to Paris! Haskell's travelers move on hoping to find someone else. Maps cannot supply what Jean wants. However, the travelers know from experience that maps can get them to Paris and that some maps are better than others (as anyone using Mapquest and Yahoo knows!). Why that is so is the interesting question. We live our lives in a manner that is based on the laws of logic. We cannot prove that logic leads us to truth. However, following sound logic based on accurate information provides results that can serve as strong empirical support for realism.<sup>202</sup>

Realists have provided additional replies to the more radical views of postmodernist historians.<sup>203</sup> While it is true that facts are interpreted and given meaning within a narrative constructed by historians, facts can often be determined irrespective of the context in which they appear, given genre considerations and the employment of criteria in arguments to the best explanation. Postmodernists assert that facts do not speak for themselves but "are context-dependent and thus speak only in the voice of their interpreters."<sup>204</sup> Thus, narratives differ little if any from fiction; the past presented by narratives did not exist. Haskell replies that people are not easily persuaded that their own past is unreal and that nothing is there for a biographer to get right.<sup>205</sup> Fay asserts that once the historian draws a bifurcation of mind and the eternal world, "one inevitably will end up claiming that reality is unknowable in itself and that the mind is essentially distortive." This leads to a dead-end and solipsism in which the only thing the mind can know is itself.<sup>206</sup> Lang offers an example and argues against the notion that every component of narratives is utterly fictitious: "On January 20, 1942, Nazi officials at Wannsee formulated a protocol for the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question.'" Granting that certain matters would need to be bracketed, such as "the status of the officials" and "whether the formulation of the 'Final Solution' originated then or before," Lang asks if this statement is a matter of interpretation; that is, can historians adjudicate on the truth of the statement if it is considered outside of a larger narrative? Could the statement set within a different narrative force an *equally legitimate* conclusion that denied that the conference

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<sup>200</sup> Tucker (2004), 257. See also Anchor (1999), 119.

<sup>201</sup> Haskell (1990), 156-57.

<sup>202</sup> Theissen and Winter (2002) argue that there are "axiomatically convictions (or ideas)" that are "those statements that one sees no obligation to ground but that rather serve as the basis for other statements—because, in our eyes, they are never false" (230). Philosophers refer to these beliefs as "properly basic."

<sup>203</sup> For some of the best presentations of these, see Fay (1998) and McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998). R. Evans (1999) opines that of all "book-length defenses of history against extreme postmodernist critiques," McCullagh's treatment is "the most cogent and comprehensive" (263).

<sup>204</sup> B. Lang, "Is it possible to misrepresent the Holocaust?" in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 426.

<sup>205</sup> Haskell (2004), 347.

<sup>206</sup> Fay (1998), 90.

actually took place and, thus, the truth of the statement? Lang concludes that we either have “facts” at the ground of historical inquiry or else narratives themselves actually determine what is and is not true.<sup>207</sup> Lang’s point is solid that singular historical descriptions can be confirmed outside of narratives in which they appear. Of course, leading postmodernists like White and Ankersmit agree with him. Only the most radical postmodernist historians would question whether the Conference at Wannsee actually occurred and they keep company with very few within the community of historians.

*Reader-Response Theory* predates and leads to postmodernism. If a text states, “A man was walking down a road,” various pictures come to mind depending on the reader’s focus. One reader pictures an old man dressed in work clothing walking on a dirt road while another sees a young man dressed in a business suit walking in the suburbs. *Reader-Response Theory* provides a clean break with naïve realism’s boast of the ability of historians to cut through their own biases and those shared by their sources in order to view the past as it actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Instead, meaning is only brought to the text by the reader.<sup>208</sup> The meaning of the text is liberated from its original context and the author’s intent is of minor-to-no importance. We cannot think historically without some kind of grid or metastory that provides coherence to past events. Since it is claimed that the intentions of the author are difficult if not impossible to determine, the grid provided by the reader is the only one available. Thus, the reading process brings about an experience of “meaning” that does not exist outside of the text. This shift in theory in the philosophy of history is often referred to as the *linguistic turn*. Anchor identifies a major problem with this approach. *Reader-response* theorists want to be understood. If we accept *reader-response theory* because language can only be understood within our own particular framework, then how do others often understand what we are talking about?<sup>209</sup> Moreover, *reader-response* theorists could never complain that a reader had misinterpreted their writings or, at least, it would make no difference if they had. The cost of *reader-response* theories is too high and unjustified. Thus, we need not feel an obligation to buy-into it.

Replies by realist historians have convinced the majority of practicing historians and philosophers of history that realism, rather than postmodernism, is both correct and practical. As a result, postmodernism has lost the battle of ideologies among

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<sup>207</sup> Lang in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 431-32. Fay (1998) argues that meaning is found in the causal effect of an event. For example, the bombing of Pearl Harbor had an effect: The U.S. entered the war. He adds that events are not inherently significant. Significance is assigned by the interested parties (agents). Finally, Fay asserts that the significance of events is independent of what the historian argues (92). Later he contends that it is “not the world but *the way the world is for someone* [that] cannot be made sense of without invoking the concepts, percepts, judgments, and intentions of active beings working in the world” (93).

<sup>208</sup> Meyer (1994) identifies a number of benefits yielded by reader-response theory: “Among the achievements and virtues of reader-response theory are three clean breaks: the break with naïve realism and the supposition that texts, of themselves and ‘already,’ in other words, in advance of the reader, yield fully constituted meaning; the break with ‘the personal heresy,’ the approach to literature through the life and times of the writer; and the break with the so called ‘affective fallacy,’ for the theory of reader-response (or of reader-reception—though the latter term can refer to study of the responses of successive historical readerships) unambiguously favored taking account of rhetorical devices designed to elicit responses” (129-30).

<sup>209</sup> Anchor (1999), 113.



professional historians and realism remains on the throne, although chastened.<sup>210</sup> According to Fay, the linguistic turn is over. “Except for some interesting exceptions at the margins of the discipline, historical practice is pretty much the same in 1997 as it was in 1967: historians seek to describe accurately and to explain cogently how and why a certain event or situation occurred . . . For all the talk of narrativism, presentism, postmodernism, and deconstruction, historians write pretty much the same way as they always have (even though what they write about may be quite new).”<sup>211</sup> Even some postmodern historians agree. Roberts admits that Ernst Breisach may be right that postmodernism has come and gone among historians.<sup>212</sup> Even Jenkins confesses that “most historians—and certainly most of those who might be termed ‘academic’ or professional ‘proper’ historians—have been resistant to that postmodernism which has affected so many of their colleagues in adjacent discourses.”<sup>213</sup> In his response to the postmodern challenge, McCullagh writes, “I know of no practicing historians who admit that they cannot discover anything true about the past. They may admit to being fallible, but they do not deny that a lot of the basic facts they present are very probably true.”<sup>214</sup> Relative to historical Jesus studies, Denton writes, “the world of historical Jesus studies would have little sympathy with any form of anti-realism in historiography.”<sup>215</sup> Therefore, the prediction that postmodernism would mean the end of history was a failed prophecy.<sup>216</sup>

Notwithstanding, the postmodern debate among philosophers of history has been valuable to the discipline. Evans concedes that it “has forced historians to interrogate their own methods and procedures as never before, and in the process has made them more self-critical and self-reflexive, which is all to the good. It has led to a greater emphasis on open acknowledgment of the historian’s own subjectivity, which can only help the reader engaged in a critical assessment of historical work.”<sup>217</sup> Iggers notes that postmodern philosophers of history have rightly made us more aware of numerous challenges.<sup>218</sup> This does not mean that historians were oblivious to these challenges before the debate. Postmodernist White acknowledges that postmodernism *reiterated* the contingency of knowledge, rather than *announce* it:

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<sup>210</sup> McKnight (2005) writes that unbeknownst to them, historical Jesus scholars are postmodernists in practice. They are “simply asserting their power and ideology through an aesthetic presentation about Jesus. Since postmodernism is the only game in town, it is the game historical Jesus scholars are playing” (11). McKnight is unclear to me at this point. He later writes “it seems to me, most historical Jesus scholars are fundamentally Eltonian” (16), after G. R. Elton who “represents pure modernism” (14). However, consider his comment just a few pages later: “Let this be said before we go further: what the modernist wants to do cannot be achieved in its pure form. . . . In our field, it is maddeningly clear that what one group see as progress (e.g., the Crossan approach) is unacceptable to another group (e.g., the Allison approach)” (19). I doubt that McKnight is a closet postmodernist. Instead, I think he is here venting his frustration *a la* Allison over the challenges that prohibit absolute certainty. In any case, McKnight is certainly mistaken when he claims postmodernism is “the only game in town.”

<sup>211</sup> Fay (1998), 83. See also Gilderhus (2007), 124.

<sup>212</sup> Roberts (2005), 252.

<sup>213</sup> Jenkins in Jenkins, ed. (1997), 1; cf. 9. See also R. Evans (2002), 81; Iggers (2005), 133, 145, 150; N. F. Partner, “History in an age of Reality-Fictions” in Ankersmit and Kellner, eds. (1995), 21-39; Tosh (2002), 194-200; Zagorin (1999), 1, 3, 9; Zammito (2005), 161, 163.

<sup>214</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 15.

<sup>215</sup> Denton (2003), 170.

<sup>216</sup> Kofoed (2005), 16.

<sup>217</sup> R. Evans (1999), 216.

<sup>218</sup> Iggers (2005), 132. Gilderhus (2007): “In all likelihood, few historians in the present day would accept notions of absolute scientific objectivity or embrace as a goal the rendering of the past exactly as it was. Moreover, many would concede valid points to the postmodernist position” (124).

This is not to say that historians and philosophers of history have failed to take notice of the essentially provisional and contingent nature of historical representations and of their susceptibility to infinite revision in the light of new evidence or more sophisticated conceptualization of problems. One of the marks of a good professional historian is the consistency with which he reminds his readers of the purely provisional nature of his characterizations of events, agents, and agencies found in the always incomplete historical record.<sup>219</sup>

Sometimes realists are guilty of attacking a straw man when criticizing postmodernism. Roberts warns historians that they should not ignore the insights gained by postmodernism when rejecting extremist positions. Instead, the historian should seek middle ground.<sup>220</sup> McKnight admits that postmodernists are often “inaccurately caricatured. . . . For postmodernist historiographers like Jenkins, there is indeed a past, a present, and a future. That past can be characterized as containing ‘facts,’ that is existential facts or better yet discrete facts.”<sup>221</sup>

Despite the weaknesses in the postmodernist position, we should commend these historians for making us attentive to the pitfalls that can and often do result from modernist abuses.<sup>222</sup> The highly imaginative reconstructions of the past and, in particular, of the historical Jesus certainly add to both academic discussion and our entertainment. However, they can hurt the reputation of the historical enterprise when stated confidently as fact without confessing to the limitations and subjectivity of narrative or without being supported by the application of responsible historical method. Historical descriptions are limited and historians must now speak with a degree of diffidence.<sup>223</sup> “[H]istory will never be as it was, since important new knowledge has been gained from the postmodern theorists and new criteria for truth and objectivity have to be established.”<sup>224</sup>

In what is perhaps an overly simplified overview, we may assert that there are three approaches to understanding history. The first is a naïve realism which holds that accurate historical judgments always result when correct method, theory, and evidence are employed consistently. This view can no longer be maintained and there are few who embrace it, at least publicly, in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The second is a postmodernist view which holds that responsible method cannot lead us to accurate historical knowledge. This view has attracted few followers. The third

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<sup>219</sup> White (1978), 82.

<sup>220</sup> Roberts is correct. However, what he suggests as middle ground seems to me closer to radical postmodernism than centrism.

<sup>221</sup> McKnight (2005), 9.

<sup>222</sup> McKnight (2005) comments, “St. Paul had his thorn in the flesh and we, I’m prone to say, have the postmodernists. They keep us on our knees. Or, on our heels” (9).

<sup>223</sup> See also Allison (“Explaining,” 2005), 133; McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004): “responsible historians will be careful not to exaggerate the certainty of their conclusions, but will point out how tentative they are when there is not strong evidence to support them” (43); White (1978): “One of the marks of a good professional historian is the consistency with which he reminds his readers of the purely provisional nature of his characterizations of events, agents, and agencies found in the always incomplete historical record” (82). Admittedly, historical Jesus scholars rarely state their conclusions with reservation. However, Mettinger (2001) is a refreshing example of a scholar unafraid to do so. See the following pages in his 2001 book: 68, 71, 81, 136, 137, 140, 142, 144, 152. Also see Crossley (2005), 182.

<sup>224</sup> Kofoed (2005), 18.

view is a realism which maintains that the accuracy of historical descriptions may be held with varying degrees of certainty. This is by far how the overwhelming majority of historians view their practice.

### 1.2.8. What is Truth?

In light of the postmodern challenge, realist historians must revisit the foundation of their views, including the nature of truth itself. The view enjoying the greatest acceptance is the *correspondence theory of truth*. We perceive the world directly through our senses. For our descriptions of the world around us to be true, they must correspond to its conditions. Insofar as our descriptions achieve this, they reflect truth. The correspondence theory of truth is challenged by a number of factors. Our perceptions and interpretations of our world are influenced by our culture and interests; in short, our horizon.<sup>225</sup> These interpretations are separate from the uninterpreted data and, to some extent, cannot be said to reflect the past. Moreover, our perceptions do not mirror reality precisely. They are the result of our mechanical senses, which can malfunction or misinterpret. For example, a young child riding in a car on a sunny day may see what appears to be water on the road ahead. His limited knowledge leads him to believe that the road ahead is wet. An older child has a basic understanding of a mirage and interprets what she sees differently than the younger child. Perceptions involve interpretations based on the horizon of the subject and/or author. When a witness says that such-and-such happened, her conclusion is founded upon horizon-laden perceptions. A historian has her own horizon in which reports are marinated then interpreted. Moreover, there is no way of proving that our senses accurately depict reality to us. While true, we all assume that our senses provide at least a relatively accurate picture of data. For example, the pain experienced when we touch a hot stove and the odor of burning flesh that results probably provides an accurate perception that it is harmful for a part of my body to make contact with a hot stove. The older child in the car has a horizon that enables her to have more accurate perceptions than the younger child who thinks he sees water on the road before him. Our experience is that a person with reasonable intelligence, a mature horizon, and properly functioning senses will have accurate perceptions.

Another challenge to a *correspondence* theory of truth is that historians are incapable of returning to the past in order to examine them in light of their theories and, thus, can never verify in the strictest sense that their theories correspond to events in a truthful manner. However, this only prohibits an absolute confidence from being warranted. Historians do not seek absolute confidence. Instead, they seek *adequate* descriptions of the past for which they may have *reasonable* certainty. Moreover, as with the challenges affiliated with perceptions, the inability of historians to verify their hypotheses most of the time only affects their *ability to know* truth. It does not affect the *nature* of truth itself.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 17.

<sup>226</sup> Contra Anchor (1999): “any correspondence theory, no matter how sophisticated, may be ultimately unsustainable” (121); Rex Martin (1998): Arguing for realism will probably end by begging the question. “It is not difficult to see that while skeptics [i.e., postmodernists] may not win this game, they are not likely to lose it either. . . . that truth that we more closely approximate, *whether or not* it is also objective truth, is at least what I shall call *methodological truth*” (36); McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998) proposes a *Correlation Theory of Truth* (17-20, 50), which he renames “a critical theory of truth” in McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 5-17. In agreement with Charles Peirce, McCullagh suggests that “a description of the world is true if it is part of an ideal theory which explains

A third challenge to *correspondence theory* states that truth is relative to the individual. If you had been in a room with René Descartes, you may have felt very warm while he felt cold. His statement that the room was cold would have been true for him but not for you. “Feeling” is a relative term. However, if we were to qualify the relative term, the problem would be solved: It is true for everyone that René Descartes felt cold while in the room and that you felt warm while you were with him during this particular occasion. Moreover, as Fay contends: “Either Caesar did cross the Rubicon on 10 January 49 BCE or he did not; either Oswald was a lone assassin or he was not; either Heidegger joined the Nazi Party or he did not. . . . What makes these sentences true is how the world is or was, not whether we believe them to be true or even whether we have justifiable warrant to believe them to be true.”<sup>227</sup>

Another theory of truth is *coherence theory*, which states that a proposition is true when all of its components cohere with other propositions believed to be true. This theory of truth may be especially attractive to those historians who excel in forming creative narrative. Their narrative is true because it coheres better with other widely held propositions. *Coherence theory* likewise faces a number of challenges. What are historians to do when a number of equally coherent hypotheses contradict one another? In this case, one would have to claim these hypotheses are equally true or that underdetermination prohibits warranting a specific hypothesis as the best explanation. Moreover, two hypotheses can be equally coherent yet one is known to be false. Are historians willing to claim that a carefully constructed narrative known to be false is truer than an event known to have occurred but is less coherent given external circumstances? It would seem that a *correspondence* view of truth prevails in the end. Otherwise, one is left with no means of distinguishing fact from fiction, a point made by postmodernists. Moreover, how is one to know whether the propositions are true with which the main proposition is coherent? At minimum, *coherence theory* requires a metanarrative. This is not a defeater of *coherence theory*. However, it reveals the breadth of work that must be completed in a *coherence* approach.

Testing the coherence of a hypothesis with other accepted propositions may serve to negate the truth of that hypothesis. But a hypothesis cannot be judged as true because it is coherent. What if we modified the *coherence theory* to state that the hypothesis that coheres better with the facts than competing hypotheses is true? Such a modification would only create a condition for determining the correct hypothesis under the umbrella of *correspondence theory*, since this would simply be another way of saying that the hypothesis that coheres best with the facts is probably closer to what

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all possible observations of the world, and I would add that for an ideal theory of the world to be true there must exist in reality something which could cause all those perceptions, were people in a position to make them” (9-10). This seems to me an unnecessary pragmatic move that brackets epistemological challenges in order to proceed rather than providing a new definition of truth. One can hold to a *correspondence theory of truth* while acknowledging that historians are incapable of producing historical descriptions which capture a complete and/or entirely accurate correspondence to the events or states they describe. McCullagh himself appears to recognize this. Speaking of his *critical theory of truth* he writes, “This is not what people normally mean when they call a description true, but it states the conditions under which it is reasonable to believe a description true” (*The Logic of History* [2004], 10). Briggs (2001) suggests Speech Act Theory for assistance in overcoming the problem of the foundations for knowledge (17), contra Fish (1980), chapter 9. Lorenz (1994) suggests “internal realism.”

<sup>227</sup> Fay (1998), 91.

actually occurred than competing hypotheses that are less coherent with the facts. In other words, a modified coherence theory becomes a coherence criterion for identifying truth as defined in correspondence theory.

*Correspondence theory* is most widely accepted and this is the way in which we live. McCullagh comments that “the practice of taking the world to correspond to our descriptions of it is convenient and generally harmless . . . In everyday contexts naïve realism produces few false expectations.”<sup>228</sup> In addition to defining truth in a correspondence sense, realist historians attempt to establish criteria for identifying what is true in a correspondence sense. Historians should not change their theory related to the nature of truth in order to accommodate the uncertainty of historical descriptions. Instead, they should strive to formulate a description that corresponds to what occurred but be willing to settle for a conclusion that is more modest, one that speaks of plausibility or probability based on the available data. Our knowledge of the past may not mirror reality, that is, it may not be a one-to-one correspondence with the details of what occurred.<sup>229</sup> Instead, historical descriptions usually present a blurred picture of what occurred with only portions of the image being quite sharp.

Thus, I contend that history is often knowable and that some hypotheses are truer than others in a correspondence sense. We cannot be certain that a particular description of the past corresponds precisely with the past. It is certainly incomplete. However, a hypothesis may be said to be “true” insofar as its description corresponds to what occurred and does not contradict it. I hasten to add, however, that this definition of truth is an entirely different matter than the confidence warranted the historian that his preferred hypothesis is “true.” Moreover, historians are not only after descriptions that are true in a correspondence sense; they desire fair and adequate descriptions.

### 1.2.9. What is a Historical Fact?

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that an *essentially contested concept* is a term for which no consensus definition exists. “Fact” is an essentially contested concept among historians. Evans defines a historical fact as something that happened and that historians attempt to “discover” historical facts through verification procedures.<sup>230</sup> This is the definition I hold and will use throughout this dissertation. Others contend that facts are data that have been interpreted by the historian so that they become “evidence” for his hypothesis.<sup>231</sup> As discussed earlier, since all

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<sup>228</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 27. See also Lorenz (1994): “the fact that the relationship of correspondence between a true statement and the world it refers to is a conventional relationship within a conceptual framework does *not* invalidate the notions of reference and of truth as correspondence. Without these notions it is, as a matter of fact, impossible to understand *what we are talking about* when we talk” (310).

<sup>229</sup> I use the word *may* since it is possible for the historian to get lucky on occasion without knowing it and present a historical description that is completely accurate, even though exhaustive is out of the question and not the objective of historians.

<sup>230</sup> R. Evans (1999), 66.

<sup>231</sup> Dunn (2003), 102-03. Also see Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994): “evidence is only evidence in relation to a particular account” (261). Disagreement exists even in the level of interpretation involved with facts. Fredriksen (1999): “Though the word is unfashionable in academic history right now, I shall breathe it anyway, here: We have facts. Facts about Jesus, and facts about the movement that formed after his crucifixion. Facts are always subject to interpretation—that’s part of the fun—but they also exist as fixed points in our investigation. Any explanation, any reconstruction of Jesus’ mission and message must speak adequately to what we *know* to have been the case. If it cannot, then no matter



historians are heavily influenced by their horizons, the interpretative factor becomes the cause of much disagreement related to what occurred in the past. Tucker asserts, “There are no given scientific or historiographical ready-to-eat facts that scientists or historians just need to select and put together in their disciplinary basket. If we take facts to be units of knowledge of which we are almost entirely certain, then knowledge of facts follows research and is theory laden because what scientists and historians take to be facts depends on their theories, research programs, and the constraints of the evidence.”<sup>232</sup> The end result is that historians disagree not only over the definition of a historical “fact” but also over what is granted membership as a fact.<sup>233</sup>

This causes a dilemma for historians. As stated earlier, facts are data that have been interpreted after being marinated in the horizon of the historian. If the historian’s horizon interprets facts, these can in turn serve as confirmation of his horizon. We seem to be working in a circle. Although there may be no way of breaking that circle, the historian can make it a little more difficult to travel the circle easily with the above six suggestions for transcending one’s horizon: method, peer pressure, submitting ideas to hostile experts, making one’s horizon and method public, detachment from bias, and accounting for the historical bedrock.<sup>234</sup> Thus, our circle has six points at which the historian should pause before proceeding. This does not guarantee total objectivity. Historical descriptions will still vary. But applying these six suggestions should, I hope, help manage one’s horizon and minimize subjectivity.

### 1.2.10. Burden of Proof

Since most of our information about the past comes to us in the form of texts, we must ask how these should be approached. Bracketing genre considerations, methodical

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how elegant an application of interesting methods or how rousing and appealing its moral message, that reconstruction fails as history” (7); Haskell (1990): “facts are just low-level interpretative entities unlikely for the moment to be contested” (141); McCullagh (“What Do Historians Argue About?” 2004): Historical facts are arrived at through the interpretation of the modern historian and are in that sense subjective. However, once a fact has been established, any account of the past must account to it (24); McKnight (2005): “‘Facts’ exist independently of the mind, whether they are discovered or not; that is, things were said and things occurred. ‘Evidence’ is what survives of those ‘existential facts’” (20n71); Topoloski (1999): Information requires varying degrees of interpretation from basic level to high level facts. Certain facts under scrutiny have no direct evidence and lead to an epistemological quagmire. In order for a fact to be considered basic, a relatively high level of consensus is required (200-01). See also Barrera (2001), 199-200. Postmodernists maintain that there are no facts, only interpretations.

<sup>232</sup> Tucker (2004), 14. Lorenz (1994) notes the “fact that historians frequently *keep* disagreeing on facts and relationships between facts” (305). See also Craffert (1989): “without *interpretation of the data* no *construction* can be made by any scholar. As a matter of fact, there are no facts without interpretation” (333); Dunn (2003): “Even the data themselves are never ‘raw’: they have already been ‘selected’ by the historical process; they are ‘selected’ again by the way they have been discovered and brought to present notice; they have come with a context, or various contacts already predisposing interpretations; the interpreter’s framework of understanding or particular thesis causes certain data to appear more significant than others; and so on” (111).

<sup>233</sup> Lorenz (1994) cites the *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute), an intellectual and political controversy between left-wing and right-wing intellectuals in West Germany (1986-89) about the way the Holocaust should be treated in history. He notes that “factual statements of one party in this debate [were] not recognized as such by the other and often [were] denounced as political ‘value judgments’” (302).

<sup>234</sup> See section 1.2.3.

credulity views texts as being reliable unless they possess indicators that they should be regarded as otherwise.<sup>235</sup> Indicators could be internal contradictions, states of affairs described that contradict what we know to be true of reality today, and an author known to distort existing data and manufacture new and misleading data in order to promote his cause. Methodical skepticism views texts as unreliable unless they possess indicators that they should be regarded as reliable.<sup>236</sup> These indicators include internal consistency, coherence with states of affairs known to be true, and the author is someone known to be fair and cautious in his reporting of data. Is a text presumed innocent until proven guilty or guilty until proven innocent? Should credulity or skepticism reign?

Employing methodical credulity in historical investigation lays some unwanted landmines. Regardless of the motives involved, ancient historians, like any modern, could lie, spin, and embellish. Moreover, questions pertaining to genre are not always easily answered. Thus, to take texts at their face value may lead historians into all sorts of quagmires and mistakes. In the United States, courts presume innocence on the part of the defendant in order to protect her from false accusations. This is methodical credulity. There are two similarities shared in the approaches of courts and historians. First, both historian and jurist seek proof beyond reasonable doubt, and second, both assume that the past can be known although it cannot be absolutely reconstructed. More radical postmodern historians should take note of this latter parallel. For to claim it is a useless effort to know the past is not only the death of history but of the legal system, too. If the past cannot be known, then no credible evidence can exist for a conviction to be warranted. Why believe the witnesses, since they report fragmented and selective data that have been interpreted according to their horizon? Burden of proof becomes a moot point. But, despite its weaknesses evidenced by the guilty who are freed and the innocent who are incarcerated, this legal system is generally quite reliable. Accordingly, credulity would appear to be the best method when the intention, method, and integrity of the author are understood. Unfortunately, on many occasions, sure knowledge in these matters eludes us.<sup>237</sup>

How are we to approach the primary sources for the life of Jesus? The common view up until only a decade ago is clearly expressed by The Jesus Seminar: “[T]he gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church’s faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand. Supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so.”<sup>238</sup> But a new consensus view of the Gospels has emerged since the early 1990s. As mentioned earlier, in 1992, Richard Burridge published *What Are the Gospels*, a book that questioned the then-dominant view of the Gospels by arguing that they belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*), which is historical in nature. A classical historian at the time, Burridge set out to disprove treatments by a few American scholars who were arguing that the genre of the Gospels is Greco-Roman biography. During his research

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<sup>235</sup> The following contend for the practice of methodical credulity: Blomberg (2007, 304), Byrskog (2002, 280), Davis (2006, 60, 62), Waterman (2006, 13), Wenham (1992, 24), and Swinburne (2003), 4.

<sup>236</sup> Methodical skepticism appears to be practiced by Meeks (2006), 110, 113.

<sup>237</sup> Meyer (1979), 85.

<sup>238</sup> Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1993), 4-5.

he became convinced that their conclusions were correct. Burridge's thesis has been so influential that Graham Stanton has praised the book for playing "a key role in establishing that the Gospels were read in the early centuries primarily as biographies. . . . To have turned the tide of scholarly opinion in this way is a remarkable achievement."<sup>239</sup> In addition, Wright notes that the closeness of the Gospels to the events they purport to describe is much closer than we have with many other works of antiquity.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Yamauchi writes,

Roman historians use Livy to reconstruct the history of the Roman Republic several centuries before his lifetime. Classical historians use Plutarch (second century C.E.) for the history of Themistocles (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.), and all historians of Alexander the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) acknowledge as their most accurate source Arrian's *Anabasis* (second century A.D.).<sup>241</sup>

While this new consensus regarding Gospel genre and the closeness of the reports to the events they purport to describe are cards in the hand of the historian employing methodical credulity, they are not enough to win the round, since other factors such as redaction and authorship are likewise players. Moreover, as Burridge notes, *bioi* had a number of components they usually featured: history, political beliefs and polemic, moral philosophy, religious and philosophical teaching, encomium, and story and novel for entertainment.<sup>242</sup> Biographies did not need to employ every component and some biographers utilized certain components more frequently than others. Accordingly, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish history from encomium.

Methodical skepticism has the attractive feature of weeding out poorly supported reports and providing evidence that is strong. However, historians, like everyone else, have their own strongly held beliefs which heavily influence how much weight they assign to specific texts. These beliefs are especially influential when a miracle claim is under consideration, since it involves answers to metaphysical questions pertaining to whether God exists and, if so, whether he acts in our world. Therefore, in our investigation of the resurrection of Jesus, methodical skepticism can be a vice as much as it is a virtue and could actually keep one from knowing the past.<sup>243</sup> Blomberg comments that "[s]cholars who would consistently implement such a method when studying other ancient historical writing would find the corroborative data so insufficient that the vast majority of accepted history would have to be jettisoned."<sup>244</sup> Of course, there will be various shades of methodical skepticism and methodical credulity marked by the burden of proof required. In other words, one historian employing methodical credulity may dismiss data as unreliable more easily than another also employing methodical credulity, while one historian employing methodical skepticism may grant evidence more readily than another employing methodical skepticism.

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<sup>239</sup> Burridge (2004), ix.

<sup>240</sup> Wright (1992), 106. As examples he provides Livy's Punic Wars and Josephus' Maccabean rebellion.

<sup>241</sup> E. Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," in Millard, Hoffmeier, Baker, eds. (1994), 26.

<sup>242</sup> Burridge (2004), 62-67.

<sup>243</sup> Meyer (1979), 108.

<sup>244</sup> Blomberg (2007), 304.

We may speak of a third view, methodical neutrality, where the one making the claim bears the burden of proof.<sup>245</sup> This view applies not only to texts but includes the statement of a hypothesis and seems to be the fairest approach at first look.<sup>246</sup> Upon a second look we discover that it bears the marks of methodical skepticism. The historian promoting a particular historical hypothesis bears the full burden of proof for supporting that hypothesis, which he assumes to be false until finding sufficient evidence to the contrary. The difference between this position and methodical skepticism arises the moment the historian moves beyond criticizing the data or conclusions and presents an alternative theory of his own. For at that moment, he bears the burden of proof for his theory. For instance, in arguing the question of Jesus' resurrection, a historian might propose that the disciples hallucinated the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. With the approach of methodic neutrality, this new hypothesis is presumed to be false until sufficient evidence is provided to the contrary. It would not be enough for him simply to toss out "hallucination" as an objection. Instead, this alternate theory would be treated as a hypothesis. And any hypothesis, whether affirming or skeptical, is subject to criticism and must be defended. This coincides with the historian's practice of weighing hypotheses.

The main difference, then, between methodical neutrality and methodical skepticism concerns burden of proof. All historians bear the responsibility of defending their hypotheses. The one claiming Jesus was resurrected must bear the burden of showing that Jesus resurrected. The texts cannot be regarded as being truthful until proven otherwise, at least not when they are part of an historical investigation. In methodical neutrality, scholars claiming that something other than Jesus' resurrection occurred likewise bear the burden to support the occurrence of that something else. It will not do to assert that X could instead have occurred without providing a reason that is both coherent and compelling that X is more probable than resurrection. For example, let us suppose that Volker claims that purple geese from Pluto are responsible for much of the unexplained phenomena on earth. We may ignore this claim until Volker provides some type of evidence, such as a report from a team of astrophysicists who detected a stream of purple residue coming from Pluto to Earth, the lead of the stream has an inverted "V" shape, and whenever the tip of this stream arrives at the Earth, a pattern of unexplainable phenomena begins to occur. Volker's theory may still sound absurd. But with methodical neutrality, the burden now shifts to the skeptic to provide an alternate theory of at least equal strength. The stronger the evidence for Volker's theory, the stronger the alternate theory must be to negate it. For example, Katja may reply that a galactic wind from a distant quasar refracted against particles left behind by a comet producing the appearance of a purple streak coming toward Earth. Moreover, the number of unexplained phenomena did not increase over what is normal. People were only in a heightened state of awareness to observe them. However, if Volker were to point out that purple featherlike artifacts were found on site at many locations of the phenomena, Katja's theory will not be as compelling, especially if she is unable to show that the galactic wind and comet particles were actually present at the specific time of the phenomena. Thus, the stronger the data

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<sup>245</sup> Eddy and Boyd (2007), 379; Fischer (1970) adopts methodical neutrality while referring to methodical credulity as the "*fallacy of the presumptive proof*" and methodical skepticism as the "*fallacy of the negative proof*" (47-49); Grant (1977): "Careful scrutiny does not presuppose either credulity or hostility" (200); R. J. Miller (1992), 23; cf. R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 9. See Sanders (1985) who applies this approach to the sayings of Jesus (13).

<sup>246</sup> Grant (1977), 201; Marxen (1968), 8; McKnight (2005), 38; Twelftree (1999), 248.

behind a historical interpretation, the greater burden is placed upon the historian holding a different position.

Let us consider another example, this time related to the resurrection of Jesus, and suppose that a skeptical historian questions it by suggesting that the forty-nine day waiting period that elapsed between Jesus' resurrection and the first public proclamation of the event by his disciples indicates that the disciples utilized that time to invent the elaborate story. The historian defending the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus may note that Luke, who reports that delay, likewise informs us that "after his suffering, [Jesus] presented himself to them alive by many proofs, for forty days appearing to them and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. And assembling them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'which you heard from Me'" (Acts 1:3-4).<sup>247</sup> According to the timeframe presented by Luke, the disciples started preaching on the day of Pentecost, which was forty-nine days after the crucifixion. Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Passover. He rose the day after Passover and appeared to his disciples and others for forty days. What did they do during that time? We are only told that he taught them concerning the kingdom of God and ate and drank with them (Acts 10:41). Then he told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. What if Jesus wanted to have a long retreat with his disciples during which time he prepared them for the tough road he knew they had ahead? Was there significance in a forty-day period of solitude with them? He had started his ministry after a forty-day period of solitude in the wilderness with God. Was he starting his church after a forty-day period of solitude with his disciples? Or were his disciples starting their major ministry after a forty-day period with God as Jesus had started his? One can only speculate here. What we know is that according to Luke, after Jesus ascended there was only a nine-day period of waiting before they began to preach his resurrection, not forty-nine. The reason for the wait, according to Luke, was because Jesus had commanded them to wait for the Holy Spirit, whose presence was necessary to do what they did. Thus, the delay is certainly explainable. Contrary to the "invention hypothesis," it was not very long and there was a plausible reason for waiting. The reason for preferring a natural explanation is linked to horizon, rather than self-evident historical reasoning. Skeptical historians may accuse historians favorable to the resurrection hypothesis of speculating where the New Testament does not provide much detail—and they would be correct. However, they speculate no less when they suggest that the resurrection story was invented during that time, since no hard evidence exists in support of the skeptical view. In this example, the skeptical historian wins if one embraces methodical skepticism, since he shoulders no burden of proof for his view. In methodical neutrality, he ties at best but does not win, unless his view is *more plausible* in terms of fulfilling the criteria for weighing hypotheses.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Irenaeus (1.28.7) reported that the Gnostics believed that Jesus "tarried on earth eighteen months" (or 548 days). In *The Apocryphon of James* it is 550 days (NH I:2, 19-20). Given the similarity of these two suggestions, these figures may have been based on some tradition. Perhaps the 18-month period was in reference to the timeframe of all of Jesus' resurrection appearances, including the one to Paul, which may have occurred within two years of Jesus' resurrection. *Pistis Sophia* 1-6 reports that he stayed for 11 years! See Robinson (1982).

<sup>248</sup> See section 1.3.2.



The ideal manner of coming to a historical conclusion is through critical and rigorous tests of truth, a style of intellectual life that insists on rational inference, and a determination to withhold assent until it is compelled by evidence. In the end this may often result in the historian concluding, “As a historian, I believe X occurred. But there is not enough evidence to be certain.” I will adopt methodical neutrality in my historical method.

### 1.2.11. Theory and Historians

Thus far, we have been entrenched in a discussion over the philosophy of history: What is history and how is it done? Surprisingly, few historians give attention to these matters. Consider the following comments:

Barrera: “Although those who would talk about history have an object in common—historiographical texts—they do not have a single clear method to approach them.”<sup>249</sup>

Fischer: “Specific canons of historical proof are neither widely observed nor generally agreed upon.”<sup>250</sup>

Haskell: “the inherently dispersive character of a discipline that, unlike English and Philosophy, lacks even the possibility of defining a single canon familiar to all practitioners.”<sup>251</sup>

Grant: “It is true that every critic is inclined to make his own rules.”<sup>252</sup>

Novick: “As a broad community of discourse, as a community of scholars united by common aims, common standards, and common purposes, the discipline of history had ceased to exist [as of the 1980s]. Convergence on anything, let alone a subject as highly charged as ‘the objectivity question,’ was out of the question. The profession was as described in the last verse of the Book of Judges. ‘In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.’”<sup>253</sup>

Tucker: “The absence of a consensus in some areas of historiography indicates no single determinate interpretation of history exists.”<sup>254</sup>

These statements represent only a sampling.<sup>255</sup> It is startling when we consider that all of the above comments were made by historians outside of the community of

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<sup>249</sup> Barrera (2001), 204.

<sup>250</sup> Fischer (1970), 62.

<sup>251</sup> Haskell (1990), 153, cf. 168-69.

<sup>252</sup> Grant (1977), 201.

<sup>253</sup> Novick (1998), 628.

<sup>254</sup> Tucker (2001), 54.

<sup>255</sup> Crowell (1998): “Very little theory—in the strict sense of systems of sentences deductively governed by laws—seems to be important in the work of historians” (221); R. Evans (1999) comments that most historians avoid the challenges of postmodernists and theory (8-9); Fay (1998): “The disjunction between history as practiced and historical metatheory has led many to claim that metatheory is more or less irrelevant. . . . [Metatheory] doesn’t touch what ‘working historians’ do. The windmills of history continue to spin despite the tilting and jousting of philosophers of history . . .”

religious scholars.<sup>256</sup> Martin thinks Novick goes too far in his now infamous “no king in Israel” statement: “It’s hard to look carefully at the ways in which interpretational controversy in historical studies is actually adjudicated evidentially, to the extent that it is, and come away with the view that in historical studies anything goes.”<sup>257</sup> I agree with Martin. Much discussion has taken place over the years pertaining to various criteria for authenticity, such as the criterion of multiple independent reports and the role of the criterion of dissimilarity.<sup>258</sup> Most biblical scholars regard these as being helpful in assisting them in identifying reliable traditions to varying degrees, even if they dispute the extent of their assistance and their limitations. Notwithstanding, it is still true that there are no methods for understanding, approaching, and conducting historical research that are broadly accepted and employed in the same manner by professional historians. As shown earlier, a strong majority are realists who maintain that the past can be recovered, although incompletely and lacking precision. Most likewise agree that arguments to the best explanation provide the path to get us there. Most would also give a nod to the bulk of the criteria discussed below for determining the best explanation, although they disagree on which criteria are the most important and state them with different emphases.<sup>259</sup> But historians remain polarized on epistemological considerations and horizons go unchecked more often than not. This results in the selective employment of agreed-upon principles and criteria by historians who in turn apply only those that are convenient for their preferred hypothesis while the others are either ignored or poorly employed.

However, interest in the philosophy of history appears to be growing. Indeed, today the discussion is more alive than discussions pertaining to the philosophy of science, if the number of articles produced on these subjects during the same period is an accurate indicator.<sup>260</sup> The value of theory behind historical knowledge and method is now being appreciated by more than philosophers of history. Historians doing actual

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(83); Fitzhugh and Leckie (2001): In an exchange of articles in *History and Theory*, realist Zagorin and postmodernist Jenkins only found one point of agreement between them: “most historians generally ignore theoretical matters” (62); Iggers (2005): “[Gordon Graham] is right in noting that theory plays only a limited role in the works of practicing historians, who would like to dispense with it, although they always operate with theoretical assumptions that they generally do not state explicitly” (474); Shaw (2001) asserts that theory intimidates the typical historian so much that most spend very little time and effort on it (5); White (1987) notes the “all but universal disdain with which modern historians regard the ‘philosophy of history’” (21); Zagorin (1999): “the majority of professional historians who, as usual, appear to ignore theoretical issues and would prefer to be left undisturbed to get on with their work while no doubt hoping the postmodernist challenge will eventually go away (2).

<sup>256</sup> For religious scholars who make similar comments, see Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996): “the criteria and tools of historical judgement are not beyond dispute. Modern historical method has been in the process of development since the origins of modernity” (63); Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): “Certainly the current search [for the historical Jesus] is not a thing easily fenced off from its predecessors; it has no characteristic method; and it has no body of shared conclusions—differences in opinion being now almost as common and ineradicable as differences in tastes. Contemporary work also has no common set of historiographical or theological presuppositions” (15). Allison then cites supporting statements from Wright (“no final agreement about method”) and R. Brown (“no common methodology”) (16). McKnight (2005) writes, “Historical Jesus scholars appropriate a historiography [i.e., philosophy of history], though very few of them spell their historiography out” (4); “historical Jesus scholarship seems largely unconscious of its historiography, or at least unwilling to trot out its essential features” (16).

<sup>257</sup> Rex Martin (2006), 260.

<sup>258</sup> Gowler (2007) refers to “the traditional canons of historical-critical approaches” (119).

<sup>259</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 23. Also see section 1.3.2 below.

<sup>260</sup> Tucker (2001), 38-39.

historical investigations are giving more attention to theory and method and proceeding with caution.<sup>261</sup>

### 1.2.12. Is History A Science?

It has often been asked whether history is a science. A number have drawn comparisons between the sciences and the practice of history or rejected this comparison.<sup>262</sup> Perhaps the leading objection to regarding the practice of history as a science is that, unlike scientists who have entities they can work with in the laboratory, the past is inaccessible to historians. Moreover, firm agreements and strong confirmation are seldom available in the study of history.<sup>263</sup> However, many of the sciences are faced with the same challenge. Although a historian does not have direct access to the past, a scientist does not have direct access to the experiments he performed last year in the lab, but can only refer to his notes. On the other hand, both historians and scientists have access to entities from the past. Every manuscript is an artifact from the past. What a scientist sees when he looks through a telescope at a distant galaxy she observes it as it existed thousands of years ago if not longer, and after it has been distorted by gravitational tugs from other galaxies and trillions of miles of interstellar dust. The work of geologists involves a significant amount of guessing. Evolutionary biologists have no means of verifying if a particular life-form evolved from another.<sup>264</sup> Physics is usually regarded as the most secure of all the sciences, since mathematics is intricately bound up in the work of physicists and their database is comparatively large to what other scientists have. Nevertheless, physicists posit numerous entities to which they have no direct access such as quarks and strings. Zammito comments that “an electron is no more immediately accessible to perception than the Spanish Inquisition. Each must be inferred from actual evidence. Yet neither is utterly indeterminable.”<sup>265</sup> Evans maintains that history is a weak science:

History, in the end, may for the most part be seen as a science in the weak sense of the German term *Wissenschaft*, an organized body of knowledge

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<sup>261</sup> Fitzhugh and Leckie (2001) suggest that “historians must begin seriously to embrace theoretical argument as a matter of ordinary practice rather than as an occasional gesture if they wish to have any critical relevance at all” (62). Shaw (2001) comments that historians do not have all of the answers related to theory and method. Nevertheless, they are making progress and should proceed, albeit with caution (9). Within the arena of historical Jesus research, the leading lights are devoting considerable space to describe their approaches. See Allison (1998), 1-77; Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 111-48; Crossan (1991), xxvii-xxxiv; Dunn (2003), 25-136; Meier (1991), 1-40; Sanders (1985), 1-58; Wright (1992), 3-120; (2003), 3-31.

<sup>262</sup> See Berry (1999); Christian (2004); Crowell (1998); Førlund (2004); Peña (1999); Stuart-Fox (1999); Tucker (2004), chapter 3.

<sup>263</sup> Gilderhus (2007), 85.

<sup>264</sup> One might think that the fossil record is abundant with clear examples of species evolving. While one can *interpret* certain life-forms as transitions, this does not *demonstrate* that they are transitional forms. Moreover, the fossil record is lacking the needed transitional forms for verification as numerous prominent evolutionists admit. See the comments by prominent evolutionists Colin Patterson and Richard Lewontin in T. Bethell (1985), 49.

<sup>265</sup> Zammito (2005), 178, cf. 177. See also Lorenz (1994), 312; Tucker (2004), 4. At least some scientists agree that scientific hypotheses, like their historical cousins, include an interpretive component: “The thesis of theory underdetermination by a given body of empirical evidence roots in the claim that any scientific theory unavoidably contains more than only pure observational terms. It therefore features in its explanatory apparatus theoretical terms which, since they refer to non-observable structures, are open to metatheoretic dispute” (Lyre and Eynck [2001], 2).

acquired through research carried out according to generally agreed methods, presented in published reports, and subject to peer review. It is not a science in the strong sense that it can frame general laws or predict the future. But there are sciences, such as geology, which cannot predict the future either. The fact seems to be that the differences between what in English are known as the sciences are at least as great as the differences between these disciplines taken together and a humane discipline such as history. . . . To search for a truly “scientific” history is to pursue a mirage.<sup>266</sup>

Others view history as both science and art.<sup>267</sup> On March 29, 2006, I had the opportunity to engage in friendly dialogue with a few scientists and a philosopher on these matters over dinner. Two are physicists at MIT (one specialized in genetics, the other in geology) and the third is a philosopher of science at Harvard. We discussed epistemological considerations in judging hypotheses within their discipline. I asked how often they work with a hypothesis that seems to explain all or most of the data and then experimentation later proves the hypothesis incorrect. The physicists answered that the data with which they work is often so fragmented that they rarely have a hypothesis that explains a lot. The philosopher and one of the physicists commented that criteria pertaining to when a hypothesis may be regarded as true are rarely if ever considered. Instead, the instincts of the scientist act as umpire.<sup>268</sup> The most valuable aspect of this discussion for me was that it revealed that the conclusions of science are not as firm as believed by those outside of the traditional disciplines of science and that, similar to many historians, the theory of method (i.e., philosophy of science) plays little part in the practices of scientists.

### 1.2.13. What Historians Do

We have covered much ground and it is time to pull together some of the topics we have discussed and ask just what it is that historians do. The past is forever gone. We cannot go back in time. Nevertheless, remnants from the past exist in the form of manuscripts, artifacts, and effects.<sup>269</sup> Historians study these and attempt to reassemble them so that the resulting historical hypothesis serves as a window through which we can peer back into the past.<sup>270</sup> The window is often blurry and contains some spots through which we may see more clearly. As a result, historians, especially those who study antiquity, speak of the probable truth of a theory rather than absolute certainty. Historical conclusions are provisional. Richard Evans writes,

We rake over the ashes of the past, and only with difficulty can we make out what they once were; only now and then can we stir them into a flicker of life. Yet we should not despair at the difficulty of the goals we have set ourselves

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<sup>266</sup> R. Evans (1999), 62. His second chapter is devoted to addressing this issue. Contra Evans’s statement that historians cannot predict the future, Staley (2002) argues that since history involves a thought process and is a discipline of how to think, if historians can know the past, they should be able to predict the future (72-73).

<sup>267</sup> Droysen (1893), 110; R. Evans (1999), 62-63.

<sup>268</sup> While we should not denigrate such instincts especially when coming from a mature scientist, the challenge with this approach is that the instincts are not public and, thus, it may be very difficult for others to judge whether the conclusions made are accurate.

<sup>269</sup> R. Evans (1999), 217; McKnight (2005), 20n71; Schinkel (2004), 52; Tucker (2004), 93.

<sup>270</sup> Zammito (1998): Historians occasionally enjoy nostalgic episodes when, for a moment, the past is retrieved and they can peer through a window and, in a sense, observe it (345).

. . . . History is an empirical discipline, and it is concerned with the content of knowledge rather than its nature. Through the sources we use, and the methods with which we handle them, we can, if we are very careful and thorough, approach to a reconstruction of past reality that may be partial and provisional, and certainly will not be totally neutral, but is nevertheless true. We know of course that we will be guided in selecting materials for the stories we tell, and in the way we put these materials together and interpret them, by literary methods, by social science theories, by moral and political beliefs, by an aesthetic sense, even by our own unconscious assumptions and desires. It is an illusion to believe otherwise.<sup>271</sup>

Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob agree:

In reality, the past as a series of events is utterly gone. Its consequences, which are very real, remain to impinge on the present, but only a retrospective analysis can make their influence apparent. What stays on visibly in the present are the physical traces from past living—the materials are objects that historians turn into evidence and they begin asking questions. These traces, alas, never speak for themselves (even oral histories occur after the event).<sup>272</sup>

Tucker similarly comments,

Historiography does not reconstruct events; it cannot bring Caesar back to life or reenact the battle of Actium. Historiography does attempt to provide a hypothetical description and analysis of some past events as the best explanation of present evidence. This knowledge is probably true, but it is not true in an absolute sense. The most that historiography can aspire for is increasing plausibility, never absolute truth. . . . Most of history has left no lasting information-carrying effects after it. Therefore, most of history is and always will be unknown and unknowable.<sup>273</sup>

While singular descriptions may on occasion be stated simply, most historical descriptions are told within narratives which differ in their completeness. For example, the resurrection of Jesus is a singular description, while the canonical Gospels (*bioi*) are narratives. Portraits of the historical Jesus offered by modern scholars are likewise narratives. Since data mostly comes to us fragmented, an exhaustive or even complete narrative is unattainable. Thus, historians do not expect full accounts of the past but narratives that are partial and intelligible. Historians seek an adequate accounting of the data where they get it right, even if not in an exhaustive sense.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> R. Evans (1999), 217. Gilderhus (2007) comments that historians “resemble paleontologists who try to construct historical images of life forms in the natural world through the use of fossils and imagination” (122). Wright (1992) likewise uses the analogy of a paleontologist (101). R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008) writes that the life of the historical Jesus must be “pieced together from the evidence left behind, much as an archaeologist reconstructs ancient buildings from the few pieces left on the ground” (14).

<sup>272</sup> Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994), 254-55.

<sup>273</sup> Tucker (2004), 258. See also Anchor (1999) who asserts that the role of historians is to discover what is most likely true (114).

<sup>274</sup> Rex Martin (2005), 143. See also Fay (1998), 91.



Part of the historian's investigation is to understand not only *what* occurred in the past, but also *why* it occurred. What was the cause of the event in question?<sup>275</sup> The historian's questions often reach further than the identification of evidence. Many times, there is such a paucity of data that confidence eludes historians pertaining to a specific proposed cause. For example, we do not know why Hitler hated the Jews to the extent he did. We are unaware of any Jews who hurt him in some manner during his childhood. Therefore, any proposed cause for Hitler's hatred for Jews is purely conjectural, highly speculative and has a good possibility of being incorrect.<sup>276</sup> On the other hand, historians often have a sufficient amount of data with which to work. In this case, they may ask whether a proposed cause significantly increases the probability of the extant data.<sup>277</sup> Optimally, historians would like to identify a cause that is logically *necessary* in order for the extant evidence to be as it is. Would the effect have occurred as it did without the proposed cause?<sup>278</sup> As a relevant example, Wright argues that the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are necessary conditions for the rise of early Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>279</sup> It is infrequent that historians are able to identify a necessary cause.

Do historians, like detectives, study the evidence and then form a hypothesis or do they form a hypothesis and then look for supporting evidence, adjusting the hypothesis to fit the facts? Since the horizons of historians are ever present, the latter is probably more common. However, some historians who genuinely attempt to distance themselves from their biases and hopes during their investigations may actually have a sort of combination of the two. These start with facts and an underlying hypothesis that they hold in provision and they adjust them all (hypothesis and facts—remembering that facts involve interpretation) as they progress through their investigation.<sup>280</sup> This is a form of *critical realism*, which recognizes that there is a past that can be known to some extent (realism) and that it is known through an honest questioning of the data in an interdependent relationship, like a spiral, between historian and data, and hypothesis and data. Relying heavily on the work of Bernard Lonergan, Ben Meyer brought critical realism to the forefront of New Testament studies and others have since adopted its use.<sup>281</sup>

### 1.3. Method

#### 1.3.1. From Theory to Method

We have asked whether it is possible to know the past and have answered with a qualified affirmative. With varying degrees, our knowledge of the past is incomplete and uncertain. Notwithstanding, there are occasions when our knowledge is adequate and when we may have reasonable certainty that our hypotheses present an accurate, though imperfect and incomplete, description of the past. I made six suggestions for minimizing the negative impact of horizons upon the work of historians. It is hoped

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<sup>275</sup> Dunn (2003), 101; Fay (1998), 91.

<sup>276</sup> Anchor (1990), 116.

<sup>277</sup> McCullagh ("What Do Historians Argue About?" 2004), 35.

<sup>278</sup> McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 165, 168, 172. See also McCullagh (2000), 49.

<sup>279</sup> Wright (2003), 686-96.

<sup>280</sup> I say this with the understanding that there are numerous levels of facts and hypotheses.

<sup>281</sup> Meyer (1979) and (1989). See also Wright (1992), Dunn (2003), Denton (2005).

that these will improve our competency as historians when we analyze a number of hypotheses posited to answer the question “Did Jesus rise from the dead?”

We will now move from theory to method. Whereas theoretical considerations equip us to be better judges, methodological considerations equip us to be better detectives. What methods are employed by historians for determining what actually occurred in the past? Iggers contends that the “historian must work with the scholarly methods that were established in the nineteenth century. . . . [They may not be universally valid.] But as scholars we are still committed to these methods and we need to work with them if we do not want to erase the border between reality and fiction.”<sup>282</sup> Notwithstanding, clear methods for weighing hypotheses are often not stated by historians who, like many scientists, are guided more often by their instinct and bias. McCullagh comments that “[i]n practice, historians sometimes have a rather hazy idea of what an adequate explanation requires, so that their explanations are somewhat haphazard, often reflecting their personal interests.”<sup>283</sup> We will look at two general methods employed by historians for weighing hypotheses: arguments to the best explanation and arguments from statistical inference. We will then consider degrees of historical confidence. Finally, we will discuss when historians are justified in awarding “historicity.”

### 1.3.2. Arguments to the Best Explanation

Arguments to the best explanation make inferences and weigh hypotheses according to specific criteria. The hypothesis that best meets the criteria is to be preferred.<sup>284</sup> The following is a list of criteria used by historians for weighing hypotheses. Not all state their use openly and some use them in a slightly different manner, while others employ only some of them.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Iggers (2004), 153. Theissen and Winter (2002) assert that in order to know the past, historians must “weigh the merits of different possibilities and prefer those that seem more probable” (258).

<sup>283</sup> McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 308. See also Barrera (2001) who asserts that methods employed among historians are fuzzy (202). This deficiency appears to be present with Allison’s historical method pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. He concludes that Jesus’ tomb was probably empty and is certain that the disciples had some experiences of the risen Jesus, at least one of which was in a group setting. However, he does not seem to have any criteria for determining when an explanation is adequate enough for awarding historicity. Not only is such criteria absent from his book *Resurrecting Jesus* (2005), his lack of criteria for an adequate explanation was reinforced during an 11/17/2007 EPS/AAR panel discussion pertaining to his book in San Diego in which he participated. When Jan van der Watt of the University of Pretoria asked what criteria one may use for determining when a hypothesis is adequate enough for awarding historicity, Allison said he did not have any. This seems to be the sort of haphazardness reflecting personal interests of which McCullagh warns. (At the same event, I asked Allison what actions he takes to minimize his bias during his investigations. He replied that none could be taken to his knowledge. For a few steps suggested by others, see section 1.2.3 above.) Allison sees no theological reason for why a transformed corpse would need to be involved in a post-mortem state. Because of this he does not believe that Jesus was raised bodily. Thus, he allows his theological conviction to drive his historical method and influence his conclusion.

<sup>284</sup> An argument to the best explanation may be adequate for justifying singular descriptions about a past person, group, event, or custom. But confidence in its accuracy decreases when broad generalizations are the subjects being investigated (McCullagh [1984], 37-38).

<sup>285</sup> McCullagh (1984), 19; Wright (1992), 99ff. McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004) provides a modified list that re-groups his seven criteria from 1984 into five with an additional comment (51-52).

a) *Explanatory Scope*. This criterion looks at the quantity of facts accounted for by a hypothesis. The hypothesis that includes the most relevant data has the greatest explanatory scope.

b) *Explanatory Power*. This criterion looks at the quality of the explanation of the facts. The hypothesis that explains the data with the least amount of effort, vagueness, and ambiguity has greater explanatory power.<sup>286</sup> Said another way, the historian does not want to have to push the facts in order make them fit his theory as though he were trying to push a round peg through a square hole. In our study of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus we will notice that some historians use exegesis as a torture chamber where biblical texts and Greek words are stretched until they tell the historian what he wants to hear.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, while a degree of vagueness or ambiguity is to be expected given the fragmented data that have come down to us from the past, a strong presence of these traits in a hypothesis will cause it to lack explanatory power, since it fails to *explain*. Historians may use their imaginative powers to reduce the amount of vagueness within a hypothesis, but in doing so there may be a trade-off as will be noted in criterion *d* below.

These first two criteria may be understood using the analogy of completing a jigsaw puzzle. We may imagine two contestants with the same puzzle but who have presented different solutions (hypotheses). In the first puzzle, a number of pieces (historical facts) remain stranded and one or more of the puzzle pieces appears forced. In the second puzzle all of the pieces have been used and fit perfectly. The first puzzle lacks the scope and power enjoyed by the second and, therefore, the second solution would be preferred. Most good historical hypotheses look like a puzzle with some missing pieces. As the number of missing pieces increases, so do the chances that puzzle pieces discovered in the future will change the current puzzle solution (or preferred hypothesis).

c) *Plausibility*. The hypothesis must be implied to a greater degree and by a greater variety of accepted truths (or background knowledge) than other hypotheses.<sup>288</sup> A hypothesis that is *implausible* is inferior to one that is neutral in its plausibility (i.e., neither plausible nor implausible) and a hypothesis that scores above neutral in plausibility is inferior to one that scores even higher.<sup>289</sup> We may think of a scale where negative ten through negative one represent degrees of implausibility, zero represents neutral, and one through ten represent increasing degrees of plausibility.

d) *Less Ad Hoc*. A hypothesis possesses an *ad hoc* component when it enlists non-evidenced assumptions, that is, it goes beyond what is already known.<sup>290</sup> When two or more hypotheses seem equal, usually due to a paucity of data, historians often

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<sup>286</sup> Wright combines criteria two and three. Listing the requirements of a good hypothesis he writes, "First, it must include the data. The bits and pieces of evidence must be incorporated, without being squeezed out of shape any more than is inevitable" (Wright 1992, 99).

<sup>287</sup> See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 343.

<sup>288</sup> McCullagh (1984), 19; McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 51-52; Tucker (2004), 148-49. This appears to be what Wright (1992) has in mind with his third criterion while hinting that illumination—our fifth criterion—is also involved (100-01).

<sup>289</sup> See McCullagh (1984) where he distinguishes between a hypothesis that lacks plausibility from one that is implausible (27).

<sup>290</sup> R. J. Miller (1992), 11: "a superior hypothesis explains the data with fewer presuppositions which beg relevant questions" (11).

employ a greater amount of imagination in order to account for the available data.<sup>291</sup> A hypothesis possessing an *ad hoc* component has the opposite problem of one lacking explanatory power. The former goes beyond what the data warrants whereas the latter may not go far enough.

The purpose of this criterion is to flag hypotheses in which the historian appears to be involved in a salvage operation by enlisting assumptions that include data that would otherwise serve to disconfirm it.<sup>292</sup> One may sense this occurring when a hypothesis enlists a number of non-evidenced assumptions while another hypothesis can explain the same data without appealing to additional non-evidenced assumptions.

This criterion has also been referred to as *simplicity*.<sup>293</sup> It is important to note that the simplicity refers to fewer presuppositions rather than combined factors, since historical events often result from multiple causes.<sup>294</sup>

e) *Illumination*. Sometime a hypothesis provides a possible solution to other problems while not confusing other areas held with confidence.<sup>295</sup> In historical Jesus research, a hypothesis meeting this criterion will solve questions about Jesus in other areas while not creating confusion in still other areas of Jesus research held with confidence. For example, if a naturalistic explanation employing the social sciences turns out being the best explanation of the known facts pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, it may shed light on other areas of interest to historians of that period as well as those of others, such as the extent to which psychological conditions may factor into the rapid recovery of a religious movement after the death of its leader. On the other hand, if the data point to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, the resurrection hypothesis may strengthen the likelihood of the historicity of Jesus' claims to divinity while creating no confusion in areas about Jesus already held with confidence, such as, that he preached about the kingdom of God and frequently spoke in parables, and that he performed deeds others interpreted as miracles, magic, and sorcery. Indeed, as in a number of the sciences, conclusions in one area may have wide-reaching impact on others.

Not all criteria have equal weight. Wright provides an illustration of a paleontologist who attempts to reconstruct a dinosaur from its bones. If she creates a simple reconstruction while omitting a few large bones, she is satisfying the criterion of simplicity at the expense of explanatory scope. However, if another paleontologist attempts a different reconstruction and, while including all the bones, ends up with a dinosaur with seven toes on one foot and eighteen on the other, this is likewise inadequate. Wright says in such a case he would prefer simplicity over greater explanatory scope.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Tucker (2004), 142-45, 240.

<sup>292</sup> McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), 52.

<sup>293</sup> Wright (1992), 100-01.

<sup>294</sup> McCullagh (1984), 19-20. R. J. Miller (1992) notes that hypotheses proposing multiple causes may often possess greater explanatory scope and explanatory power than hypotheses with a single cause (10-11). I note here that the qualified value I am assigning to simplicity above is a softening or correction from what I previously held in Habermas and Licona (2004), 120-21.

<sup>295</sup> Perkins (2007), 60; Wright (1992), 100-01.

<sup>296</sup> Wright (1992), 105. Lüdemann (2004) asserts that the best hypotheses are "those that resolve the most (and most important) open questions or existing problems, and provoke the fewest (and weakest) counterarguments" (22). Focusing on the larger narrative of the historical Jesus, Sanders (1985) writes,

McCullagh lists plausibility as the most important criteria followed by explanatory scope and power, followed by less *ad hoc*. We may suppose two hypotheses: A & B. If neither A nor B are implausible (i.e., it is in tension with solid conclusions in other areas), if A has greater scope and power than B, then even if A is more *ad hoc* than B, A is to be preferred. Put another way, if A is more *ad hoc* than B but excels over B in its explanatory scope and explanatory power, it should be preferred over B. However, if A seems incompatible with known facts in other areas (i.e., it fails the criterion of plausibility), even if it has greater explanatory scope and power, it is to be abandoned.<sup>297</sup>

I will adopt McCullagh's order when later weighing hypotheses with the simple addition that the criterion of illumination carries the least weight. Although a bonus when met, this criterion is unnecessary for confirming the overall probability of a hypothesis.

Historians using arguments to the best explanation should weigh each hypothesis according to how well it meets these five criteria. The hypothesis fulfilling the most criteria, especially the more weighty ones, is to be preferred. The more a hypothesis distances itself ahead of competing hypotheses in fulfilling the criteria, the greater likelihood it has of representing what actually occurred. Hypotheses must likewise be judged by how well they answer disconfirming arguments.

Arguments to the best explanation are guided by inference and can sometimes be superior to being an eyewitness to an event. Testimony to the court does not provide truth but data. The court prefers the way of investigation to the way of belief. Thus, what may be absolutely certain to the witness may become only more or less probable to the court, depending on how well the particulars intended by the witness's testimony correlates with actual knowns. If the court cannot directly appropriate the witness's knowledge, it can nevertheless have the next best thing, which is not belief but inference. In its final state, the inferences of the court may actually be superior in scope, perspective, accuracy, and certainty to the knowledge of any and all witnesses.<sup>298</sup>

### 1.3.3. Arguments from Statistical Inference

Arguments from statistical inference are sometimes useful to historians and can be a more reliable tool in the hands of a historian than arguments to the best explanation.<sup>299</sup> In order for statistical inferences to yield reliable conclusions, they must take into account all relevant data. I can claim that my twelve-year-old son cannot lift two hundred pounds above his head. But if I add that a bodybuilder would assist my son in lifting the two hundred pounds above his head, this datum changes the outcome completely. In a similar manner, if we *a priori* rule God out of the equation, then we can conclude statistically that the odds of a person returning from the dead are so miniscule that a reasonable person cannot believe that Jesus rose.

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"One is looking for a hypothesis which explains more (not everything), which gives a good account (not the only one) of what happened, which fits Jesus realistically into his environment, and which has in view cause and effect" (58).

<sup>297</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28.

<sup>298</sup> Meyer (1979), 88-92.

<sup>299</sup> McCullagh (1984), 45.



However, if we take into consideration the existence of a God who may have reasons for raising Jesus from the dead, the probability that Jesus rose is increased significantly. The prominent then-atheist philosopher Antony Flew agreed: “Certainly given some beliefs about God, the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely.”<sup>300</sup>

Philosophers and scientists often employ Bayes’ Theorem for estimating the probability that a condition exists or existed given the extant data. In fact, philosopher Richard Swinburne made a recent attempt to employ Bayes’ Theorem in order to estimate the probability that Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>301</sup> However, many are doubtful that Bayes’ Theorem can be employed effectively with most historical hypotheses. Statistician David Bartholomew writes that “[t]he great difficulty about applying the theory is that it is often not at all clear what value should be given to the prior probability.”<sup>302</sup> McCullagh writes that “virtually no historian has used it and even if any wished to do so, he would probably find it difficult as it requires information which is often hard to obtain” and is often unavailable.<sup>303</sup> Although we will discuss how miracles impact historical investigation in the next chapter, I will note here that it is doubtful that Bayes’ Theorem may be employed for miracle claims. Tucker asserts that “it is unclear if and how [Bayes’ Theorem] can be worked out in practice. In particular historical contexts, when there is sufficient evidence, it is possible to evaluate the prior probability of some particular hypotheses of deception or distortion. But the aggregation of all probabilities requires more evidence than is usually available about particular historical contexts of alleged miracles.”<sup>304</sup> Christian philosopher William Lane Craig likewise argues that Bayes’ Theorem cannot be applied to miracle claims such as the resurrection of Jesus, since the background information required is “inscrutable, given that we’re dealing with a free agent.”<sup>305</sup> Philosopher Stephen Davis argues that Bayes’ Theorem is “a useful tool in some epistemic situations, but it is a blunt instrument when used in discussions of the resurrection of Jesus. . . . [since] people are obviously going to differ in the values they attach to the priors and likelihoods. There seems to be no objective way of adjudicating such disputes.”<sup>306</sup> This limitation is not unique to questions involving a deity. For as McIntyre notes, the free will of the historical agent is one way in which the historical discipline differs from natural science in which natural laws are constant.<sup>307</sup>

Applied to the resurrection of Jesus, Bayes Theorem can be stated as follows:

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<sup>300</sup> See Flew’s comments in Miethe, ed. (1987), 39.

<sup>301</sup> Swinburne (2003). He concluded that the hypothesis that Jesus was resurrected can be held with a confidence of ninety-seven percent (214). This claim has been criticized by atheist philosopher Michael Martin (1998). Christian philosopher Stephen Davis (1999) replied with a critique of Martin’s arguments and concluded that “the probability [that Jesus rose from the dead] is not only greater [than the hypothesis that he did not] but very much greater” (9). The Davis article is available to view online for free at [philoonline.org/library/davis\\_2\\_1.htm](http://philoonline.org/library/davis_2_1.htm).

<sup>302</sup> Bartholomew (2000), 34.

<sup>303</sup> McCullagh (1984), 46-47; 57-58.

<sup>304</sup> Tucker (2005), 381.

<sup>305</sup> See Craig’s comments in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 32. Also see Davis (*Philo* 2:1), 8 of 11, accessed online (September 7, 2007) at [http://www.philoonline.org/library/davis\\_2\\_1.htm](http://www.philoonline.org/library/davis_2_1.htm).

<sup>306</sup> Davis (*Philo* 2:1), 8-9 of 11.

<sup>307</sup> McIntyre, (2001), 5.

$$\Pr (R/B\&E) = \frac{\Pr (R/B) \times \Pr (E/B\&R)}{[\Pr (R/B) \times \Pr (E/B\&R)] + [\Pr (\neg R/B) \times \Pr (E/B\&\neg R)]}$$

R = Resurrection Hypothesis

$\neg R$  = No R Hypothesis (or one might substitute H1 = Natural Hypothesis [e.g., hallucination])

E = Specific Evidence Related to R

B = General Background Knowledge

The above equation reads as follows: The relative probability of the truth of the resurrection hypothesis given the background knowledge and evidence is equal to the numerator divided by the denominator. The numerator is the relative probability that the resurrection occurred given the background knowledge times the relative probability that the evidence we have would exist given the background knowledge and the occurrence of the resurrection. The denominator is the same as the numerator placed in brackets then adding the following equation in brackets: the relative probability that Jesus did not rise from the dead (or the relative probability than an alternate hypothesis is true, such as grief hallucinations) given the background knowledge times the relative probability that the evidence we have would exist given the background knowledge and the non-occurrence of the resurrection (or the occurrence of grief hallucinations). Compressed, Bayes' Theorem may be stated as follows:

$$\frac{X}{X+Y}$$

In order to apply this equation to the probability that Jesus rose from the dead, we would have to know the background knowledge, which includes the probability that God exists combined with the probability that such a God would desire to raise Jesus from the dead. As Craig states, this background knowledge is inscrutable. However, for fun, let us say that it is "as likely as not" that God exists and would want to raise Jesus. This will assign our background knowledge a probability of 50 percent or .5. Many atheists will believe the probability to be much lower and many Christian theists will believe it to be much higher.

$$\Pr (R/.5\&E) = \frac{.5 \times \Pr (E/.5\&R)}{[.5 \times \Pr (E/.5\&R)] + [.5 \times \Pr (E/.5\&\neg R)]}^{308}$$

When our equation is played out, Bayes' Theorem actually shows that the resurrection hypothesis (R) has a greater probability than the position that Jesus did not rise from the dead. (R) wins because the probability of having the specific evidence to be discussed in chapter four is much greater than fifty percent, if Jesus rose from the dead. In the parallel equation, the probability of having the specific evidence discussed in chapter four is less than fifty percent given that Jesus did not rise from the dead, or more specifically the hypothesis that hallucinations account for the post-resurrection appearances. In short, since it is likely that we would have the extant

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<sup>308</sup> I am indebted to William Lane Craig for his clarification pertaining to plugging in the figures in a personal telephone conversation on September 6, 2007.

data if Jesus rose and unlikely that we would have it if he did not, the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead is more probably true.

But as stated earlier, the background knowledge is difficult to agree upon when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, since it involves the probability that God exists and that he would want to raise Jesus. In other words, we would have to provide the relative probability that the Judeo-Christian God exists and that he would want to raise Jesus. This becomes very difficult, since a Muslim may change the background knowledge to the relative probability that the Islamic God would want to raise Jesus, which is zero, given the statements in the *Qur'an*.<sup>309</sup> Of course if the probability of God's existence were lowered to below .5, this would create an entirely different outcome. Bartholomew notes that two difficulties exist for Bayes' Theorem. First, we can never be certain that our inventory of hypotheses is complete. The second reason provides an advantage to the theist. He illustrates this using the example of a well-attested miracle claim.

Let us now consider this alleged happening in relation to the two following hypotheses: (A) that God exists and has power to act in the world, and (B) that there is no such god. On A the occurrence may be judged to be very probable, even certain, because a god of this kind can presumably do what he pleases. On B it would seem to be very unlikely. In circumstances like this the atheist can never fare better than the theist and will usually do much worse. This makes it all the more necessary for the atheist to insist that the prior is essential for reaching a conclusion since A is so improbable a priori that the higher likelihood is completely swamped. This example shows both the important role of the prior probability and the severe limitations of judgements based only on likelihoods.<sup>310</sup>

Bartholomew follows by acknowledging that for the same reasons "there is no calculus by which we can accumulate evidence and so arrive at a final answer."<sup>311</sup> He then concludes, "The lesson of all this is that though the use of formal probability arguments cannot deliver all that the theory promises that is no reason for ignoring what it can tell us."<sup>312</sup> So, mathematicians, like historians, find themselves in a quagmire when probability equations are employed: mathematical certainty eludes both. While this may prohibit mathematicians from obtaining absolute knowledge, it does not prohibit them from calculating the likelihood that an event occurred. I would also note that the horizon of the mathematician is equally involved when the issue of background knowledge arises. We may never be able to provide a final and absolute adjudication on the matter, given our present data. However, this does not mean neither has the truth. Both may be confident but at least one is certainly mistaken. Moreover, the inability of the correct historian to convince those whose horizons prevent them from arriving at a correct judgment does not warrant the conclusion that the correct historian cannot know what occurred.

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<sup>309</sup> Q 4:157-58 states that Jesus did not die on the cross. If he did not die, we cannot speak of a resurrection.

<sup>310</sup> Bartholomew (1996), 252-53.

<sup>311</sup> Bartholomew (1996), 253.

<sup>312</sup> Bartholomew (1996), 253.

In most cases where statistical inference arguments are employed, the historian has extensive data whereby he can conclude that X occurs a certain percentage of the time or when A is present, X occurs a certain percentage of the time but when A is absent, X occurs a certain percentage of the time. McCullagh lists the following grades but admits a subjective element:<sup>313</sup>

extremely probable: in 100-95% of cases  
very probable: in 95-80% of cases  
quite or fairly probable: in 80-65% of cases  
more probable than not: in 65-50% of cases  
hardly or scarcely probable: in 50-35% of cases  
fairly improbable: in 35-20% of cases  
very improbable: in 20-5% of cases  
extremely improbable: in 5-0% of cases

As historians, we cannot employ a statistical inference argument in our examination of the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead, since if it occurred, it would be a unique event. However, this cannot be turned against the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus by claiming that the probability of the resurrection of Jesus is “extremely improbable” on the grounds that it is incontrovertibly true that less than (say) five percent of the dead return to life. The advent of the resurrection of Jesus would not only be rare but unique since it could be the resurrection of the Son of God. One could perhaps use statistical inference arguments for Jesus’ death by crucifixion, but not his resurrection. Accordingly, a similarly flawed argument for a positive judgment would be to claim the probability of the resurrection of Jesus is “extremely probable” since it is true that every time an omnipotent God would want to raise someone from the dead, he does. The reason such an argument is flawed is that there is simply not enough background evidence to draw such a conclusion based on mathematical probability. Historians, at least, do not possess this sort of knowledge.

If the historian knows all possible hypotheses that could account for all of the extant data, she may employ a statistical argument that has a reciprocal relationship between the competing hypotheses. For example, let us suppose three hypotheses: A, B, C. Let us further suppose that these exhaust all possible hypotheses. Finally, let us suppose the *a priori* probabilities for A and B are .2 and .2. This leaves a probability of .6 for C. If B were reassessed at .5, then C would have to be recalculated at .3. If C were reassessed at .8, then A and B would have to be recalculated accordingly.<sup>314</sup> Unfortunately, *all* possible hypotheses are seldom known in historical inquiry and assigning mathematical probabilities to a hypothesis usually involves a great amount of subjectivity in historical inquiry.

To summarize, historians commonly employ arguments to the best explanation and arguments from statistical inference.<sup>315</sup> Historians cannot prove that a best explanation or a statistically most probable explanation is what actually occurred. However, these approaches have been shown to work well in instances when a degree of verification is possible. Historians are free to adjudicate on a matter and judge that an event or condition occurred. However, the judgment must always be held as

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<sup>313</sup> McCullagh (1984), 52.

<sup>314</sup> McCullagh (1984), 68.

<sup>315</sup> McCullagh (1984), 74.

provisional. It is not possible to employ a statistical inference argument pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, since the event of God raising someone from the dead would be unique and, thus, our pool of data is insufficient for calculating probabilities. Moreover, the background evidence required for completing an estimation of the probabilities is at best almost inscrutable, since even if God exists there is no way for historians to know whether he would want to raise Jesus. Since historians largely shy away from statistical inference in general, I will employ an argument to the best explanation when analyzing what happened to Jesus.

#### 1.3.4. Spectrum of Historical Certainty

Not all historical descriptions can be held with the same degree of historical certainty. Some hypotheses are supported by stronger evidence than others. For example, we can hold that the American Civil War occurred with far greater certainty than what we may have for the Trojan War. Pertaining to Jesus, that he believed he was God's eschatological agent may be held with greater confidence than that he believed he was divine. Many historians have recognized degrees of historical confidence that may be viewed along a 'spectrum of historical certainty.'<sup>316</sup>

a) N. T. Wright: "I use the word 'probable' in the common-sense historians' way, not in the highly problematic philosophers' way . . . ; that is to say, as a way of indicating that the historical evidence, while comparatively rarely permitting a conclusion of 'certain', can acknowledge a scale from, say, 'extremely likely', through 'possible', 'plausible' and 'probable', to 'highly probable'."<sup>317</sup>

b) John P. Meier: "I will content myself with such general judgments as 'very probable,' 'more probable,' 'less probable,' 'unlikely,' etc."<sup>318</sup>

c) James D. G. Dunn: "almost certain (never simply 'certain'), very probable, probable, likely, possible, and so on. In historical scholarship the judgment 'probable' is a very positive verdict."<sup>319</sup>

d) Ben F. Meyer: "there should be three columns for judgments on historicity (historical, non-historical, and question-mark)."<sup>320</sup>

e) Robert J. Miller: "'very probable' to 'somewhat probable' to 'somewhat improbable' to 'very improbable' to 'extremely doubtful.' And beyond even 'extremely doubtful' there is [sic.] huge number of statements, limited only by the imagination, that are certainly false."<sup>321</sup>

f) Gerald O'Collins: utterly certain, highly probable, solidly probable, probable, various shades of possibilities, genuinely indeterminate. O'Collins contends that the historian is warranted in awarding historicity when a hypothesis is solidly probable.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> In McCullagh (*The Logic of History*, 2004), he states that there are degrees of credibility (12).

<sup>317</sup> Wright (2003), 687.

<sup>318</sup> Meier (1991), 33.

<sup>319</sup> Dunn (2003), 103.

<sup>320</sup> Meyer (1989), 135.

<sup>321</sup> R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 11.

<sup>322</sup> O'Collins (2003), 36.



g) Graham H. Twelftree: “A position is demonstrated, when the reasons for accepting it ‘significantly’ outweigh the reasons for not accepting it. . . . This leaves a large gray area where positions are held to be ‘likely’ or ‘probable.’”<sup>323</sup> For Twelftree, a position on the positive side of the spectrum of historical certainty is “likely,” “probable” (with shades of each), or “historical.” Elsewhere, he seems to include “uncertain” and possibly “historicity denied,” although he does not use these terms.<sup>324</sup>

h) A. J. M. Wedderburn: “[C]ertainly true” means beyond all reasonable doubt or that “the level of probability has become so high that the falsehood of the assertion is highly improbable. . . . More often . . . we will be left with a choice between verdicts of ‘more probable’, ‘less probable’ and ‘improbable.’”<sup>325</sup>

i) Paula Fredriksen: Acknowledges “historical bedrock, facts known past doubting,”<sup>326</sup> then forms her reconstruction using those facts as anchors, implying that the other facts are not so strong.<sup>327</sup>

j) Jesus Seminar: *The Five Gospels* color codes the sayings of Jesus: black (0-25% or he did not say this), gray (26-50% or the ideas rather than the words are close to his own), pink (51-75% or he probably said something like this), red (76-100% or he undoubtedly said this or something like it).<sup>328</sup>

k) Rex Martin: Speaks of increasing confidence of a “factual statement” being supported-to-well-supported by the available evidence, to being sound or true, to being sound or true and its denial or contradiction must necessarily be false.<sup>329</sup>

l) Dale Allison: Speaks of a scale of may have happened, “plausible but uncertain,” “unlikely but still possible,” “We just do not know.”<sup>330</sup>

m) Luke Timothy Johnson: Lists “very high level of probability,” “slightly less probability,” “fairly high degree of historical probability,” “some substantial level of probability.”<sup>331</sup>

<sup>323</sup> Twelftree (1999), 248, who admits to being influenced by R. J. Miller (1992), 5-30.

<sup>324</sup> Twelftree (1999) lists twenty-two miracles of Jesus that he claims “can be judged with high confidence to reflect an event or events most likely in the life of the historical Jesus” and seven additional miracles and writes “the nature of historical research is such that these stories cannot, based on available data, be said with the same degree of certainty to reflect (or, indeed, not to reflect) an event in the life of the historical Jesus. Intellectual humility is required here.” Regarding the latter seven, Twelftree may either deny historicity or maintain a position of agnosticism (328-29), which shows a neutral and possibly a negative side to his spectrum.

<sup>325</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 4-5.

<sup>326</sup> Fredriksen (1999), 264.

<sup>327</sup> Fredriksen (1999), 7: “We have facts . . . Facts are always subject to interpretation—that’s part of the fun—but they also exist as fixed points in our investigation. Any explanation, any reconstruction of Jesus’ mission and message must speak adequately to what we *know* to have been the case. If it cannot, then no matter how elegant an application of interesting methods or of how rousing and appealing its moral message, that reconstruction fails as history.”

<sup>328</sup> Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997), 36-37.

<sup>329</sup> Rex Martin (2005), 142.

<sup>330</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 338.

<sup>331</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 123.

n) C. Behan McCullagh: “extremely improbable,” “very improbable,” “fairly improbable,” “hardly or scarcely probable,” “more probable than not,” “quite or fairly probable,” “very probable,” “extremely probable.”<sup>332</sup>

For purposes of our inquiry, I will use a spectrum of historical certainty with the following: certainly not historical, very doubtful, quite doubtful, somewhat doubtful, indeterminate (neither improbable nor probable, possible, plausible), somewhat certain (more probable than not), quite certain, very certain (very probably true), certainly historical.

Because of the uncertainty of knowledge in general and historical knowledge in particular, a requirement of “incontrovertible” proof is both unattainable and an unreasonable expectation. We regularly make decisions based on probabilities in most areas of our lives. If we cannot obtain absolute certainty in reference to any type of knowledge, we should not expect a burden of proof that requires absolute certainty before awarding historicity. This raises the question concerning when historians are justified in concluding that their preferred hypotheses are what actually occurred. Is there a point along our spectrum of historical certainty that may be regarded as a synonym for “historical”?

Many times in historical research, the data is so fragmented that historians are only warranted in judging that their hypotheses are “plausible,” in other words, one can imagine without too much of a stretch that it could have happened this way.<sup>333</sup> McCullagh, Miller, and Twelftree believe that a historical description is very probably true when it is strongly supported and much superior to competing hypotheses or when the reasons for accepting it significantly outweigh the reasons for rejecting it.<sup>334</sup> In other words, it outdistances competing hypotheses by a significant margin and does a good job at explaining counter-arguments. We will place this around the “quite certain” to “very certain” points on our spectrum. This also provides us criteria for something to be regarded as “historical”: (1) The hypothesis must be strongly supported and much superior to competing hypotheses and/or (2) The reasons for accepting a hypothesis must significantly outweigh the reasons for rejecting it.<sup>335</sup> O’Collins holds that “[t]here is a range of historical conclusions which responsible scholars can firmly hold, even when they do not reach the status of utter certainty. They can make solidly probable cases and reach firm conclusions, without pretending

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<sup>332</sup> McCullagh (1984), 52.

<sup>333</sup> McCullagh (“What Do Historians Argue About?” 2004): Interpretations lacking “overwhelming support” should be judged plausible, not necessarily credible, and fair only relative to the evidence (38).

<sup>334</sup> McCullagh (1984), 63, 103; McCullagh (*The Truth of History*, 1998), 23; R. J. Miller (1992), 24; Twelftree (1999), 248.

<sup>335</sup> This is very similar to reaching verdicts in the field of law. Annette Gordon-Reed (1997), a law professor at New York Law School explains: “Demanding that individual items of evidence amount to proof sets a standard that can only be met in the rarest of circumstances, either in history or in the law. . . . The evidence must be considered as a whole before a realistic and fair assessment of the possible truth of this story can be made. . . . To deal with the concern that accusations are easily made (whether in a legal or nonlegal context), the burden of proof is normally allocated to the accuser. The accuser can meet the burden by offering a certain quantum of evidence, which varies depending upon the nature of the accusation, for example—in the context of legal disputes—*proof beyond a reasonable doubt for criminal charges or, for civil charges, proof that makes the truth of an accusation more probable than not*” (xix-xx, ital. mine). Of course, it may be noted that “beyond a reasonable doubt” is subjective and fuzzy. See Carmy (2008), 46.

to enjoy the complete certainty which would discount even the possibility that further evidence might come to light and disprove their conclusions.”<sup>336</sup> O’Collins’s “solidly probable” is the equivalent of my “quite certain.” Dunn asserts that historians are attempting to construct a hypothesis that is a reasonably close approximation of the actual event.

Where the data are abundant and consistent, the responsible historian may be confident of achieving a reasonably close approximation. . . . the critical scholar learns to make carefully graded judgments which reflect the quality of the data—almost certain (never simply ‘certain’), very probable, probable, likely, possible, and so on. In historical scholarship the judgment ‘probable’ is a very positive verdict. And given that more data may always emerge . . . any judgment will have to be provisional, always subject to the revision necessitated by new evidence or by new ways of evaluating the old evidence.<sup>337</sup>

On Dunn’s spectrum, “probable” seems to hold an equivalent on my spectrum somewhere between “somewhat certain” and “quite certain.” He holds that historians are justified in awarding “historical” to their preferred hypotheses if they are “probable” with the qualification that it is provisional.<sup>338</sup> Miller likewise asserts that “‘probably true’ is an acceptable outcome.”<sup>339</sup> Meyer notes that historians must know the strengths and weaknesses of their hypotheses. Weaknesses may include a paucity of data, that secondary but relevant questions remain, or a failure of the hypothesis to fulfill the five criteria in arguments to the best explanation. When no unknown relevant conditions exist the hypothesis is verified.<sup>340</sup>

I propose that historians may claim to know the past, at least the particular question under their investigation, when their preferred hypothesis may be placed on the spectrum of historical certainty at or above a half-step under “quite certain.” In proposing this, I am not attempting to find a compromise between what some historians think is a warrant. Rather, I believe the answer can lie somewhere between the two points and can vary depending on the relationship between the strength of the arguments for a particular hypothesis and the degree of its superiority over competing hypotheses. It is doubtful that historians would disagree with Dunn’s statement that “probable” is a very positive verdict, given the paucity of data that is often available. Historians would like to have more data, but they work with what is available. If a hypothesis deemed “probable” distances itself by a respectable margin from competing hypotheses, this may serve as a compensating factor so that historians need not pause at concluding that their preferred hypothesis is historical, so long as it is held as provisional.

Although seldom possible for historical descriptions of antiquity, historians dream of having a hypothesis that may be judged “very certain.” A hypothesis may be regarded as “very certain” if it fulfills all five criteria for an argument to the best explanation and has a respectable distance between it and competing hypotheses. A

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<sup>336</sup> O’Collins (2003), 36.

<sup>337</sup> Dunn (2003), 103.

<sup>338</sup> Dunn kindly confirmed my interpretation of his statements in an email dated May 27, 2005.

<sup>339</sup> R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 9.

<sup>340</sup> Meyer (1979), 88-92.

judgment of “certain” should be reserved for descriptions of more contemporary events, such as “Hitler led the Holocaust.” The evidence for this hypothesis is so strong and the distance between this hypothesis and competing ones is so great that the hypothesis is virtually incontrovertible. It is noteworthy, however, that Holocaust deniers exist. Thus, historians should never wait for absolute consensus. Indeed, as we observed, consensus in historical judgments is rare.

How do historians determine where to place various hypotheses on the spectrum of historical certainty? We are again at the mercy of the subjectivity of the individual historian. Therefore, the historian should provide reasons open to public examination why he has placed his preferred hypothesis in the particular spot. Moreover, two prominent factors should be taken into account: (1) how well the hypothesis meets the five criteria for an argument to the best explanation and (2) how much distance exists between the preferred hypothesis and competing hypotheses that trail it in probability.

### 1.3.5. Summary

We have seen that historians have not reached a consensus pertaining to how historians come to know the past. Indeed, the postmodernist debate concerning whether anything of the past can be known, while not widely embraced, has benefited realist historians by noting a number of factors that render all historical descriptions as provisional. These factors include the constraints of language, that we have access to the past only indirectly through inference (i.e., there is no direct interaction with the past), that all data and descriptions are incomplete, and that they have been interpreted by the historian’s horizon. As a result, the idea that historians can relate to the “raw” and “uninterpreted” data with complete objectivity has been abandoned. While postmodern historians have referred to “the death of history,” realist historians, which are by far the majority, feel justified in proceeding, though with caution. If history is truly dead, there are no means by which historians can distinguish fact from fiction and no way of weighing the plausibility of numerous hypotheses. Indeed, there are other consequences that are difficult for postmodernists to live with if their view of knowing the past is correct, such as a collapse of the legal system. Moreover, the arguments of postmodern historians are often self-refuting since they involve reasons for why we can *know* that we cannot know. Problems may still lie in a number of factors that may reduce historical confidence, such as a paucity of data. But there are no epistemic reasons that prohibit historians from proceeding with their inquiries. Accordingly, postmodern historians have provided valuable insights into the nature of knowing, even if in the judgment of the majority they have gone too far in their conclusions.

We next discussed the nature of truth. The two major theories of truth are *correspondence* and *coherence*. The former is more attractive than the latter, since there may be a number of hypotheses explaining the data that are coherent. Yet, all cannot be true. Thus, a hypothesis may be negated for not passing a criterion of coherence. But coherence does not provide the best measurement for truth. The problem with Correspondence Theory is that there is no way of verifying that our senses provide us with an accurate depiction of reality. Nevertheless, all of us assume that the depiction they provide is adequate. Otherwise, we would not bother looking both ways before crossing the street, since our perceptions of whether a large truck is approaching could just as easily be mistaken. Another challenge is that data and facts

are laden with interpretation that is a result of the horizons of historians. But this does not impact the nature of truth itself; only our ability to know it. Thus, my contention is that truth should be viewed in a correspondence sense. Our historical descriptions are incomplete, imperfect, and may not be a clear and precise picture of what actually occurred. However, they may be adequate and can be held with reasonable certainty.

The problem of horizon is huge and is responsible more than any other factor for the variety of historical descriptions attempting to answer the same question. The historian's horizon results from the sum of his knowledge, education, experience, cultural conditioning, beliefs, preferences, presuppositions, and worldview. Horizons are like eyeglasses and the historian sees everything through them. All of the factors just mentioned color the lenses of the eyeglasses. This may allow certain historians to see things more clearly, like certain shades allow the viewer to eliminate reflections on water and see fish in a lake. On the other hand, it may prevent other historians from seeing things clearly, as though there is a dark shade on everything and prevents them from seeing certain objects. The problem of horizon will be ever present when examining the data related to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.

Who bears the burden of proof? We observed there are three possibilities: credulity, skepticism, and neutrality. Methodical credulity is the preferred method when the intention and method of the author is clear. Unfortunately, most of the time clarity in these areas is absent. In the case of the Gospels, recent arguments have established that they are of the genre of Greco-Roman biography. Although *bioi* most often took historical matters seriously, biographers varied greatly in the amount of liberty they took, thereby limiting the benefit of knowing the genre of the Gospels. The problem with methodical skepticism is that, when applied across the board to ancient texts, our knowledge of history is reduced to an amount the majority of historians would find unacceptable. Methodical neutrality places the burden on the historian providing the hypothesis. The skeptic is free to criticize the hypothesis, but the moment he provides a competing hypothesis, he is responsible for defending it and the most plausible explanation prevails. In the next chapter we will discuss how the introduction of miracle into the equation impacts the burden of proof. In my investigation of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, I will adopt methodical neutrality.

The question concerning whether it is possible for historians to transcend their horizons enough to obtain adequate objectivity may be answered in the affirmative. Certainly all historians do not achieve this degree of objectivity all of the time but noteworthy examples demonstrate that adequate objectivity is possible. We looked at six criteria that may serve to assist historians in transcending their horizons: method, peer pressure, submitting ideas to unsympathetic experts, making one's horizon and method public, detachment from bias as much as possible, and accounting for the relevant historical bedrock. These provide speed bumps at which the historian should pause for reflection and, thereby, make it more difficult to travel the road of subjectivity unhindered.

We then examined the problem of certainty. Historians cannot obtain absolute certainty for many of the same reasons that absolute certainty always eludes us in most areas. The wise person is rarely hindered by her inability to possess absolute certainty. Instead, she acts upon probabilities. This is the way we live our lives and we have found that this principle appears to work rather well in leading us to correct



assessments. Thus, when historians claim that something occurred, they are saying, “Given the available data, the best explanation indicates that we are warranted in having a reasonable degree of certainty that  $x$  occurred and that it appears more certain at the moment than competing hypotheses. Accordingly, we have a rational basis for believing it. However, our conclusion is subject to revision or abandonment, since new data may surface in the future showing that things may have happened differently than presently proposed.”

We then moved on to method. We started by looking at two methods commonly employed by historians for adjudicating between competing hypotheses. The first is an argument to the best explanation. We noted five criteria commonly employed for determining the strength of a hypothesis: explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*, and illumination. The preferred hypothesis should fulfill the criteria better than competing hypotheses. A second method involves arguments from statistical inference. We looked at two ways of doing this. Bayes’ Theorem calculates the relative probability of the truth of a hypothesis given the background knowledge and the existence of the relevant evidence. We observed that we will not be able to use Bayes’ Theorem for weighing hypotheses pertaining to Jesus’ fate, since the background knowledge required is unavailable. For this reason few historians use Bayes’ Theorem. Arguments from statistical inference may be used when sufficient data is available to demonstrate that something occurs with a certain frequency. That frequency, if qualified properly, may represent the statistical probability that a particular event occurred. Since the resurrection of Jesus would be a unique event, we cannot use this form of statistical inference either. There is an extremely low probability of someone rising from the dead by natural causes. However, if Jesus rose from the dead, it is doubtful that it was the result of natural causes and there is no way of calculating the probability that God would want to raise Jesus from the dead. In light of this, we will use an argument to the best explanation when considering various hypotheses related to Jesus’ fate.

When is the historian warranted in awarding a judgment of “historical” to a hypothesis? Many historians have a spectrum of historical certainty that awards degrees of historical confidence to hypotheses. The spectrum I will use in chapter five where I weigh hypotheses is as follows: certainly not historical, very doubtful, quite doubtful, somewhat doubtful, indeterminate, somewhat certain, quite certain, very certain, certainly historical. Historians award historicity when a hypothesis is placed on the spectrum somewhere above “somewhat certain.” The place of a hypothesis on the spectrum is determined by how well it meets the five criteria for the best explanation, how much distance it enjoys in its superiority to competing hypotheses, and how effectively it addresses counterarguments.

### **1.3.6. Conclusions**

My research began with the objective of making a contribution toward solving the problem concerning the numerous and conflicting conclusions pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. I set out to explore the possibility that biblical scholars and philosophers are ill-equipped to complete an adequate investigation on the matter. The proper approach, I thought, is to learn how professional historians outside of the community of religious scholars conduct historical inquiries and then apply such an approach to answering the question, “Did Jesus rise from the dead?”

To my surprise, I discovered that most historians are barely better equipped to answer this question than are biblical scholars and philosophers. Historians outside of the community of biblical scholars are struggling with the same epistemological and methodological questions asked by biblical scholars and philosophers of history, although I hasten to add that it is far more common for historians to give serious attention to these matters than biblical scholars. But the ongoing debates are nowhere near resolution.<sup>341</sup>

Most scholars do not acknowledge the problem of horizon, much less take precautions for minimizing the negative impact it may have on their investigations. This is dangerous and it thwarts a proper practice of history. For when bias is left unchecked and method is followed haphazardly, the results are a practice of history that is a sort of fantasy world where undisciplined imagination reigns, responsible method is consigned to lower-class housing and largely ignored, and exegesis serves as a torture chamber where the historian stretches biblical texts and the meaning of words until they tell him what he wants to hear.

This journey has been of immense assistance for an investigation pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. I am aware of the limitations intrinsic to any historical inquiry. I have established criteria which I will employ in weighing hypotheses. I understand that the horizons of historians play a huge part in every historical inquiry and have suggested procedures for assisting historians in the minimizing of the negative impact of horizon.

### **1.3.7. Confessions**

One of the procedures I suggested for managing one's horizon is to be public with one's method and personal biases. I have already discussed the former and I think this is an appropriate place to address the latter. I was brought up in a conservative Christian home and made a profession of Christian faith at the age of ten. I have never experienced any inclinations toward atheism or deism. While I believe that the occasional feelings I have experienced of closeness with God may be authentic, I am aware that they may also be the result of long-term conditioning and expectations. However, there are also external circumstances that have led me to maintain a theistic worldview.

When I was a teenager—I am forty-six as I write—my father had a part-time ministry of writing and speaking that focused on the fraternal order of Freemasonry. His basic message was that Christians should not be involved in the Masonic Lodge because many of its teachings are incompatible with biblical teachings and its founders relied heavily on occultic practices. At that time I had no interest in theological matters or in the ministry activities of my father. Nevertheless, some events occurred that convinced me of the truth behind at least some of what my father was claiming. On many occasions prior to his seminars or radio interviews, paranormal phenomena would occur in our home. These experiences could be quite frightening. While alone one evening, my sister witnessed a bath towel twirling in the air with no one holding it. It frightened her so much that she called the police and ran out of the house. My mother was once awakened in the middle of the night and turned to see a large and

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<sup>341</sup> Gilderhus (2007), 74.

very dark figure standing close by, looking at her. She prayed quickly that it would depart and it did. My father usually awoke at five o'clock in the morning and went to the living room of our home where he would spend an hour in Bible study and prayer. On numerous occasions he reported that when he would pray, he would hear systematic footsteps walking toward him that would stop when in front of him. Sometimes the footsteps would be accompanied by the additional sound of a chain dragging.

For myself, there were countless times that I thought that I sensed the presence of something evil in the room. It was not concrete like those experiences of my parents and oldest sister and I was always aware that my being on the alert may have created an expectation and the feeling itself. However, I had two experiences that were of a more concrete nature. The first occurred while I was in high school. I usually went to bed around 10:30pm. Mine was the smallest bedroom and the door did not fit properly. In order to close it completely, I had to press down on the door handle and make a deliberate effort to push it shut. There could be no quiet entry or exit. One evening I excused myself from my parents and two sisters who were watching television and went to bed at the normal time. I closed my door completely and proceeded with my ritual of reading a chapter in the Bible, turning the light off, and praying for approximately five minutes before falling asleep. Shortly into my prayer, I had the clear perception that something of adult size and weight sat down on the bed next to me. I felt that portion of the mattress compress. Too frightened to open my eyes for fear of what I might see, I uttered "In the name of Jesus I order you to leave," after which the mattress returned to its original shape. Skeptics will no doubt think that I was probably dreaming or experiencing a sort of waking hallucination. While I cannot rule out either of those options, to my knowledge I have never experienced a hallucination otherwise nor have I confused a dream with reality. And I am strongly convinced to this day that my experience was neither a dream nor a hallucination.

On the second occasion, I was a college student, at home on a semester break. It was my custom to go out at night to a nearby ball field where I would be alone and could pray in solitude. There was a large grocery store across the street and the lighted parking lot provided enough lighting for me to see where I was walking. One evening while on the field I felt particularly in the mood to worship. I lay on the ground and sang a few hymns of praise. At one point, I heard systematic footsteps in the distance walking in my direction. This did not alarm me, since people occasionally walked their dog in the adjacent field or would come out for a jog. However, when I sensed that the footsteps continued in my direction, I looked up. The sound ceased. Looking around I saw no one. Thinking the sound may have been caused by the wind, I returned to prayer and worship. As soon as I did, the sound of the footsteps resumed. After a few moments, I looked up only once again only for the sound to stop. I did this one or two more times. On the final time when I resumed praying the footsteps began running toward me and at that point I got up in fear and ran home. Both of these events occurred 25-30 years ago and I realize that my recollection of the details may not be completely accurate. However, they were unpleasant experiences that I will never forget. I have since discovered that numerous people, including a few close friends, have had similar and even much more frightening experiences. My family and I interpreted our experiences of the paranormal as demonic. While this interpretation may or may not be accurate, for me they provide a serious challenge to metaphysical naturalism.

Answered prayer has likewise contributed to my adherence to theism. I acknowledge that most of my answered prayers may be explained by coincidence. When I was offered the job I desired, was it an answer to prayer or because I was the most qualified applicant? I may never know. However, there are a few answered prayers that stand out to me. I have had friends and personal acquaintances who have more impressive examples. But here I will provide two first-hand reports.

During a summer break while in graduate school, I was with my girlfriend one evening when, around nine or ten o'clock, she asked me to pray for her mother who had been sick. We prayed for her that very moment. Then my girlfriend left for her ten-minute drive home. The next day when we spoke, she shared that when she arrived home, she asked her mother how she was feeling. It was more of a courtesy question than one of expectation. To her surprise, her mother answered that she had been feeling terrible until about ten minutes prior when, for no reason known to her, she began feeling as though her health had been restored.

On the other occasion, I was serving as a guest speaker for a regional denominational church retreat for high-school students. About ten minutes prior to speaking on a Saturday morning, a youth leader directed my attention to a student named Amber who appeared to be weeping in the hallway. Apparently, she had just been informed that her grandfather who had undergone heart surgery the previous day had now turned for the worse and was expected to die at any moment. A youth leader asked if I would be willing to speak with her. I agreed and immediately went to her. We spoke for a few moments and then I prayed for her grandfather. Later that afternoon I was taking a walk through the grounds and passed Amber and three or four of her male friends who were walking in the opposite direction. I asked if she had an update on her grandfather's condition. She did not and so I asked if she and her friends would be interested in praying for him once again. They all looked at one another with some trepidation, but they did agree. We sat down at that very spot and all of us prayed for Amber's grandfather. I believe that it was less than two hours later when an elated Amber ran up to me, saying that she had been looking for me. Her grandfather had just called her and asked if she had been praying for him. He explained that at a specific time he had felt something come over his body and heal him. The surprised physicians had then informed him shortly thereafter that it appeared that he was going to be fine. She ascertained that he had experienced this healing very close to the precise moment our group had prayed. Was this the combination of an anomaly and coincidental timing? Perhaps. But given a collection of what I regard as legitimate experiences of the paranormal, I believe I am justified in concluding that some sort of supernatural being answered our prayers and healed Amber's grandfather. Experiences of the paranormal and answered prayer may serve as evidence that reality is quite more complex than atheism and deism normally allow.<sup>342</sup>

My desire is for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus to be confirmed, since it would provide further confirmation of my Christian beliefs. For me, if the resurrection of Jesus were ever disproved, I would feel compelled to abandon my Christian faith and remain a theist with no commitments to a particular view. I confess that my previous research was conducted more in the interest of confirming

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<sup>342</sup> See chapter 2, note 84.

my faith and for use in apologetic presentations than being an open investigation where I would follow the evidence. As a result of my discussion of horizon, I am aware of the frustrating influence horizon brings to any investigation and I am not naïve to think myself exempt.

During the past three years, I have attempted to divest myself of preconditioning and have worked toward experiencing empathy when reading the works of those with whom I do not agree. I have frequently asked God for his patience and guidance as I have wrestled through the issues. I have been able to experience what I believe was a neutral position for a number of brief periods. During these, I have been so uncertain of what I believe in terms of Jesus' resurrection that I prayed for God's guidance and continued patience if the Christianity I was now doubting is true. I was walking on a balance beam and could have tipped toward either side. However, I also confess that each of those occasions of neutrality did not continue for longer than two months and that it was not usually reasoning that brought me out of them—since I was saving the weighing of hypotheses for the final chapter—but instead it was a lack of conscious and sustained efforts on my part to be in as close to a neutral position as possible. Consequently, I experienced a return to my default position of belief. Still, although I am aware that I cannot overcome my personal bias, I maintain that I can be adequately objective and that my present research is, to the best of my knowledge, an honest investigation of the data.

I have written and published three books contending for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus and have defended that position in numerous public debates with opponents such as Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman. Given my familiarity with the arguments for and against the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, I am doubtful that I will conclude that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur. However, I believe myself very open to the possibility that the historical evidence for the event is not strong enough to place the resurrection hypothesis far enough along on my spectrum of historical certainty to warrant a conclusion of “historical.”

Because of the position I have taken in previous work, I would experience a bit of personal embarrassment if I were to arrive at the more modest conclusion of a historical question mark. I would also most likely disappoint two scholars who have not only been very influential in my life but have also become close friends: Gary Habermas and William Lane Craig. Even given all this, I am convinced that my interest in truth supersedes my fear of embarrassment and disappointment. If the resurrection of Jesus could not be confirmed historically, my specifically Christian faith could still survive. But a disconfirmation of the resurrection would lead me to abandon it.

I presently enjoy a position of national leadership within the largest protestant denomination in North America, a position for which I carry influence, am paid fairly, and through which I find much satisfaction. I am aware that should my research lead me to the conclusion that Jesus did not rise from the dead I would be dismissed from my position and my employment would be terminated. But, should that occur, there is a good chance I could then make a small fortune writing books that challenge the traditional view of Christianity. I would not even need my present job! More seriously, there are other factors that push me toward objectivity. I am wrestling with this topic because I am committed to seeking, finding, and following truth. At the



moment I am quite persuaded by the scientific and philosophical evidence that some sort of Supreme Being exists who is responsible for the creation of the universe and life itself. Thus, I would still hold to the existence of God if I concluded that Jesus did not rise from the dead. And I am much more interested in pleasing the true God than I am in hanging onto my job.

All historians of Jesus have something on the line in this discussion. Now that I have reported my experiences and laid bare my hopes, readers may assess the following discussion in terms of my approach and whether it was created, consciously or unconsciously, to achieve the results I desire rather than being a genuine attempt to conduct an objective historical investigation. This is important, since there is much dispute over the historical value of a number of the sources we are about to survey.

## Chapter Two

### The Historian and Miracles

[T]he historian (even one who is a believer) finds herself simply unable to deal with some of the central assertions of the Christian faith, the most striking example of this being the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

*Gregory Dawes*

As long as historiography does not begin dogmatically with a narrow concept of reality according to which ‘dead men do not rise,’ it is not clear why historiography should not in principle be able to speak about Jesus’ resurrection as the explanation that is best established of such events as the disciples’ experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb.<sup>2</sup>

*Wolfhart Pannenberg*

#### 2.1. Introductory Comments

A number of years ago, my wife was stopped at a traffic light when a truck hit her car from behind. She sustained permanent injury to her back as a result. The truck driver’s insurance company was stubborn and did not want to pay most of the expenses we incurred. So, the matter went to court. I was one of the first witnesses called and at one point stated that the insurance company did not even want to provide a rental car while our car was being repaired. The moment I said that, the defense attorney made a motion. The judge then dismissed me. Then he dismissed the jury. A few minutes later I learned that the judge had declared a mistrial. I had not been informed by my attorney that “insurance company” was a forbidden term in a trial such as ours.

Something similar often occurs in the field of historical Jesus research. There is a lot of discussion over what the real Jesus actually said and did. But when anyone mentions the terms “miracle” or “resurrection” it is not uncommon for some scholars to jump to their feet and shout, “Objection! You can’t go there as a historian.” Although I am not an attorney, I would be willing to bet that there are some good reasons for barring the mention of the insurance company involved. After all, insurance companies are big, impersonal corporations with deep pockets. Reminding jurors of this might bias them toward finding for the plaintiff. There are likewise reasons provided for why historians are forbidden from investigating miracle claims. This is important, since if historians are barred from investigating miracle claims, we

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<sup>1</sup> Dawes (1998), 32. So also Eastham (2000): “There is no historical evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is the limit case of historical method, plainly not the sort of topic to preoccupy the Jesus Seminar” (176).

<sup>2</sup> Pannenberg (1974), 109; cf. Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 71. So also Braaten (1999): “The resurrection is to be considered an historical event because it is the subject of reports that locate it in time and space. It happened in Jerusalem a short time after Jesus was crucified” (155).

can go no further in our inquiry pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. As historians we have reached a dead end.

I am convinced the reasons typically provided are mistaken. If a past event left traces, most historians hold that it can be the subject of historical investigation. What about when the event in question is a miracle? By miracle, I am referring to *an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate*. That is not to say that there still could be a natural explanation which has yet to be discovered. It is to say that the nature of the event itself is such that there could be no natural cause.<sup>3</sup> Some

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<sup>3</sup> The term *miracle* is an essentially contested concept and numerous definitions have been offered: Bartholomew (2000): “a miracle is an act by some power external to the natural world. If, therefore, something happens which cannot be explained by the natural processes of the world and which cannot be attributed to human agency then there is a prima facie case for supposing that a miracle has occurred” (81); Beaudoin (2006): “*events in the natural world that would not occur but for the interposing of a supernatural force*” (116, emphasis in original); Bultmann (1958): “miracles are events which in themselves have no religious character, but which are attributed to divine (or dæmonic) causation” (173); Davis (1993): “a miracle is an event E that (1) is brought about by God and (2) is contrary to the prediction of a law of nature that we have compelling reason to believe is true. That is, the law predicts that, given the circumstances preceding E, some event other than E will occur; E occurs because God causes E to occur; and no other law of nature or set of laws of nature could have helped us to have predicted, given the circumstances, that E would have occurred” (Davis [1993], 10-11); Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008): “events that contradict the normal workings of nature in such a way as to be virtually beyond belief and to require an acknowledgment that supernatural forces have been at work” (241); cf. Ehrman’s comments in Craig and Ehrman (2006) where he states that miracle “is by definition, the most implausible explanation” (13); Geisler (1999): “A *miracle* is a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events” (450); Hume (*d. 1776*): “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature” and “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent,” in David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, Vol II, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, “Of Miracles” (originally published 1777), 114, 115. An online text is located at <http://etext.leeds.ac.uk/hume/ehu/ehupbsb.htm> (Leeds Electronic Text Centre, University of Leeds, 2000); C. S. Lewis (1978): “an interference with Nature by supernatural power” (5); Mackie (1982): “a supernatural intrusion into the normally closed system that works in accordance with [the laws of nature]” (22); Meier (1994): “A miracle is (1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by any interested and fair-minded observer, (2) an event that finds no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space, and (3) an event that is the result of a special act of god, doing what no human power can do” (Vol. 2, 512). Interestingly, Meier does not regard the resurrection of Jesus as a miracle, since it does not meet his first criteria of a miracle (525); here Meier seems to confuse the *definition* of a miracle with the *identification* of a miracle. Moreland and Craig (2003) distinguish between *providentia ordinaria* and *providential extraordinaria*, or acts of God that are ordinary and extraordinary. Classifying miracle as *providential extraordinaria*, they define miracles as “naturally (or physically) impossible events, events which at certain times and places cannot be produced by the relevant natural causes” (567-68). Purtill (“Defining Miracles” in Habermas and Geivett [1997]): “an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting” (62-63); Swinburne (1989): “an event of an extraordinary kind brought about by a god and of religious significance” (2); Theissen and Merz (1998): “A miracle is an event which goes against normal expectations and has a religious significance: it is understood as the action of a god” (309); Tucker (2005): “divine feats of strength” (378); Twelftree (1999) provides a list of eight general definitions of miracle (25-27). The following I owe to the research of Colin Brown (1984), the page number is where the citation appears in C. Brown’s book: Kant (*d. 1804*): “they are events in the world the *operating laws* of whose causes are, and must remain, absolutely unknown to us. Accordingly, one can conceive of either *theistic* or *demonic* miracles” (106); Augustine (*d. 430*): “whatever appears that is difficult or unusual above the hope and power of them who wonder” (7); Hobbes (*d. 1679*): “A miracle is a work of God (besides His operation by the way of nature, ordained in the Creation) done for the making manifest to His elect the mission of an extraordinary minister for their salvation. . . . that no devil, angel, or created spirit can do a miracle” (35); Locke (*d. 1704*): “A miracle, then, I take to be a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator,

historians assign the study of miracle claims to theologians and philosophers, asserting that historians do not possess the tools for investigating the occurrence of a miraculous event. Thus, if a miracle truly occurred, the historian *as historian* can never conclude that it did.

In this chapter we will discuss objections to the historical consideration of miracle claims as advanced by these scholars: David Hume, C. Behan McCullagh, John P. Meier, Bart D. Ehrman, A. J. M. Wedderburn, and James D. G. Dunn. We will see how each objection fails and why the hesitancy standard for many historians before the investigation of a miracle claim is, after all, unnecessary.

## 2.2. David Hume

In his treatment *Of Miracles*, the Scottish skeptic David Hume argues that we are never justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred. In part one of his essay, he states that the uniform experience of the overwhelming majority of people is that they have never witnessed a miracle. This uniform experience amounts to a proof. Therefore,

That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.<sup>4</sup>

Hume explains his principle with an illustration of someone who informs him that he has seen a dead man restored to life. He asks what is more probable: that this person is deceived, is deceiving, or that the dead man actually rose from the dead? Hume weighs the data and decides on the option that is the lesser miracle. “If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates,” then we are merited in holding that the event occurred.<sup>5</sup>

Hume goes on in part two to provide four reasons why no miracle claims have ever met or could ever meet this burden of proof. First, the witnesses are never good enough to warrant preferring their testimony over a naturalistic theory.

There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in

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and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine” (43); Tillich (*d.* 1965): “A genuine miracle is first of all an event which is astonishing, unusual, shaking, without contradicting the rational structure of reality. In the second place, it is an event which points to the mystery of being, expressing its relation to us in a definite way. In the third place, it is an occurrence which is received as a sign-event in an ecstatic experience” (172); Warfield (*d.* 1921): “an effect in the external world, produced by the immediate efficiency of God” (199); D. and R. Basinger: “a religious concept (an act of God) which derives its uniqueness not from its explicability status, but from the fact that it is part of an unusual event sequence” (210).

<sup>4</sup> Hume (1777), 116.

<sup>5</sup> Hume (1777), 116.

case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable. All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.<sup>6</sup>

Hume's second reason draws from the principle of analogy and appeals to antecedent probability.

[W]e ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, two arguments are here put forth: First, if we have observed that animals do not talk in our lifetime, nor have spoken in the recent past, we should reject views maintaining they did in the past. Balaam's donkey<sup>8</sup> and the animals of *Aesop's Fables* serve as examples. Second, if the historical record is nearly unanimous that the dead do not return to life, the few testimonies to the contrary should be rejected. Eminent Humean scholar Antony Flew adds that "the present relics of the past cannot be interpreted as historical evidence at all unless we presume that the same fundamental regularities obtained then as still obtain today."<sup>9</sup>

Hume's third reason goes back to the poor quality of the witnesses behind miracle reports: "[T]hey are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations. . . . *It is strange . . . that such prodigious events never happen in our days.* But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages."<sup>10</sup> Hume's fourth reason is that testimonies of miracles in one religion are weighed against an infinite number of witnesses who testify of miracle claims in competing religions. Therefore, these cancel out each other. Thus, based on his four reasons, Hume concludes that "a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion."<sup>11</sup>

Although numerous replies to Hume have been offered,<sup>12</sup> his thesis remains influential, even after more than two hundred years. Dunn writes, "As David Hume had earlier pointed out, it is more probable that the account of a miracle is an untrue account than that the miracle recounted actually took place."<sup>13</sup> Even most conservative Christian scholars would not object to the principle that if a competing hypothesis to Jesus' resurrection were of at least equal weight to the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead, then for the matter of historical adjudication, the natural theory should be preferred.<sup>14</sup> Hume's thesis is valuable since it begs the historian to be extra cautious when considering the historicity of miracle claims. However, I will

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<sup>6</sup> Hume (1777), 116-17.

<sup>7</sup> Hume (1777), 117. Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) argues similarly (244).

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 22:28-30.

<sup>9</sup> A. Flew, "Non-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous" in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 49.

<sup>10</sup> Hume (1777), 119-20, emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Hume (1777), 127.

<sup>12</sup> In personal correspondence with Christian philosopher Gary Habermas, Antony Flew wrote that the book Habermas edited with Geivett, *In Defense of Miracles*, is now *the* book for skeptics to answer pertaining to addressing Hume's arguments. Also see Habermas and Licona (2004), chapter 8; Swinburne, "For the Possibility of Miracles" in Pojman (1998), 308-14; Twelftree (1999), 40-43.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn (2003), 103-04.

<sup>14</sup> Eddy and Boyd (2007), 52, 78.



highlight a few responses that weaken his contention that a miracle can never be established.

**2.2.1.** Hume's first point is that witnesses to miracles are never good enough to prefer their testimony over an alternative natural explanation. According to Hume, the testimony of any reliable event must have the following credentials in order to qualify as a historical event. It must be attested by a sufficient number of witnesses of "unquestioned good sense, education, and learning" and "of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion" of deceit.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, these witnesses are to be of such a high reputation in the eyes of others, that they would have much to lose if lying. Finally, he demands that the event be performed publicly in a major part of the world so that its visibility would be unavoidable. When all of these conditions are met, historians may have confidence that the testimony under consideration is true.<sup>16</sup>

If Hume's criteria for accepting testimony as true were employed outside of miracle claims, we would probably have to dismiss the vast majority of what we believe we presently know about the past. Much of what we hold about the past was reported by a lone source and is rarely "beyond all suspicion." While data meeting Hume's criteria are certainly desirable, historians do not hesitate to make historical judgments when they are unmet, since they have a number of tools with which they work, namely criteria for authenticity and arguments to the best explanation.<sup>17</sup>

Hume's argument concerning the intelligence and integrity of witnesses to miracles makes three claims: Testimonies of miracles abound among the ignorant and uneducated, they do not occur in modern times, and deceitful witnesses abound. On these claims Hume's argument again faces numerous challenges. It is true that citizens in third-world countries may be more gullible than the educated in modern cultures and may mistake for supernatural a spectacular event known by scientists to have a natural cause, such as an eclipse or the northern lights. It is likewise true that there are numerous miracle claims from the past and that deceitful witnesses abound. However, the converse is also true: miracles are both claimed and believed by highly educated persons in modern society and truthful witnesses abound.<sup>18</sup> Certainly caution is in order. We must consider miracle claims on a case-by-case basis. If the evidence for a miracle is credible and no plausible natural explanations exist, to reject it on the basis that other miracle claims abound among the ignorant and uneducated is to be guilty of arguing *ad hominem*. Thus, historians need not bow to Hume's criteria for acceptable testimony.

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<sup>15</sup> Hume (1777), 116.

<sup>16</sup> Hume (1777), 116-17.

<sup>17</sup> Habermas (2003), 7-8. Habermas adds, "Strangely enough, Hume was well aware of this, as he did not apply these four criteria to his own multi-volumes *History of England*" (8).

<sup>18</sup> Keener (2003) writes, "As a former atheist who has personally witnessed, occasionally experienced, and is regularly exposed to reliable testimonies of instantaneous supernatural phenomena within circles where such phenomena typically occur (including instantaneous, visible healings in response to prayer), often through my work in Africa or among Pentecostals, I confess my own skepticism toward the prevailing anti-miraculous skepticism of Western culture. My wife, an African with a Ph.D. in history from the University of Paris, also offers a substantial collection of testimonies. Interpreters might seek to suggest plausible alternative, non-supernatural explanations for the thousands of miracle claims in the Two-Thirds World today, but for the most part the academy simply ignores such claims as if no one has offered them." Keener goes on to note, however, that these must be regarded as anecdotal because of "the limited base of data from which we work and the unfortunate dearth of academic works cataloguing such claims" (1:267).

**2.2.2.** Hume's second point is similar to the principle of analogy presented nearly one and a half centuries later by Ernst Troeltsch and focuses on antecedent probability:<sup>19</sup> Events of the past do not differ in kind from those in the present. Thus, if miracles do not occur today, they did not occur in the past.<sup>20</sup> One might argue that if the historian fails to employ this principle, there is nothing to prevent us from accepting fairy tales as historical.<sup>21</sup> Dunn explains the application of analogy to the resurrection of Jesus:

When we add the initial observation—that departure from this life (death) can indeed be described as a historical event, whereas entry on to some further existence can hardly be so described—it can be seen just how problematic it is to speak of the resurrection of Jesus as historical. . . . [T]he historical method inevitably works with some application of the principle of analogy.<sup>22</sup>

Pieter Craffert who takes a social scientific approach likewise comments:

The principle of analogy which is one of the basic principles of all social scientific study, is not restricted to the sceptical historian, but applies to all historiography as well as to everyday life. There is no other option but to apply to present practical standards of everyday life to determine whether the decision of the historian to reject the claims of some events narrated in ancient sources, is valid.<sup>23</sup>

While analogy demands our attention and caution in a study of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, there are drawbacks to its unqualified usage. Numerous established modern beliefs would fail using the principle of analogy. For example, we could not conclude that dinosaurs existed in the past. After all, historians and scientists do not experience them today. One may object that we can still establish dinosaurs scientifically, since their fossils remain. But the historian may reply that this is in spite of the principle of analogy and that we may likewise be able to establish miracles historically, because we have credible testimony that remains. Therefore, the principle of analogy can be taken too far as Dunn explains: “[T]he acids which the historical method uses to clean away the surface varnish and later reworkings of the original painting eat not only into such later accretions but into the original painting and the very canvas itself.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Troeltsch (1913), 2:729-53.

<sup>20</sup> Also see Anchor (1999) who says that only our direct knowledge of reality in the present allows us to decide what the past was like (115).

<sup>21</sup> See Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) who writes that “experience shows that we should always prefer the natural hypothesis, or we shall fall into superstition” (55). Also see Robert Price in his debate with William Lane Craig, *Intellectual Foundations: Did Jesus of Nazareth Rise from the Dead?* Tape 1. C. F. Evans (1970) notes the difficulty is “that we have no criteria for judging an event which is strictly without parallel” (177). J. Moltmann, “The Resurrection of Christ: Hope for the World” in D'Costa, ed. (1996) observes that Troeltsch “certainly no longer has the last word today, even among historians.” Nevertheless, he finds Troeltsch's arguments strong enough that he cannot speak of Christ's resurrection as a historical event (78ff).

<sup>22</sup> Dunn (2003), 876-7.

<sup>23</sup> Craffert (1989), 342. The social sciences usually are thought to include the arts and humanities. For our purposes, psychology and literature are the disciplines most often employed in a social scientific approach to biblical studies.

<sup>24</sup> Dunn (2003), 70. We may add that the strength of cumulative data is more important than analogous events as Pannenberg (1983) suggests: “Does not the postulate of the fundamental homogeneity of all events usually form the chief argument against the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, for example?”

Another weakness of the principle of analogy is that it makes it difficult to recognize unique events, and we may wonder whether it is “inevitably too restrictive.”<sup>25</sup> Philosopher Norman Geisler writes,

[I]f it were true that no present exception can overthrow supposed “laws” of nature based on our uniform experience in the past, then there could be no true progress in our scientific understanding of the world. . . . This is precisely what happened when certain outer-spatial “exceptions” to Newton’s law of gravitation were found and Einstein’s theory of relativity was considered broader and more adequate. Without established exceptions, no progress can be made in science. In short, Hume’s objections to miracles seem to be unscientific!<sup>26</sup>

Does the principle of analogy allow for the possibility of an act of God or does it *a priori* rule it out? If we knew for a fact that God does not exist, the *a priori* exclusion of miracles would be justified. This is where the horizon of the historian discussed in the previous chapter factors into every historical investigation.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, historians should neither presuppose nor *a priori* exclude the possibility of God’s intervention in human affairs.

The principle of analogy also appears to assume metaphysical naturalism, since it presupposes that miracles do not occur today.<sup>28</sup> But how is such an assumption justified without arguing in a circle? Another historian may hold that miracles do, in fact, occur today. “If miracles are presently occurring, then Troeltsch’s principle of analogy could be granted and used to *support* the reality of past miracles.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the horizon of the historian plays a large role in their use of Troeltsch’s principle of analogy. Pannenberg explains,

If somebody considers it with David Hume (or today with John Dominic Crossan) to be a general rule, suffering no exception, that the dead remain

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But if that is so, does not the opinion, which has come to be regarded as virtually self-evident, that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be a historical event, rest on a remarkably weak foundation? Only the particular characteristics of the reports about it make it possible to judge the historicity of the resurrection, not the prejudgment that every event must be fundamentally of the same kind as every other” (49, n90).

<sup>25</sup> Dunn (2003), 70.

<sup>26</sup> N. L. Geisler, “Miracles and the Modern Mind” in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 80-81. See also Dunn (2003), 106-07. We may also note that a resurrection may not be as *unscientific* as some may think. See F. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). Even if Tipler is mistaken, his work demonstrates that a scientific explanation for the possibility of “resurrection” is available within the scientific enterprise.

<sup>27</sup> See also Bartholomew (2000), 112-13.

<sup>28</sup> Metaphysical naturalism is sometimes confused with methodological naturalism. The latter is the process by which a scientist or historian looks for a natural cause of an event. Although she does not rule out the possibility of a supernatural cause, she limits herself only to the consideration of the natural. Metaphysical naturalism goes further by claiming that everything has a natural cause. Supernatural causes are *a priori* ruled out as possibilities. Although little difference exists in practice between methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism, the latter is guided more by the metaphysics of the practitioner.

<sup>29</sup> F. J. Beckwith, “History and Miracles” in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 97. Also see Meier (1994), 516.

dead, then of course one cannot accept the Christian assertion that Jesus was raised. But then this is not a historical judgment but an ideological belief.<sup>30</sup>

The principle of analogy is also limited by the knowledge and experience of the particular historian, which may be insufficient and misleading.

Our knowledge of the world around us is gained by gathering information. When we cast our net into the sea of experience, certain data turn up. If we cast our net into a small lake, we won't be sampling much of the ocean's richness. If we make a worldwide cast, we have a more accurate basis for what exists. Here is the crunch. If we cast into our own little lakes, it is not surprising if we do not obtain an accurate sampling of experience. However, a worldwide cast will reveal many reports of unusual occurrences that might be investigated and determined to be miracles. Surely most of the supernatural claims would be found to be untrustworthy. But before making the absolute observation that no miracles have ever happened, someone would have to investigate each report. It only takes a *single justified example* to show that there is more to reality than a physical world. We must examine an impossibly large mountain of data to justify the naturalistic conclusion assumed in this objection.<sup>31</sup>

It would be a seemingly impossible task to investigate every miracle claim, thus, rendering Hume's assertion that the uniform experience of reality supports the nonexistence of miracles equally impossible to support. Accordingly, C. S. Lewis notes,

[W]e know the experience against [miracles] to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.<sup>32</sup>

If historians do not follow the principle of analogy, will they find themselves embracing superstitions? I see no reason why this must be the case if proper historical method is applied. We do not interpret *Aesop's Fables* as history because a highly plausible natural hypothesis is available considering genre. Miracle claims must be judged on an individual basis. Accordingly, the threat of superstition should not prohibit historians from proceeding while being careful to apply sound method.<sup>33</sup> Wright explains, "The natural/supernatural distinction itself, and the near-equation of

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<sup>30</sup> Pannenberg (1998), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Habermas and Licona (2004), 144. See also Habermas (2003), 6; Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): "People do not want to be stigmatized, to have others think them shackled to superstition. But the censoring of testimony does not allow us to remain loyal to the realities of human experience; and although the facts are too little known, surveys from various parts of the world indicate that perceived contact with the dead is, however we interpreted, a regular part of cross-cultural experience" (271); Eddy and Boyd (2007): "No longer should scholars feel justified in calling their work 'critical' when they foreclose the nature of the conclusions they will find in their historical research by arbitrarily restricting the pool of experience they base their analogies upon to the myopic experience of their own secularized academic subculture" (82; cf. 67, 70); Witherington (2006), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis (1978), 102. See also Gregory (2006), 137-38.

<sup>33</sup> See Beaudoin (2006), 123. Viney (1989), while rejecting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, maintains that "the strategies of Craig and Habermas are basically sound" (125).

‘supernatural’ with ‘superstition’, are scarecrows that Enlightenment thought has erected in its fields to frighten away anyone following the historical argument where it leads. It is high time the birds learned to take no notice.”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, perhaps the most difficult challenge to the principle of analogy comes from Ben Meyer who asks,

When the principle of analogy was made to presuppose the impossibility of miracles, did it presuppose a grounded judgment or just an assumption? If it is grounded, what grounds it? Scientific knowledge? Philosophical reflection on scientific knowledge? Or what?<sup>35</sup>

Meyer goes on to explain that it cannot be grounded in scientific knowledge since science does not seek to answer questions pertaining to these matters. Neither can the philosophy of science rule out the possibility of miracles, since scientific knowledge is empirical.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, we observe a number of reasons why analogy does not prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims.

**2.2.3.** Hume claims that antecedent probability lends strength to his use of analogy: “[W]e ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations.” Thus, if the greatest number of observations in the past is that when a person dies, he or she stays dead, a greater probability already exists that reports of a person returning to life from the dead are false.<sup>37</sup>

As with the principle of analogy, several major problems beset an antecedent probability argument against the consideration of miracle claims by historians. First, unique and improbable events known to have occurred would have to be ruled out as the best (or most probable) explanation by historians. For example, we could never conclude that a specific lottery winner actually won, since the probability of anyone, much less a specific person, winning the lottery on a specific day is vastly outweighed by the probability that no one will win.<sup>38</sup> As a result, by placing too much value on

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<sup>34</sup> Wright (2003), 707n63.

<sup>35</sup> Meyer (1979), 100.

<sup>36</sup> Pannenberg (1983) similarly remarks, “To be sure, the connection in cultural history between the development of historical method and the rise of modern anthropocentric philosophies of history cannot be dismissed by remarking, for instance, that this was only a matter of the accidental conditions involved in the origin of historical method. For there is indeed an anthropocentric element in the very structure of the methodological principles of historical criticism. The question is only whether this methodologically essential element must be bound up with an anthropocentric world view” (40).

<sup>37</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 244; Ehrman (2000), 166-67, 177-78; Ehrman’s comments in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12.

<sup>38</sup> In a debate on whether God exists between myself (theist) and Steve Yothman (atheist) held at the University of Georgia (Athens, GA. USA) on March 2, 2006, Yothman asserted that this type of argument is mistaken. In response to my argument that the chances of our universe being life-permitting rather than life-prohibiting and that life would exist on this planet are infinitesimally small, Yothman argued that I am mistaken, since the actual chances must be 1.0 (or 100%) because it occurred this way. I noted in my reply that this is a misunderstanding of how probability works. It would be similar to arguing that there was a 1.0 or 100% chance that the Pittsburgh Steelers would win the Super Bowl in 2006 and that this is evidenced by the fact that they did! One must consider the probabilities prior to the football season, not after the championship game.



antecedent probability in historical judgments, the historian is many times forced to make conclusions that are incorrect.<sup>39</sup>

Second, when applied to the resurrection of Jesus, antecedent probability proves much less than Hume would hope. The failure of billions who have not returned from the dead only warrants the conclusion that the dead are not raised *by natural causes*. The Christian claim is not “Jesus is risen by natural causes.” The claim is “Jesus, the Son of God, is risen” or “God raised Jesus from the dead.”<sup>40</sup> Can historians *a priori* conclude that if Jesus is divine he cannot raise himself or that if God wanted to raise Jesus from the dead there is a high degree of probability that he cannot have done so? It would not appear so.<sup>41</sup>

A third problem with Hume’s antecedent probability argument is that, even if legitimate, it is only applicable when blind processes are involved. The principle does not work when enabled intentionality is present. Consider my example in the first chapter of my son lifting weights. The chances that an average twelve-year-old boy can lift two hundred pounds over his head are zero. However, if an external agent, such as a bodybuilder, were to enter the equation, the chances increase significantly to almost one hundred percent. Similarly, if a context exists where there is reason to believe God may have entered the equation, the chances that we have a genuine miracle on our hands may be greater than they are for naturalistic theories, such as myth, dream, or hallucination, especially if other data point away from these natural hypotheses. Flew comments, “Certainly given some beliefs about God, the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely.”<sup>42</sup>

**2.2.4.** Hume’s fourth point is that miracle claims from religions conflicting with Christianity cancel out claims to Christian miracles. Serious problems beset this point as well. As Hume noted, most miracle claims are poorly attested. Miracle stories involving founders of several major world religions appear centuries after the purported events and are not usually corroborated by multiple sources or neutral-to-

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<sup>39</sup> An antecedent probability argument would also abrogate a number of scientific beliefs commonly held with a high degree of confidence. For example, observable phenomena indicate that something cannot come out of nothing. There are no known exceptions to this rule. If something began to exist, it had a cause. However, nearly all modern cosmologists maintain that the “Big Bang” was the event that signified the birth of everything out of nothing. See Hawking and Penrose (1996), 20; Hoyle (1975), 658. Consequently, we would be forced to discard the Big Bang theory. Accordingly, Hume’s use of antecedent probability may actually be unscientific.

<sup>40</sup> “That Jesus rose naturally from the dead, that is to say, that all of the cells in his body spontaneously came back to life again, is a hypothesis so absurdly improbable that virtually all other explanations—hallucinations, apparent death, even E.T. abduction—will be more probable” (Craig’s comments in Copan and Tacelli, eds. [2000], 186).

<sup>41</sup> Bartholomew (2000): “If Jesus Christ was what orthodoxy claims, he was not ‘as other men’ and hence there is no reason for assuming that what is true for all others was true for him. Hence there is no ground for pronouncing on the possibility of the resurrection from a scientific standpoint” (112). Accordingly, Cohn-Sherbok (1996) is mistaken when he finds the resurrection of Jesus “theoretically possible if God is all-powerful. Yet, like many other modern Jews, I find such an idea implausible because of the findings of contemporary science” (196). Dawes (1998) is likewise mistaken when he writes that “no historian could come to this conclusion [that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’] without ceasing to act as a historian” (35). His reasons are “modern historians are reluctant to attribute any action to the direct intervention of God” and because no singular event such as a divine resurrection can overturn the probability of what is normally observed that the dead do not rise (35).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Flew’s presence by Habermas from a personal correspondence between Flew and Miethe in Miethe, ed. (1987), 39.

hostile witnesses. However, the existence of counterfeit currency does not negate the existence of the genuine. In the same manner, poorly attested miracle claims are scarcely able to rule out well-evidenced ones. For example, if the resurrection of Jesus has good evidence for it, why should a single report of post-mortem appearances of Apollonius of Tyana made more than a century later be placed on equal ground? Our only extant biography comes from Philostratus writing around A.D. 225, 130 years after the death of Apollonius.<sup>43</sup> Philostratus informs us that his primary source for the life of Apollonius is Damis, whom most scholars maintain was a fictional figure invented by Philostratus who also claims that Damis's information ended prior to the death of Apollonius.<sup>44</sup> So, he continues his biography by supplementing Damis's information with reports from unnamed sources.<sup>45</sup> Belonging to this latter category are a number of reports of post-mortem appearances of Apollonius as a spirit being.<sup>46</sup> Only one is described in detail and it is not a resurrection. Instead, an unnamed person at an unidentified time sees Apollonius in a dream.<sup>47</sup> Apollonius believed in the immortality of the soul.<sup>48</sup> For him, post-mortem existence did not include a revivification of the corpse. Prior to his death, Apollonius invites Damis and Demetrius to take hold of his hand so that they may know he is alive, literally not a ghost that cannot be held, since he has not yet "cast aside" his body.<sup>49</sup> Contrast this with Jesus' invitation for his disciples to take hold of him after his resurrection so that they may know that he is not a spirit being without flesh and bones.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the post-mortem appearance reports of Philostratus are late, reported by only a single source, and never make the claim of a resurrection. Accordingly, Ehrman is mistaken when he writes,

To agree with an ancient person that Jesus healed the sick, walked on water, cast out a demon, or raised the dead is to agree, first, that there were divine persons (or magicians) walking the earth who could do such things and, second, that Jesus was one of them. . . . The evidence that is admitted in any one of these cases must be admitted in the others as well.<sup>51</sup>

Second, whereas several plausible explanations exist for most miracle claims, this may not be the case when we come to Jesus' resurrection.

Third, Hume seems to be unaware that, if either the Jewish or Christian view is true, genuine miracles could occur among unbelievers and be entirely compatible with these beliefs. For example, God acted among a nonbeliever by healing Naaman's leprosy.<sup>52</sup> Although this point cannot here be defended, many accounts exist in our

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<sup>43</sup> Very little remains that refers to Apollonius. See Lucian, "Alexander the False Prophet" 5 who speaks of him in negative terms and Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.41.5-10) who notes that Moiregenes refers to Apollonius as a "magician and philosopher" (μάγου καὶ Φιλόσοφος), that he had "magical power" (μαγείος) and was a "swindler/imposter" (γόητα).

<sup>44</sup> Philostratus. *Apollonius of Tyana*, Jones, ed. and trans. (2005), 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Philostratus 8.29.1.

<sup>46</sup> Philostratus 8.31.3. I have translated δαμμονίοις as "spirit being." A demon in this sense was a "transcendent incorporeal being" with a "status between humans and deities" (BDAG, 2000, 210).

<sup>47</sup> Philostratus 8.31.

<sup>48</sup> Philostratus 8.31.1.

<sup>49</sup> Philostratus 8.12.1. In 8.12.2 out of joy they hug Apollonius.

<sup>50</sup> Luke 24:39. See also John 20:27.

<sup>51</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Kings 5.

time of the paranormal that occur within a religious context. The Christian view allows that it might be God acting in these situations, or in some cases, that the observed phenomena are the works of demons.

Since we will consider testimonies in antiquity to have seen the risen Jesus, we must address a final statement of Hume's in relation to his fourth point.

But according to the principles here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.<sup>53</sup>

Statistician David Bartholomew points out that Hume's use of the relative values of probabilities are being applied incorrectly.<sup>54</sup> He notes the study by Charles Babbage, the father of the computer.<sup>55</sup> Babbage demonstrated that if a number of individual witnesses could be shown to have no prior collusion, the chances they would agree on a falsehood would decrease as the number of witnesses increased.<sup>56</sup> Although Babbage's estimations could be significantly weakened by not taking certain factors into consideration, Bartholomew contends that his approach toward calculating such probabilities is correct in principle.<sup>57</sup> One must employ Bayes' Theorem and compare the improbabilities that  $x$  occurred with the improbability that  $n$  witnesses believed to

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<sup>53</sup> Hume (1777), 127.

<sup>54</sup> Bartholomew (2000), 92-98.

<sup>55</sup> Bartholomew (2000) does not provide a source for Babbage's results. However, it is found in Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1938). Babbage's argument is likewise cited against Hume by statistician Zabell (1988), 344-45.

<sup>56</sup> See also Tucker (2005), 381; Davis (1983), 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Such problems involve the unlikelihood of no collusion occurring, the understanding of what is a miracle on the part of the individuals involved, and that if counterwitnesses exist, the force of their testimony combined with the prior probability of a miracle's nonoccurrence may easily be higher than a greater number of witnesses testifying to the occurrence of a miracle. Tucker (2005) writes, "Usually, there are no multiple independent testimonies for any particular miracle hypothesis, and there is insufficient evidence for considering whether the evidence of some miracle is independent. Consequently, there is insufficient information to assign values to the variables, and therefore, the proposed formulae for computing the effects of multiple independent witnesses on the probabilities of miracles are not useful" (375). Citing Theissen and Winter (2002, 14-15), Eve (2005) asserts that the existence of multiple independent sources "establishes only the age of a tradition, not its authenticity" (26). My reading of Theissen and Winter differs from Eve's on this point. I understand them to be in agreement with Eve that multiple independent sources establish an early age of a tradition. However, they add that multiple independent sources can on occasion bring historians back to the event: "the argument for fixing the relative value of a source would be a positive criterion of authenticity only in an instance where we could be certain that two sources are related because they are independent witnesses of the event to which they commonly attest and thus, so to speak, represent two independent eyewitnesses. . . . In some cases we can be almost certain that we have independent sources that reach back to the history itself, namely, where we can compare Christian and non-Christian texts" (14). I agree with Eve when he writes, "The more widespread the notion of Jesus' miracle-working is among diverse independent sources, the harder it is to maintain, as Mack wants to, that this miracle-working is simply the invention of one particular Jesus-group. And the more diverse and widespread the miracle tradition is, the earlier its originating point is likely to be, and in that sense, the more likely it is that it may go back to the historical Jesus. But this is a long way from making the criterion of multiple attestation an automatic guarantor of *high* historical probability" (32). As with Tucker above, Eve likewise notes the problem of proving the independence of the sources and adds, "This would seem to be a problem endemic to any form of historical Jesus research obliged to rely solely on early Christian sources that share a large measure of common interests" (45).

be independent have colluded in order to report the miracle falsely. Accordingly, unless the prior probability of an event's occurrence is known in fact to be zero, there comes a point when the strength of the evidence may require one to admit that the prior probability assigned is incorrect and may rather support the opposite conclusion.<sup>58</sup>

In light of his four arguments, Hume encourages us to ask a question when we face a miracle claim, particularly that of Jesus' resurrection: Which is less miraculous: that deceit is involved or that the dead man has risen? About forty years after Hume published his essay, Thomas Paine posited a very similar question: "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie? We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course; but we have good reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in the same time; it is, therefore, at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie."<sup>59</sup> Not only does Paine, like Hume, rule out all miracle claims of his time without investigation, his question requires qualifications, since the answer is largely based on whether one believes that God exists. If we assume that God does not exist, then of course it is more probable that men would lie than that nature would alter its course. However, if we are open to God's existence, we will need to ask at least three additional questions: (1) Is there good evidence that the event in question occurred? (2) Does a context exist in which we might expect a god to act? (3) Is there good evidence that those making the claim lied? If good evidence exists that the event occurred, a context exists where we might expect a god to act, and there is an absence of evidence for a lie, then there is no reason to believe that a lie is more probable than a miracle in a specific instance.

**2.2.5.** Although Hume's arguments attempt to prove that one is never justified in believing miracle reports, we have observed that his thesis contains many errors, only a few of which could be explored in this chapter. The problems with Hume's logic cast considerable doubt on his conclusions. Accordingly, while Hume's points correctly insist that historians be cautious when investigating specific miracle claims, the profound weaknesses in them do not prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims.

Before moving along, it is important to note that Hume specifically cited the miracle of a resurrection as impossible to prove:

It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous

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<sup>58</sup> Ehrman is mistaken when he argues that numerous miracle reports do not increase the probability of the historicity of a particular miracle because every miracle report itself is improbable: "in every single instance you have to evaluate whether it's a probable event or not. And it never can be a probable event" (Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman [2006], 33). While it is certainly true that numerous reports of a *poor quality* do not add up to a good one, Babbage and Bartholomew seem correct to me if we add a caveat requiring that the numerous reports of miracles be of a *good quality*. Such may indeed indicate that the antecedent probability Ehrman assigns to miracles is incorrect.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1794), Part 1, chapter 17. An electronic text of Paine is offered by the University of Adelaide Library at <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/p/paine/thomas/p147a/reason2.html> (accessed July 14, 2008).

event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.<sup>60</sup>

Hume argues that human history provides a uniform experience that the dead are not raised (in fact, he adds, such has never been observed in any age or country). This is why a claim to a resurrection is regarded as a miracle. This uniform experience is full proof that miracles do not occur and prohibits any evidence no matter how good from overturning this conclusion. In other words, the fact that no one has ever observed the dead return to life is conclusive proof that the dead do not rise and no evidence could ever overturn this conclusion because of its improbability. Hume's objection begs the question, since he assumes what he must prove. How can Hume claim that it "has never been observed in any age or country" that "a dead man should come to life" when numerous reports exist that this is precisely what happened in the case of Jesus? Hume must demonstrate that the reports of the dead returning to life are mistaken.

Hume's treatment of miracle persists in its influence. Just as Darwin's initial theory of evolution has been modified in order to account for its weaknesses exposed during the past century and a half, Hume's arguments have likewise been modified and can be recognized to some extent in the writings of a number of non-theists and even theists. Although we have observed numerous fallacies in Hume's arguments, he challenges us to think through a number of areas in the philosophy of history, such as how to identify a miracle and how to consider a miracle claim without opening wide the floodgates of credulity. He warns some of us concerning our partiality toward miracle claims found in our chosen religious system. For this, we are in debt to Hume.

### 2.3. C. Behan McCullagh

In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, McCullagh lays out a number of methods employed by historians to arrive at a conclusion of "historical." Arguments to the best explanation can be said to warrant a positive conclusion when seven criteria are met.<sup>61</sup> Having described each of the criteria in detail, McCullagh provides a few illustrations. His first is the resurrection of Jesus.

One example which illustrates the conditions most vividly is discussion of the Christian hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead. This hypothesis is of greater explanatory scope and power than other hypotheses which try to account for the relevant evidence, but it is less plausible and more *ad hoc* than they are. That is why it is difficult to decide on the evidence whether it should be accepted or rejected.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Hume (1777), 115.

<sup>61</sup> McCullagh (1985), 19, 29. See chapter 1.3.2.

<sup>62</sup> McCullagh (1984), 21. It is interesting to note that he here cites Marxsen (1970) and C. F. Evans (1970) as those clearly explaining the issues involved.



McCullagh defines plausibility as something that is probable given the particular views or presuppositions of a historian.<sup>63</sup> For example, if a historian holds that God does not exist, he will also hold that Jesus' resurrection is implausible. However, if he holds that God exists, that he acts within human history, and that Christianity is probably true, he is most likely to hold that Jesus' resurrection is quite plausible.<sup>64</sup> *Ad hocness* is not to be confused with plausibility or a lack of explanatory scope. When a hypothesis is not rendered probable by the total available evidence, it must be regarded as *ad hoc*.<sup>65</sup> McCullagh goes on to explain that

[a] *d hocness* and lack of plausibility are not reasons for thinking a hypothesis false, or at least they are not reasons for thinking it is more likely to be false than true. Implausibility and disconfirmation, however, can provide reasons for this conclusion. For a hypothesis to be implausible, our present knowledge of the world must imply that it is probably false. And for a hypothesis to be disconfirmed is for one of its implications to be false, which means the hypothesis itself is probably false.<sup>66</sup>

Why then does McCullagh think it difficult to make a decision on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? Does he hold that the theistic worldview required to allow it is implausible, in other words, that it is contrary to our present knowledge of the world? Is the hypothesis "Jesus rose from the dead" not rendered "probable" by all of the available evidence? The answer may be found a few pages later.

For even if a hypothesis is of greater explanatory scope and power than another, if evidence incompatible with it cannot be explained away satisfactorily, then it is abandoned. Historians simply assume, as do most people, that the world is logically and materially consistent, so that for beliefs about it to be true, they must refer to compatible events and states of affairs. . . . [Given this,] if two hypotheses are not implausible or disconfirmed, then even if one is more *ad hoc* than another, if it has greater explanatory scope and power it will be preferred.<sup>67</sup>

It is somewhat confusing why McCullagh regards it as difficult to decide on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>68</sup> A theory that lacks plausibility is not the same as one that is implausible. McCullagh himself acknowledges this distinction.<sup>69</sup> The former is in a neutral position, whereas the latter exists in a negative one. According to McCullagh, the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead is only "less plausible" than competing theories.<sup>70</sup> This could even allow its plausibility factor in the positive zone. He then says that even if one hypothesis is more *ad hoc* than others, it is to be preferred if it possesses greater explanatory scope and power.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> McCullagh (1984), 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> We may add that the agnostic historian who judges the data for or against God's existence as inconclusive may pass on making a decision regarding the historicity of miracle claims. However, it would be an unjustified step to claim that if an event cannot be proved that it is, therefore, disproved.

<sup>65</sup> McCullagh (1984), 24.

<sup>66</sup> McCullagh (1984), 27.

<sup>67</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28.

<sup>68</sup> McCullagh (1984), 21.

<sup>69</sup> McCullagh (1984), 27.

<sup>70</sup> McCullagh (1984), 21.

<sup>71</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28

According to McCullagh, the resurrection hypothesis possesses this trait.<sup>72</sup> So, why the difficulty? Appealing to Feyerabend<sup>73</sup> he writes,

Competing theories about the nature of the world cannot be compared because each theory provides the terms in which observations relevant to it are to be made, and so there is not any common domain of facts of which it can be said that one theory or hypothesis is a better explanation than another.<sup>74</sup>

McCullagh asks us to consider the following hypotheses: (1) Jesus had supernatural powers. (2) Jesus did not have supernatural powers. The historian who admits the possibility of the former is more likely to hold that Jesus in fact performed miracles, whereas the historian who rejects the possibility of the supernatural is likely to hold the latter. McCullagh then concludes:

So what constituted the prime domain of evidence for one historian could be almost entirely denied by another. It would seem that here is a perfect case of the sort of incommensurability which Feyerabend was discussing.<sup>75</sup>

In the end, it seems that for McCullagh, a positive judgment for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection cannot be awarded because such a judgment is contingent upon the worldviews of individual historians and these are often in stark, irreconcilable disagreement. McCullagh is not alone. Dunn explains that "[a]s interpretation, the resurrection of Jesus constituted a perspective on reality which determined how reality itself was conceived."<sup>76</sup> He concludes that the "resurrection of Jesus is not so much a historical fact as a foundational fact or meta-fact."<sup>77</sup>

I do not think this a good reason for historians to punt to philosophers and theologians rather than making a historical judgment. Why should historians refuse to make judgments when colliding worldviews exist? As stated in the previous chapter, historical descriptions offered by historians without exception are heavily influenced by their race, gender, nationality, values, political and religious convictions, concepts of the external world and of history itself.<sup>78</sup> This results more often than not in a pluralism even in matters that are not religious in nature. A Marxist approach to history, which attempts to explain the past as the result of social movements of working classes rather than rulers, will usually yield historical narratives in conflict with those generated from other approaches. Yet, historians do not suggest that they cannot write histories of the American Revolution or the Vietnam War since a degree of incommensurableness presents itself when Marxist descriptions differ from those provided by non-Marxist historians.

Historians are required to make numerous philosophical assumptions before entering every historical investigation. For example, they assume the external world is real.

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<sup>72</sup> McCullagh (1984), 21.

<sup>73</sup> Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1975), chapter 17.

<sup>74</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28.

<sup>75</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28.

<sup>76</sup> Dunn (2003), 878. Braaten (1999) refers to the resurrection of Jesus as the "deepest fault line . . . where faith and unbelief meet within the churches, among their pastors and theologians" (147).

<sup>77</sup> Dunn (2003), 878.

<sup>78</sup> See chapter 1.2.2.

They assume our senses provide a fairly accurate perception of the external world. They assume logic facilitates us in our quest for truth rather than merely being a pragmatic tool that aims at our survival and quality of life. They assume natural laws in effect today were in effect in antiquity and that they operated in a similar manner. More importantly, the majority of historians assume that history is at least partially knowable.<sup>79</sup> Whereas the vast majority of all historians agree on most of these assumptions, a number of postmodernists take issue with some of them, especially the last. For these, not only is a historical judgment on Jesus' resurrection out of the question, so is every other past event. Yet, this does not keep realist historians from making historical judgments. Each of the five assumptions just mentioned is purely philosophical in nature. While good reasons exist for holding a realist view of history over a postmodern approach, at the end of the day, realist and postmodernist positions are based on assumptions that cannot be defended to a point beyond all doubt.<sup>80</sup>

Thus far, I have only suggested that historians need only be in a position where they neither presuppose nor *a priori* exclude theism but instead maintain a position of openness while examining the data. However, let us assume for a moment that historians must select a metaphysical grid from which to operate. If they have the liberty to proceed with these five philosophical assumptions, should they be prohibited from adopting a sixth philosophical assumption that involves the existence of a God who acts in history?<sup>81</sup> Such an assumption is not without merit. During the past forty-five years, many scientists and philosophers have discovered volumes of data from recent advances in astrophysics and molecular biology that they believe imply an intelligent Creator and Designer of our universe who purposefully intended the existence of life on earth.<sup>82</sup> This evidence has been so compelling to some that a

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<sup>79</sup> McCullagh (1984) himself lists four similar assumptions (1). Gorman (2000) speaks of debates among historians concerning whether the meaning of historical *truth* is a matter for historians or philosophers (253). Rex Martin (2006) comments that historians always “make philosophical presuppositions” when writing their books (253). He adds that “historians need philosophy to do their work as historians better” (260).

<sup>80</sup> McCullagh (1984) admits, “The truth of these four assumptions [behind realism] cannot be proved, as philosophers have been tireless in explaining. We have no access to reality independent of our beliefs and experiences of it, so we cannot check in a God-like manner upon their truth. We are justified in holding them because it is useful to do so; indeed we may even be psychologically incapable of doing otherwise” (1).

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, McCullagh (2000) elsewhere comments that when historians write the history of historical concepts that are essentially contested (as examples he names religion, art, science, democracy, and social justices) “they must choose an interpretation of the subject to guide them” (47). In *Logic of History* (2004) he writes, “When historians draw inferences about the past and go on to test them, they bring with them a heap of beliefs about nature, society and history, which they assume to be true. . . . The rationality and credibility of their conclusions is always relative to that of the assumptions they employed in reaching them. This is a matter of no concern, so long as those assumptions are themselves well supported by other perceptions, scientifically validated you might say. If the assumptions are rationally credible, then so may be the historical inferences which depend upon them” (43-44). Elsewhere, after acknowledging that “we cannot know for certain that historical descriptions are true,” McCullagh (2005) suggests that “[t]his is where pragmatism asserts itself. In order to act in the world, in our own and other’s interests, we must decide what the world is like, or to put it another way, which descriptions of the world to believe. It is reasonable to believe those that best explain available evidence, and that are well supported by evidence, if only because these are most often confirmed by further experiences. . . . When evidential reasons do not prove the truth of a belief beyond all possibility of error, pragmatic reasons can give us a good reason for believing it true nevertheless” (454).

<sup>82</sup> See Behe (1996); Collins (2006); Dembski, ed. (1998); Denton (1998); Gonzalez and Richards (2004); Schroeder (1997). See also John D. Barrow, Frank J. Tipler, and John A. Wheeler, *The*

reversal of worldview occurs. For example, Antony Flew, one of the most prominent and influential atheist philosophers of the twentieth century, recently abandoned his atheist views in the face of what he regarded as compelling evidence for the existence of God from relatively recent finds in the fields of astrophysics and molecular biology.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the prominent cosmologist Frank Tipler moved from atheism to theism, having been impressed with the data in astrophysics that pointed to a Designer of the cosmos.

In addition, a number of medical studies have reported double-blind experiments where neither the patients nor the physician leading the study knew which patients were being prayed for. The studies revealed that prayer seemed to have a positive impact on the healing process.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, since it was a double-blind experiment, the placebo effect is insufficient for explaining the data supporting the position that prayer is effective. Moreover, scholars Dale Allison and Craig Keener claim to have had experiences of apparitions that are more at home within theism than atheism.<sup>85</sup> These cannot simply be dismissed *a priori*.<sup>86</sup>

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*Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon & Schuster; reprint ed., 1984). Arno Penzias won a Nobel Prize for his 1964 discovery which confirmed the Big Bang Theory. In a personal email to me dated July 24, 2002, Penzias confirmed that he agreed with a statement attributed to him but for which I could find no reference. The statement is, "Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, and delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to support life. In the absence of an absurdly-improbable accident, *the observations of modern science* [ital. mine] seem to suggest an underlying, one might say, supernatural plan." Atheist philosopher Quentin Smith (2001) notes that anywhere from one fourth to one third of all professional philosophers today are theists and that "many of the leading thinkers in the various disciplines of philosophy, ranging from philosophy of science (e.g., Van Frassen) to epistemology (e.g., Moser), [are] theists." This article is available for online viewing at [http://www.philoonline.org/library/smith\\_4\\_2.htm](http://www.philoonline.org/library/smith_4_2.htm) (accessed August 29, 2006). In light of this, Segal and Tucker are either out of touch with the current state of dialogue on the subject or have turned a blind eye to those intellects who are persuaded by the case for intelligent design. Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) refers to arguments for intelligent design posited by these scientists as merely being "Scientific creation 2.0" (138). Tucker (2004) claims that the community of creationists "is quite homogenous, composed exclusively of biblical fundamentalists, almost all of whom are American Protestants. Their bias in favor of an anachronistic, historically insensitive interpretation of Genesis is the best explanation of their beliefs" (34). Tucker seems only aware of "young earth" or "recent" creationists. However, not all scientists who embrace intelligent design are Christians and even a strong majority of scientists and philosophers who are evangelical Christians are "old earth" creationists, embracing a dating of 4.5 billion years as the age of the earth and 12-15 billion years as the age of the universe. The difference is that they express hesitations toward neo-Darwinism, maintaining that the scientific data favors either special creation or theistic evolution.

<sup>83</sup> Flew in Flew and Habermas (2004), 197-211. Consider the following statements by Flew: "I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it" (200) and "It now seems to me that the findings of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design" (201).

<sup>84</sup> Byrd (1988): 826-29. See also W. S. Harris, M. Gowda, J. W. Kolb, C. P. Strychacz, J. L. Vacek, P. G. Jones, A. Forker, J. H. O'Keefe, B. D. McCallister, "A Randomized, Controlled Trial of the Effects of Remote, Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients Admitted to the Coronary Care Unit," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 159 (Oct. 25, 1999), 2273-78. I am indebted to Gary Habermas for these references.

<sup>85</sup> Allison (2005), 275-77; Keener (2003), 1:267. See also Eddy and Boyd (2007), who claim to have witnessed phenomena difficult to recognize on naturalistic terms which they regard as demonization and exorcisms (69). I am not in agreement with Jewish scholar Cohn-Sherbok in D'Costa, ed. (1996) who regards the idea of an omnipotent God "implausible because of the findings of contemporary science" (196). To the contrary, it is my opinion that many of the results of contemporary science strongly point to an intelligent Designer of a sort and that reality is far more complex than materialists maintain. Habermas (1995) contends that naturalists are "mistaken if they think that the advances of

Thus, the historian would be epistemically justified in embracing a theistic worldview when making historical considerations.<sup>87</sup> After all, why should an atheist or agnostic worldview be awarded a default position, especially when good data exists for a theistic reality?<sup>88</sup> Additionally, if a significant majority of those in modern society hold a theistic worldview, how can an assumption of theism be regarded as *ad hoc*?<sup>89</sup> Those historians who are not as sanguine may provide reasons why they do not agree with a theistic horizon and why their historical conclusions are different.<sup>90</sup> However, this does not prohibit theistic historians from proceeding any more than postmodern historians prohibit realists from proceeding. Therefore, this hesitancy on the part of McCullagh and others is unwarranted.

McCullagh has once again raised the challenge of horizons for our consideration. As we observed in the previous chapter, historians differ widely on these and must defend the metaphysical component of their horizon in so far as it impacts their historical hypotheses. This will especially apply when we investigate the resurrection

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science make supernatural belief obsolete” (126; cf. 10, 144-146). Templeton laureate J. Polkinghorne (2006) writes, “Science simply tells us that these events [miracles] are against normal expectation. We knew this at the start. Science cannot exclude the possibility that, on particular occasions, God does particular, unprecedented things. After all, God is the ordainer of the laws of nature, not someone who is subject to them” (100). Polkinghorne goes on to say that “precisely because they are *divine* laws, simply to overturn them would be for God to act against God, which is absurd” (100). However, “the consequences of these laws can change spectacularly when one moves into a new regime” (100-01).

<sup>86</sup> Hurtado (*How on Earth*, 2005) writes, “it appears to be either ideological bias or insufficiently examined assumptions that prevent some scholars from taking seriously the idea that there are revelatory religious experiences that can directly contribute to religious innovations” (191).

<sup>87</sup> Baxter (1999) argues that theistic historians are justified in arriving at the historical conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead, although the logic employed does not render the conclusion by the theist as *necessary* (32-34).

<sup>88</sup> Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996) writes, “The decision to exclude God from the public understanding of reality is of course not a specifically historical issue. It is not among the tools of historical critical method. But it impinges upon the use of that method” (64). He adds, “Accepting the affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection as an event in history on the one hand, and the role of historical reason on the other, can go together, if the concept of history allows a place for God in the reality of historical processes” (71). Padgett (1998) writes, “[W]ho is to say that Christian faith does not give us better insight into the data than unbelief does? Why should unbelief, rather than faith, lead to the best explanation of the evidence? Would it be so strange if the followers of Jesus have an inside track in the understanding of Jesus? . . . Granted that faith is a kind of prejudice, perhaps it is a helpful prejudice. Helpful prejudices can give us insight into data, and clear the way for understanding” (294-95).

<sup>89</sup> Cladis (2006) writes, “Among the majority of the planet’s inhabitants, including those in North America, religion is thriving” (94, cf. 96). In support, see the Pew Forum U. S. Religious Landscapes Survey which interviewed 36,000 Americans and then published “Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant” (June 2008): <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2008). The report concluded that 92% of U. S. adults believe in the existence of God or an impersonal force/universal spirit (5, 9), 79% believe that “miracles still occur today as in ancient times” (11), and 74% believe in an afterlife (10). Meier cites a 1989 Gallup poll which found that “82 percent of Americans polled believed that ‘even today, miracles are performed by the power of God.’ . . . Indeed, only 6 percent of all Americans polled by Gallup completely disagreed with the proposition that even today God works miracles.” Referring to Bultmann’s statement regarding the impossibility of using modern conveniences and also believing in miracles (Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 5), Meier (1994) asks if it is more plausible to conclude that only six percent of Americans qualify as modern persons or “that only 6 percent of Americans share the mind-set of some German university professors” (520-21). Cited from G. Gallup, Jr. and J. Castelli, *The People’s Religion: American Faith in the 90’s* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 58.

<sup>90</sup> Craffert (1989): “the historical study of the New Testament will have to include a debate on 20<sup>th</sup> century world-views” (343).



of Jesus. Historians here should start from a neutral position, assuming neither the existence nor the non-existence of God, and proceed to make their case.

## 2.4. John P. Meier

Meier maintains that the modern person can believe in miracles.<sup>91</sup> However, he adds that professional historians cannot assign a judgment of “historical” to a miracle claim.<sup>92</sup>

[I]t is inherently impossible for historians working with empirical evidence within the confines of their own discipline ever to make the positive judgment: “God has directly acted here to accomplish something beyond all human power.” The very wording of this statement is *theo*-logical (*God* has directly acted . . .”). What evidence and criteria could justify a historian *as a historian* in reaching such a judgment? . . . Hence it is my contention that a positive judgment that a miracle has taken place is always a philosophical or theological judgment.<sup>93</sup>

Meier goes on to explain that after a historian has completed an exhaustive investigation on a possible miraculous event, he may affirm that no reasonable natural cause is known, that the event took place in a context charged with religious significance, and that some witnesses claimed, even believed, that it was a miracle. However, his job ends there in his capacity as a historian.<sup>94</sup> “[T]o move beyond such affirmations and to reach the conclusion that God indeed has directly caused this inexplicable event is to cross the line separating the historian from the philosopher or theologian.”<sup>95</sup> Peter Carnley agrees: “The historian cannot say that the raised Jesus was seen in a vision without himself becoming a man of faith. . . . He must *qua* historian hold his peace.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Theissen and Winter write, “There can be no doubt that the Easter *faith* of human beings is a historical event. But the reality to which it wants to point is no more ‘historical’ than the creation *ex nihilo*, which can never be the subject of historical research on the basis of sources. Events in the realm beyond death are fundamentally removed from the historian’s work. . . . With the Easter *faith*, on the other hand, we have the convictions of human beings that are subject to historical investigation, to which all the premises and methods of historical–critical research apply.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Meier (1994), 521.

<sup>92</sup> Meier (1994) does not classify the resurrection of Jesus as a miracle because it does not fit his definition of miracle (529). The first component of his definition is that “a miracle involves an event that is in principle perceivable by all interested and fair-minded observers” (512). Since Jesus’ post-mortem appearances were not afforded to everyone according to Acts 10:40-41, it does not meet his criteria for a miracle. However, this is an odd component for any definition of miracle, since the difference consists in the audience rather than the act. Moreover, Meier does not seem to exclude a resurrection in general from being a miracle; only Jesus’ resurrection as reported in Acts 10. It should be noted that *defining* “miracle” and providing criteria for *identifying* one are separate discussions.

<sup>93</sup> Meier (1994), 513-14. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) who takes a similar position (350-51). However, it does not prevent him from trying (199n2); Wedderburn (1999), 96.

<sup>94</sup> So also Dunn (2003), 875; C. A. Evans (2006), 139; L. T. Johnson (1996), 136; Tilley (2003), 14.

<sup>95</sup> Meier (1994), 514.

<sup>96</sup> Carnley (1987), 89.

<sup>97</sup> Theissen and Winter (2002), 250. If the earliest apostolic proclamation was that Jesus rose spiritually rather than in his transformed corpse and that their experiences of the post-Easter Jesus were visions,

Meier underestimates the weight of a context charged with religious significance. If no reasonable natural explanations are available to the historian and the event under investigation occurs in a context charged with religious significance, is the historian *as historian* left only with the conclusion that we have an anomaly? In answer, let us see if reasonable criteria exist for differentiating between an anomaly and a miracle. William Lane Craig asserts that “if a purported miracle occurs in a significant religio-historical context, then the chances of its being a genuine miracle are increased.”<sup>98</sup> Meier gladly allows historians to acknowledge a significantly religious context. Such a context is his third component for identifying a miracle.<sup>99</sup> However, for him, this is not enough to overcome the inability of historians to conclude that a miracle has occurred.

How important is context? A similar question is presently being asked in science related to the challenges of arriving at the conclusion that an intelligent Designer is responsible for the universe and life. Can the scientist *qua* scientist make this conclusion? Since atoms have not been stamped “Made by God,” an important question that has risen as a result of the dialogue is “How do we identify something that is designed?” William Dembski has proposed that we may infer design when *specified complexity* is present.<sup>100</sup> For something to be *specifically complex*, it must (1) exhibit complexity to an extent that it is extremely unlikely for it to be the result of natural processes and (2) exhibit a pattern that we normally affiliate with a personal agent. Dembski argues that scientists employ these criteria in forensics, artificial intelligence, cryptography, archaeology, and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI).<sup>101</sup> Since scientists are able to detect design using the criteria of *specified complexity*, if they employ the same criteria to the universe and life and the criteria are met, then there is no reason why the scientist, *as scientist*, cannot infer design, and design implies a Designer.

We may approach the historicity of miracles in a similar manner. Just as scientists are not asking “What is design?” we are not here addressing the question “What is a miracle?”<sup>102</sup> Rather, as the scientist asks, “What criteria are necessary for identifying design?” the historian asks, “What criteria are necessary for identifying when a miracle has occurred?” Since most philosophers and theologians agree that a miracle has occurred when the event has a divine cause, recognizing that an event is a miracle is much like recognizing that something is the product of an intelligent Designer. I would like to suggest that if we modify Dembski’s criteria for *specified complexity*, we can formulate miracle-identifying criteria that are conceptually and pragmatically correct. We may recognize that an event is a miracle when the event (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. In other words, the event occurs in a context where we might expect a god to act. The stronger the

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then we might say that Jesus’ resurrection is beyond reach of historical conclusion. However, as we will see, the data does not indicate that this was their proclamation.

<sup>98</sup> Moreland and Craig (2003), 569. See also Rex Martin (2005) who contends that historians must look to antecedent and subsequent (aftermath) matters (147).

<sup>99</sup> Meier (1994), 513.

<sup>100</sup> Dembski (1999), chapter 5.

<sup>101</sup> Dembski (1999), 127.

<sup>102</sup> As mentioned in note 3 above, “miracle” is an essentially contested concept. Numerous definitions for “miracle” are provided.

context is charged in this direction, the stronger the evidence becomes that we have a miracle on our hands.

David Hume provided a hypothetical example of reports concerning Queen Elizabeth returning to life after her death.

But suppose, that all the historians who treat of ENGLAND, should agree, that, on the first of JANUARY 1600, Queen ELIZABETH died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed ENGLAND for three years: I must confess that I should be surprized at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real.<sup>103</sup>

If for a moment we assume with Hume that his example reflected actual reports, what if the historian likewise had credible data supporting the conclusion that the Queen had claimed to be a prophetess and that she had performed a number of acts during her lifetime that convinced both herself and others that she possessed a degree of supernatural power? And what if she had predicted her death and resurrection? Although the historian may have grave hesitations when attempting to make a judgment on whether the Queen had actually risen from the dead, such a context could only complicate matters for skeptics, since according to Hume's example, a great deal of strong data exists for the reality of the event. If either the data supporting her death and post-mortem appearances or her claims and actions were weak, this would significantly weaken any case purporting that the Queen had, in fact, risen from the dead. However, the inverse seems likewise true: If both the data supporting her post-mortem appearances and her claims and actions were strong, this would significantly strengthen any case purporting the Queen had in fact risen. And what if there were no plausible natural explanations for the event to boot? A significant difference exists between David Hume's example of the reports of the death of Queen Elizabeth and her post-mortem appearances and reports of the death and post-mortem appearances of Jesus of Nazareth. The life of the Queen was not earmarked with claims or deeds that would seem at home with post-mortem appearances. The life of Jesus was. Moreover, the historical matrix in which the data for Jesus' resurrection appears is charged with religious significance as we will observe in a moment, whereas the life of the Queen enjoys no such context.

Tucker asserts "if a disease such as cancer goes into remission without treatment, this is a meaningful event that has no scientific explanation. However, science cannot explain many things because relevant evidence or theories are missing. Events that have no scientific explanation do not break the laws of nature."<sup>104</sup> I am in complete agreement with Tucker. Notwithstanding, let us define a context in which a cancer patient goes into remission. Let us suppose that Katja has been experiencing severe

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<sup>103</sup> Hume (1777), 128.

<sup>104</sup> Tucker (2005), 379.

upper abdominal pain that radiates to her back. She notices a yellowing of her skin and of the whites of her eyes. She has no appetite, is depressed, and has lost a considerable amount of weight. An entrepreneur and never one to take time off from work, Katja finally visits her physician and, after undergoing a number of tests, is diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer and given less than six months to live. Distressed over the news, she leaves the office in tears with an appointment to return the following day. In the morning, the physician and staff discuss among one another how each had experienced a dream that evening in which they either saw Katja cancer-free or in which they were told by an angelic being that it was not Katja's time to die and that she has been healed. When Katja arrives for her appointment, the staff are surprised to observe her positive countenance and hear her describe how for some unknown reason her pain and jaundice had vanished. The physician re-administers the tests and finds Katja to be completely cancer-free. Because the context in which Katja's remission occurs is charged with religious significance, I see no reason why the physician cannot declare that a miracle has occurred.

Perhaps another scenario may be helpful. Let us suppose the existence of a fifty-year-old man named David who was born blind, is an atheist, and has never prayed to be given sight. One Saturday afternoon while he and his wife are talking in their living room, David receives sight for no reason apparent to either of them. In his excitement he undergoes a thorough medical examination by a lifelong friend who is a highly regarded ophthalmologist and who informs him there is no medical explanation for why he now sees. Is the physician *as physician* justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred? It seems the only warranted answer in this scenario is 'no.' Perhaps it was a miracle. Perhaps it is an anomaly. They may never know.

Let us now alter some of the details of our scenario. Let us suppose the existence of the same fifty-year-old man named David who was born blind, is an atheist, and has never prayed to be given sight. One Saturday afternoon while he and his wife are talking in their living room, they hear someone knock on their front door. When David's wife opens the door, she is greeted by a local Baptist pastor who is hesitant but speaks: "Please excuse my interruption. A number of us were praying at the church just thirty minutes ago when three of us had the simultaneous thought that someone should come to your charming home on the corner and share the words from the first verse of an old hymn named *Amazing Grace*. So with your patience, here they are: 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.' Again, please excuse my uninvited visit. May God bless you both." The pastor then leaves. David's wife closes the door and returns to find her husband in complete joy and astonishment. He looks at her and says, "As soon as he said 'was blind but now I see' I could see!" David visits the same ophthalmologist who provides a thorough medical examination and informs him there is no medical explanation for why he now sees. Is the physician *as physician* justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred? I would like to suggest that he is. What is the difference between the two scenarios? The latter occurred in a context charged with religious significance.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> One cannot here dispute the conclusion that a miracle has occurred by simply defaulting to metaphysical naturalism. In other words, a metaphysical naturalist cannot argue that since a miracle contradicts the known fact that miracles do not occur, this specific miracle claim is disconfirmed. The argument begs the question, since our atheist's receiving sight at the word of a holy man may be the defeater for metaphysical naturalism.

When we consider the question of the resurrection of Jesus, a context exists that may assist us in identifying a miracle. Meier may object that this is precisely why the modern person is justified in *believing* that a miracle has occurred. But the physician *acting in his capacity as a physician* is incapable of drawing that conclusion, since the claim in our earlier example that *God* imparted sight to David is theological or philosophical in nature. Miracle claims are outside of historical investigation and, therefore, the historian acting in his capacity as a historian is incapable of drawing the conclusion that a miracle occurred.

I do not think Meier's reasoning warrants his conclusion. As we noted earlier in our discussion of McCullagh's objection, historians come with a number of philosophical commitments prior to any and every historical inquiry. Yet, this does not prohibit them from proceeding. It is both common and necessary for historians, philosophers, and theologians to cross disciplines. Historians neglecting to do this may unknowingly produce poor results.<sup>106</sup> Philosophers of science must have an understanding of the principles of science in order to act in their capacity. I was acting in the capacity of a philosopher of history when I wrote this chapter and the previous one. Archaeologists are significantly assisted in piecing together a detailed history of their sites by a study of the ancient texts describing them. When a biblical scholar seeks to comprehend the pathological effects of scourging and crucifixion in order to gain insights into Jesus' death, it is doubtful she would be accused of stepping outside of her capacity as a historian, although she will be opening herself up to criticism from medical experts in the process. Why then are philosophical considerations off-limits to a historian? No reason exists *a priori* why philosophy is restricted to professional philosophers. These are artificial boundaries. This becomes especially clear when we consider that some biblical scholars may also have training in philosophy while some philosophers may also be trained in historiography. Although Allison and Habermas are friends, I doubt Allison would be content with the following dialogue:

*Allison:* My training and work have been in the fields of biblical historiography and exegesis. Accordingly, since Jesus' resurrection requires

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<sup>106</sup> See Shaw (2001), 9; Barrera (2001), 205; R. Evans (1999), 10; Fischhoff in Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, eds. (1982), 350; Gilderhus (2007), 111-12; Harvey (1996), 55-56; Lorenz (1994), 298, cf. 312; McIntyre (2001), 7, 14. See also Vann (2004), 3. McIntyre (2001) notes the "strong similarities" between the disciplines of history and theology (2) while Barclay (1996) opines that "historical and theological enterprises have effected a remarkably fruitful marriage in biblical scholarship" (28). Hexter (*History Primer*, 1971) notes the lack of dialogue between philosophers and historians. As a result, some historians have "a rather special gift for leaping aboard intellectually sinking ships and drawing their innocent followers along with them" (110). R. J. Miller (1992) contends that even if a New Testament scene is implausible, "no one can deny its possibility" (17). In a note, he adds, "The issue is relevant in regards to miracles. Since judgments about their possibility are cosmological and not historical, they force biblical scholars to moonlight as philosophers of science, with predictably messy results (though we seem as untroubled by it as do philosophers and theologians who cite biblical texts uncritically). We have much to learn from the philosophy of science and the philosophy of religion on the cosmological and theological issues entailed in judgments about the possibility of miracles. One problem, which cannot be cavalierly dismissed, is that the cosmological assumptions routinely made in our guild are beholden in part to an obsolete nineteenth-century worldview" (17n33). See also R. Stewart, "Introduction" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 3. Stump (1989) similarly comments that "philosophers and historians need to talk to each other (philosophers and historians and literary theorists, we might add), and that these groups have a great deal to learn from each other" (371).



God's existence, I do not believe I am qualified to adjudicate on the historicity of the event. I must punt to the philosopher.

*Habermas:* My training and work have been in the fields of biblical historiography and the philosophy of religion. Since adjudicating on Jesus' resurrection requires training in both, I am qualified to render a judgment pertaining to the historicity of the event. Consequently, only those with formal training and work in both disciplines may adjudicate on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection and those who are only biblical scholars should henceforth be silent on the matter. Moreover, since miracles and exorcisms play such a vital role in Jesus' ministry, historical Jesus scholars without training and work in philosophy are likewise henceforth barred from their work.

We may also add that historians do not need direct access to the explanatory entities in their hypotheses. As Craig argues, physicists posit numerous entities to which scientists have no direct access such as quarks and strings. However, "they postulate such unobservable entities on the basis of the evidence that we have as the best explanation."<sup>107</sup> This is tantamount to the move made by historians who argue that "God raised Jesus."<sup>108</sup> Indeed, historians do not have direct access to *any* of the objects of their study, since the past is forever gone.<sup>109</sup> Historians only have remnants from the past and they infer past entities and events on the basis of the evidence that has come to them.

The theological objection only disputes the *cause* of Jesus' revivification or the nature of a revived body, rather than the event itself. In concept, historians could agree that sometime after his violent death, Jesus somehow returned to life and leave a question mark pertaining to the cause of this occurrence.<sup>110</sup> Ted Peters argues that what is meant by the term "resurrection" is more than the revivification of a corpse.

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<sup>107</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 24. See also Lorenz (1994), 312; Tucker (2004), 4; Wright (2003), 15-16; Zammito (2005), 178, cf. 177.

<sup>108</sup> Polkinghorne (2006) states that as a theoretical physicist he believes that protons and neutrons consist of subatomic particles (i.e., quarks and gluons) although these never have been and probably never will be seen. He asserts that he believes in the occurrences of the Big Bang and biological evolution even though he was not there to witness either. He believes because of phenomena consistent with these being true (116-17). He believes Jesus' resurrection for the same reason: the extant historical data is most consistent with Jesus' resurrection (118).

<sup>109</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 9. See also Dunn (2003): "In one sense, of course, we are simply recognizing the nature of the evidence which any biographer has to weigh who has no access to any writings of the biography's subject. That is to say, a portrayal of Jesus as seen through the eyes and heard through the ears of his first disciples is neither an illegitimate nor an impossible task, and such a portrayal, carefully drawn in terms of the evidence available, should not be dismissed or disparaged as inadmissible" (131).

<sup>110</sup> Habermas (2003) writes, "The original charge that miracles cannot be investigated in terms of normal research methods would obtain only if we knew that such events did not occur at all, or if they happened only in some nonobjective realm. In either case, it would constitute a proper assessment to denying investigation by historical methodology. However, since it is an open question whether miracles occur in normal history, it would seem to be at least possible to investigate *the historical portion* of these claims with regard to their accuracy" (4); cf. G. Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Recent Agnosticism" in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007), 288. Craig (*Assessing*, 1989) writes, "According to the above methodology, the historian *qua* historian could conclude that the best explanation of the facts is that 'Jesus rose from the dead,' but he could not conclude, 'God raised Jesus from the dead'" (419).

There is an eschatological component that cannot be verified via historical method.<sup>111</sup> Jesus' resurrection was believed to have been the first fruits of the general resurrection that will occur on the last day when God will make everything right, redeem the righteous and condemn the wicked. Accordingly, the interpretive construct placed by the early Christians pertaining to what they thought had happened to Jesus has a strong presence. Peters is correct when he contends that full historical verification of what happened to Jesus after his death cannot be obtained until the Parousia. In a similar manner, a historical investigation may lead to the conclusion that Jesus died by crucifixion. However, it cannot conclude that Jesus' death atones for sins to the satisfaction of God.<sup>112</sup>

A historian may postulate that God resurrected Jesus, build a case for it that includes theistic evidence, and then demonstrate that the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus occurred in a context in which we might expect a God to act. However, it may be too much to argue that Jesus had a "resurrection" body as understood by first-century Christians with all of the theological implications that accompany that term. Segal may be correct in asserting that there is insufficient historical evidence to conclude that "Jesus was actually and physically raised from the dead and that he appeared in his transformed fleshly body."<sup>113</sup> However, if we nuance this statement by adding four words, I see no reason why the historian in theory is blocked from saying, "Jesus was actually and physically raised from the dead and he appeared in *what others interpreted as* his transformed fleshly body."<sup>114</sup>

If the evidence for a miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus occurs in a context that is charged with religious significance, it would not appear out of place and the resurrection hypothesis could be the strongest explanation for the data. Meier's position at best militates against historians identifying the cause of Jesus' return to life or the actual nature of Jesus' revived body, but it cannot prohibit historians from voting on the event itself. Lüdemann writes, "Indeed, the miraculous or revelatory aspect of Jesus cannot be the object of any scientific approach. However, as long as theology is 'paired' with historical thought (as it is on the one hand by the character of its central sources and on the other by modern criteria of truth), then it must be interested in a natural explanation of the miracle—or it must admit that even on historical grounds a supernatural explanation is more plausible."<sup>115</sup> In summary, I am defining *miracle as an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate*. I am contending that we may identify a miracle when the event (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. If these criteria are

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<sup>111</sup> T. Peters, "The Future of the Resurrection" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 149-69. See also Eddy and Boyd (2007), 88-89; Moltmann in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 80.

<sup>112</sup> R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 15; Schmidt (1984), 78.

<sup>113</sup> Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

<sup>114</sup> If I am correct, Schmidt (1984) punts prematurely when writing, "The events which the gospel messages recount in connection with the Resurrection cannot be brought within our horizon of empirical confirmation and historic understanding. . . . One has a strong impression that the only thing that would fall under the authority of historical investigation is the presence of the Resurrection doctrine in the kerygma of the original Church. About the 'facts' one must question whether they—be they unhistorical, trans-historical, or meta-historical—simply fall out of our reach (and thereby become, as facts, irrelevant)" (78).

<sup>115</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 21. See also Craffert (2003), 347.

fulfilled and the Resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the historical bedrock, the historian is warranted in affirming that a miracle has occurred.

## 2.5. Bart D. Ehrman

After acknowledging that some reject the possibility of miracles altogether, Bart Ehrman continues,

There still remains, though, a huge, I'd even say insurmountable, problem when discussing Jesus' miracles. Even if miracles *are* possible, there is no way for the historian who sticks strictly to the canons of historical evidence to *show* that they have ever happened. . . . I'm saying that even if they did, the historian cannot demonstrate it.<sup>116</sup>

Ehrman offers five arguments in support of his conclusion.<sup>117</sup> He first argues that the sources reporting Jesus' resurrection are poor. Historians look for desirable witnesses that include eyewitness accounts, multiple independent accounts, consistent and corroborative accounts, and unbiased or disinterested accounts. Ehrman contends that the New Testament Gospels are not good witnesses since they are not written by eyewitnesses, are written 35-65 years after Jesus, and contain propagandistic stories that were altered during their transmission, which accounts for the irreconcilable differences among them. Ehrman adds that Jesus does not appear in "any non-canonical pagan source until 80 years after his death. So clearly he didn't make a big impact on the pagan world." Regarding discrepancies, Ehrman offers a few examples, such as the day and time of Jesus' death. The Gospel of John reports that it was at noon on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, whereas Mark's Gospel says it was at 9 am after the Passover meal was eaten. Did Jesus carry his cross the entire way as John states or did Simon of Cyrene carry it part of the way as in the Synoptics? Did Mary go to the tomb alone or were other women with her? What did they see when they got there: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)?

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<sup>116</sup> Ehrman (2008), 241.

<sup>117</sup> On March 28, 2006, Ehrman debated Christian philosopher William Lane Craig at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. The question both scholars agreed to debate was "Is there historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?" A complete transcript of the debate is posted online at <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/crec/website/resurrection-debate-transcript.pdf>. The transcript is 38 pages long. I also debated Ehrman on the same issues on February 28, 2008 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. Since a transcript of that debate is not available at the time of this paper, I will refer to Ehrman's use of the arguments elsewhere. Of Ehrman's five arguments, three are also found in Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 240-44 and two in Ehrman (2000), 166-67; 177-79. Segal offers five arguments of his own, three of which are similar to Ehrman's, one is similar to one offered by Wedderburn (following), and one is unique. See Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 121-38. His unique argument is that Jesus' resurrection cannot be confirmed historically because it cannot be scientifically verified (135). I have answered this contention in chapter 1.2.5 and 1.2.12. See also Marsden (1997), 28-29. Although historical hypotheses vary in the certainties warranted them, it is rare for *any* to be verified scientifically. This is especially true as historians attempt to peek further into the past. It is also noteworthy that Segal takes a fideistic approach to religious matters. He writes that faith "does not depend on rational argument. If it did, it would be reason, not faith" (137). Marxsen (1990) agrees, "But I have tried to show that Jesus' resurrection is a pseudo-subject. It cannot provide any security for faith . . . Quite apart from this, it must also be said that a faith which has somehow been made secure is no longer faith" (91). I am not a fideist and few scholars are interested in a fideistic approach to faith. If my faith can be decisively disconfirmed, let it be done that I may abandon it and be on my way either to another faith or some sort of enlightened atheism.

Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? He adds that there are also non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels. In summary, Ehrman says the Gospels are neither contemporary, nor disinterested, nor consistent.<sup>118</sup>

Ehrman's second argument is that historians attempt to establish what probably occurred and a miracle by definition is the least probable explanation. "We can't really know the past because the past is done with. We think we know the past in some instances because we have such good evidence for what happened in the past, but in other cases we don't know, and in some cases we just have to throw up our hands in despair. . . . Historians try to establish levels of probability of what happened in the past. Some things are absolutely certain, some are probable, some are possible, some are 'maybe,' some are 'probably not.'"<sup>119</sup> Since miracle violates the course of nature, "their probability is infinitesimally remote."<sup>120</sup> In fact, any natural explanation, no matter how improbable, is more plausible than a miracle, which is by definition the most implausible explanation.<sup>121</sup> "Historians can only establish what probably happened in the past, and by definition a miracle is the least probable occurrence. And so, by the very nature of the canons of historical research, we can't claim historically that a miracle probably happened. By definition, it probably didn't."<sup>122</sup> This means that any "facts" presented in a case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus are "completely irrelevant." Therefore, the resurrection cannot be the subject of historical investigation and must be accepted on faith.

Ehrman's third argument is that the hypothesis that Jesus was raised is theological rather than historical. To say "Jesus was raised" implies that God did it. Historians "cannot presuppose belief or disbelief in God." Such discussions are theological rather than historical and, thus, outside of the discipline of the historian. This is similar to Meier's argument above.

Ehrman's fourth argument is that if we accept that Jesus did miracles we must also be willing "in principle" to concede that other people did them.<sup>123</sup> He provides as examples Muhammad, Apollonius of Tyana, Honi the Circle-Drawer, Hanina ben Dosa, and the Roman Emperor Vespasian.<sup>124</sup> We reject them because they do not agree with our particular religious or philosophical beliefs.

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<sup>118</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 10-11. Tucker (2005) agrees that the sources for miracle claims provide evidence that is insufficient for establishing the historicity of the miracle. He notes that it is often impossible to establish the independence of multiple witnesses (382), that descriptions of miracles in the Old and New Testaments do not claim to have been witnessed by multiple people (383), and that naturalistic hypotheses should be preferred since they enjoy equal simplicity, yet have "wider scopes," "are more fruitful," and "usually increase further the likelihood of the evidence" (385).

<sup>119</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 9.

<sup>120</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12.

<sup>121</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 13. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) opines that "even if speculative, a natural explanation is to be preferred" (52). Dawes (1998) speaks of a "world in which miracles are (at best) an explanation of last resort" (35).

<sup>122</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12. See also Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 243-44.

<sup>123</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242. See also Craffert (1989), 342; Lindars (1986), 91; Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

<sup>124</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242. See also Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) who provides as examples "the miraculous giving of the Quran to Muhammad" and six-day creation (136).

Ehrman's fifth and final argument is that the canons of historical research do not allow historians to adjudicate on miracle claims:

I wish we could establish miracles, but we can't. It's no one's fault. It's simply that the canons [sic] of historical research do not allow for the possibility of establishing as probable the least probable of all occurrences.<sup>125</sup>

[T]he theory behind the canons in historical research is that people of every persuasion can look at the evidence and draw the same conclusions.<sup>126</sup>

In summary, Ehrman argues that the best sources about Jesus are poor, that historians must choose the most probable explanation and miracle, by definition, is always the least probable, that the statement "God raised Jesus" is theological and cannot be touched by historians, that if we admit the miracles of Jesus we must be open to the possibility of others performing miracles, and that the canons of historical research do not allow such an investigation by historians.

**2.5.1.** In my opinion, Ehrman is misguided on all five counts. Are the sources poor from which we mine data that serve as evidence for the resurrection hypothesis? We will examine these sources in more detail in the chapter that follows. For now I will note that Ehrman's objection does not establish the conclusion he thinks. At best it demonstrates that terribly deficient sources may prohibit an accurate determination pertaining to a specific past event, including Jesus' resurrection. But it does not rule out historians investigating a miracle claim. We will devote attention to Ehrman's objection pertaining to the quality of the sources when we assess the Resurrection hypothesis.<sup>127</sup>

**2.5.2.** Ehrman's second argument is that miracle hypotheses are by definition the least probable of all hypotheses. Since historians must choose the most probable explanation, they are never warranted in selecting a miracle hypothesis. Why must a miracle hypothesis necessarily be the least probable explanation? If God exists and wants to act, then the action or result under investigation may actually be the most probable explanation.<sup>128</sup>

Craig answers that the only way to assess a miracle hypothesis as the least probable explanation as Ehrman does is by employing Bayes' Theorem. However, one cannot do this because the background knowledge required is unavailable. As a result, calculating the probability of a particular miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus is

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<sup>125</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12. The misspelling of "canons" is likely the result of the transcriber of the debate rather than Ehrman.

<sup>126</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 25.

<sup>127</sup> See chapter 5.7.2.4.

<sup>128</sup> Tucker (2005) asserts "if we interpret miracle hypotheses as claiming merely that a divinity performed, or delegated the power to perform, a particular wonder-ful feat of strength . . . [then the] prior probability of such a miracle hypothesis is certainly higher than zero. The likelihood of the evidence for a feat-of-strength miracle, given such a miracle hypothesis, can be quite high" (380). If Tucker is correct, Fergusson (1985) is not when he writes, "On inductive grounds the resurrection of a dead person is intrinsically highly improbable, and therefore it can never be rational to postulate such an event as the explanation of a phenomenon which although remarkable is not so improbable as the resurrection" (297).



inscrutable.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, he contends that Ehrman is not justified in declaring the “improbability” of the resurrection of Jesus.

Craig admits that if the hypothesis is that Jesus was raised *naturally* from the dead, Ehrman is correct regarding a super-low probability. However, the hypothesis is that Jesus was raised *supernaturally* (i.e., by God) from the dead. If God desired to raise Jesus, then his resurrection may be regarded as very probable. Thus, in order to demonstrate that the resurrection hypothesis is improbable, Ehrman has to provide the necessary background knowledge that God’s existence is improbable or, that if God exists, it is improbable that he would want to raise Jesus.<sup>130</sup> Craig notes that not only does Ehrman fail to do this, his own philosophy of history prohibits him from doing so. If he is correct that historians cannot say anything about God, they are also restrained from assigning an intrinsic probability to the resurrection of Jesus. Said another way, if historians cannot investigate the claim “God raised Jesus from the dead,” because “God” as the cause makes it a theological rather than historical matter, they likewise cannot say that it is improbable that miracles occur, since such work of God is likewise a matter for theologians and philosophers.<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, Ehrman’s third argument—discussed next—cuts the legs off his second. He fails to justify his definition of miracle, no *a priori* reason exists for assuming miracle is the least probable explanation,<sup>132</sup> and the probability of the resurrection of Jesus is inscrutable.<sup>133</sup>

**2.5.3.** Ehrman’s third argument is that the hypothesis that Jesus was raised is theological rather than historical. To say “Jesus was raised” implies that God did it. Since God is outside the investigative tools of historians, the question of the resurrection of Jesus is a matter for theologians and philosophers rather than historians. I have already addressed this objection with Meier.<sup>134</sup> However, it may be added that Ehrman confuses historical conclusions with their theological implications. Most would admit that if Jesus rose from the dead, God is probably the best candidate for the cause.<sup>135</sup> Thus, for Ehrman, since God is a subject for theologians rather than historians, the entire exercise of investigating the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection is illegitimate. But this is to do history backward. Historians should approach the data neither presupposing nor *a priori* excluding the possibility of God’s acting in raising Jesus, then form and weigh hypotheses for the best explanation. Probability ought to be determined in this manner rather than by forming a definition of ‘miracle’ that excludes the serious consideration of a hypothesis prior to an examination of the data.

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<sup>129</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 32. See also Bartholomew (2000), 112; Plantinga (2000), 276. Tucker (2005) argues that calculating the probability that a miracle hypothesis is true “requires more evidence than is usually available” and that “it is unclear if and how this can be worked out in practice” (381; cf. 382).

<sup>130</sup> As noted in chapter 1.3.3, this is perhaps the most insoluble component of Bayes’ Theorem when attempting to ascertain the probability of the resurrection of Jesus, since God is a free agent and it is difficult to know *a priori* what He may or may not want to do. See also Gilderhus (2007), 30-31.

<sup>131</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 36.

<sup>132</sup> Swinburne (2003): “In so far as there is evidence that there is a God, there is evidence that a violation of natural laws is a serious possibility” (31).

<sup>133</sup> See chapter 1.3.3.

<sup>134</sup> See section 2.4.

<sup>135</sup> Theoretical physicist Polkinghorne (2006) writes, “Whatever we may say about cloudy unpredictability, we surely can’t suppose that it was through a clever exploitation of chaos theory that Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. If this happened (as I believe it did), it was a miraculous divine act of great power” (97).

Moreover, historians often must leave the *cause* of an event unanswered. Yet this does not prohibit them from drawing historical conclusions. Historians are certain that Carloman died in AD 771, although they are uncertain whether his brother Charlemagne had him murdered or he died of natural causes. In this case, historians need not hesitate to conclude that Carloman died in AD 771 while leaving a question mark pertaining to the cause of his death. In a similar way, historians could conclude that Jesus rose from the dead without deciding on a cause for the event. They can answer the *what* (i.e., what happened) without answering the *how* (i.e., how it happened) or *why* (i.e., why it happened). It is only the theological implications of the historical conclusion that gives pause.

**2.5.4.** I offer two responses to Ehrman's fourth argument that if we grant that Jesus performed miracles we must also be willing "in principle" to concede that others did as well. First, in principle, a Christian who believes that Jesus provides the only way to know God might also believe that God acts in the lives of those who practice other religions.<sup>136</sup>

Second, Ehrman fails to recognize that all miracle claims do not possess an equality of supporting evidence. In fact, the examples provided by Ehrman are poorly evidenced. For example, the *Qur'an* does not report that Muhammad performed miracles. Reports of miracles performed by Muhammad do not appear until much later.<sup>137</sup> As mentioned earlier in our discussion of Hume, Philostratus's biography of Apollonius is beset by numerous problems much worse than what is claimed for the Gospels.<sup>138</sup>

Onias, also known as Honi the Circle-Drawer, is first mentioned in Josephus as one whose prayers for rain were answered. However, the story is fairly tame:

Now there was one, whose name was Onias, a righteous man he was, and beloved of God, who, in a certain drought, had prayed to God to put an end to the intense heat, and whose prayers God had heard, and had sent them rain.<sup>139</sup>

Around three centuries after Josephus, the story is reported in the Jerusalem Talmud with many more details. Honi prays for rain. When it does not come, he draws a circle and stands inside of it promising not to leave his spot until it rained. When only a few drops came, Honi said this is not what he had prayed for. Then it rained violently. But Honi said he had prayed for "rain of good will, blessing, and graciousness." Then it rained in a normal manner.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> See Twelftree (1999), 43.

<sup>137</sup> It may be added that theists in general and Christians in particular may not feel compelled to reject a supernatural origin of the *Qur'an*. Muhammad himself first believed that he was plagued by demons when the supernatural being approached him with Quranic revelations, an interpretation at home with biblical Christianity. See Ibn Ishaq, A. Guillaume, transl. (2004), 71-73, 106, and cf. 1 Tim. 4:1.

<sup>138</sup> See section 2.2.4 above. Also noteworthy is that there are twenty-five extant manuscripts for Philostratus's biography of Apollonius. The earliest is from the eleventh century, the next earliest from the twelfth century, and the remaining twenty-three were written in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. See Jones, ed. and transl. (2005), 19, 22.

<sup>139</sup> Jos. *Ant.* 14:22. English translation by William Whiston.

<sup>140</sup> Y. Taanit 3:8-9 66d in Neusner (1987), 226.

Note that Josephus places Honi in the first century BC whereas the Jerusalem Talmud places him in the sixth century BC, five hundred years earlier! The discrepancies in the Gospels cited by Ehrman pale in comparison to what we find in the reports of Honi. Moreover, Josephus' account is approximately 150 years after the purported event, far longer removed from the event it purports to describe than the Evangelists are from the events they are reporting.

Hanina ben Dosa is a first-century AD figure who is likewise mentioned in the Mishnah<sup>141</sup> (c. AD 200) and appears in the Talmud (AD 400-600).<sup>142</sup> Thus, the first report on Hanina ben Dosa's miracles as with Honi is about 150 years after the purported events, much later than the 25-45 years we find with the miracles of Jesus reported in Mark's Gospel.

Three sources report two miracles performed by the Roman Emperor Vespasian.<sup>143</sup> Two of the three sources wrote as close to the event as Mark was to Jesus. However, a plausible naturalistic explanation is readily at hand.<sup>144</sup>

Reports of miracle-workers existed in antiquity. Although not as active as Jesus in performing miracles, they are plentiful.<sup>145</sup> Miracle-workers are not unique to antiquity and continue today. When theme, motif, and form are considered, the number of pre-Christian accounts is reduced to only three in which Ehrman's examples are not to be found.<sup>146</sup> We noticed that the miracles reported in Ehrman's examples are either quite late, far more contradictory than what we find in the Gospel narratives, or have a plausible naturalistic explanation. Former atheist Flew does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Even so, he asserts, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."<sup>147</sup> My objective here is not to argue that the Gospels are reliable sources or that a miracle hypothesis is more plausible than a naturalistic theory posited for the miracle reports of Jesus. Instead, I have demonstrated that historians who regard the miracles of Jesus as historical need not necessarily acknowledge the historicity of the miracles Ehrman cites from other religions. Miracle reports should be examined on a case by case basis.<sup>148</sup> If it turns out that there are good reasons for holding to the historicity of the miracles of Jesus

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<sup>141</sup> TB Berarkhot 34b; 61b; Yevamot 21b; TB Sotah 9:15; TB Baba Batra 74b; TB Ta'anit 24; 25a.

<sup>142</sup> Neusner (2005), 53. C. A.D. 400 for Jerusalem Talmud and by A.D. 600 for Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>143</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 4.81 (writes +35 years after the purported event), Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7.2 (+35), Dio Cassius 65.8.1 (+110 or more).

<sup>144</sup> Meier (1994) writes, "Suetonius and Tacitus seem to tell the whole story with a twinkle in their eye and smiles on their lips, an attitude probably shared by Vespasian. The whole event looks like a 1st-century equivalent of a 'photo opportunity' staged by Vespasian's P.R. team to give the new emperor divine legitimacy—courtesy of god Serapion, who supposedly commanded the two men to go to Vespasian. Again, both in content in form, we are far from the miracle traditions of the Four Gospels—to say nothing of the overall pattern of Jesus' ministry into which his miracles fit" (625).

<sup>145</sup> According to Twelftree (1999), individual ancient miracle-workers within 200 years of Jesus on either side did not perform many miracles (247).

<sup>146</sup> Blackburn, "Miracle Working ΘΕΙΟΙ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ in Hellenism (and Hellenistic Judaism)" in Wenham and Blomberg, eds. (1986), 200. See also Blackburn (1991).

<sup>147</sup> Flew in Flew and Habermas (2004), 209.

<sup>148</sup> Crossley (2005), 181.

and that these are lacking in Ehrman's examples, there is no reason why granting the historicity of Jesus' miracles requires historians to grant the historicity of others.<sup>149</sup>

**2.5.5.** In his fifth argument, Ehrman claims that the canons of historical research do not allow historians to investigate miracles. Where are these canons of history to which he refers? In the previous chapter we observed that there are no methods for understanding and doing history that are broadly accepted by professional historians. Instead, historians remain polarized on hermeneutical and methodological considerations.<sup>150</sup> A few statements by professional historians outside the community of religious scholars are worthy repeating: Fischer asserts that "Specific canons of historical proof are neither widely observed nor generally agreed upon."<sup>151</sup> Haskill speaks of "the inherently dispersive character of a discipline that, unlike English and Philosophy, lacks even the possibility of defining a single canon familiar to all practitioners."<sup>152</sup> Grant admits, "It is true that every critic is inclined to make his own rules."<sup>153</sup>

One need only consider the debate over postmodernism to realize that there are no specific canons of history that are accepted by nearly all historians. Indeed, if we followed Ehrman's assertion regarding the canons of historical research, historians themselves could not proceed, since leading postmodernist historians such as Ankersmit, White, and Jenkins deny the ability of historians to reconstruct the past in any manner that may be said to be an accurate reflection of the past. Moreover, scholars disagree among themselves whether miracle claims may be investigated. McCullagh's canons of historical research prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims while those of Tucker allow it.<sup>154</sup> Within the community of biblical scholars, the canons of Meier, Dunn, Wedderburn, Theissen, Winter, and Carnley prohibit historians from adjudicating on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus while the canons of Wright, Lüdemann, Brown, O'Collins, Habermas, and Craig allow it. Historians need not be theists to reject Ehrman's canons. Lüdemann is an atheist. What Ehrman would be correct in saying is that there are some historians who disallow the investigation of miracle claims within *their* canons of history.

Ehrman adds that the canons of historical research require that "people of every persuasion can look at the evidence and draw the same conclusions."<sup>155</sup> While a consensus exhibiting this degree of heterogeneity is on every historian's "wish list," it is very rare, as we observed in the previous chapter.<sup>156</sup> Instead a pluralism of preferred hypotheses by historians is typical.<sup>157</sup> Thus, if consensus among historians is to be required before awarding historicity to a particular hypothesis, much of what is regarded as known history would have to be discarded.

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<sup>149</sup> That the early Christians borrowed from a dying and rising god motif is now widely rejected. See Mettinger (2001), 7. Also see chapter 5, note 255 below.

<sup>150</sup> See chapter 1.2.11.

<sup>151</sup> Fischer (1970), 62.

<sup>152</sup> Haskill (1990), 153.

<sup>153</sup> Grant (1977), 201. For biblical scholars, see chapter 1, note 256.

<sup>154</sup> McCullagh (1984), 28; Tucker (2005), 373-90.

<sup>155</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 25. See also Henaut (1986), 188; Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

<sup>156</sup> See chapter 1.2.4.

<sup>157</sup> Lorenz (1994), 326.

Segal and Tucker offer similar solutions to this dilemma. Segal mentions Crossan by name and Tucker appeals to biblical criticism along the lines of what is offered by Crossan, namely, that “these stories should be read as metaphors or as fabrications in the service of the political or other interests of their authors.”<sup>158</sup> Segal adds, “A historical theory should be available to assent or dissent regardless of one’s religious perspective. And that is a truer and more accurate statement of the consensus.”<sup>159</sup> These attempts by Segal and Tucker quickly fail. Not only is the consensus sought by Segal contrary to where he wants to go, the biblical criticism to which Tucker appeals is largely biased against the supernatural. Crossan has thus far failed to receive widespread support from scholars who have specialized in the resurrection—including those who deny its historicity—and there are numerous problems with his hypothesis and similar ones that regard the resurrection narratives as metaphor written in the interest of legitimizing authority of church leaders. We will discuss these in detail in chapters four and five. What Segal and Tucker suggest is a position that is itself suspect of unrecognized bias.

We may return then to our previous discussion of what sort of consensus historians should seek. Since we have already discussed this at length in the previous chapter I will only summarize our conclusions.<sup>160</sup> The optimal group from which we will seek consensus consists of members of significant heterogeneity, all of whom have engaged in significant personal research on the particular topic being investigated. Since horizons will no doubt be a great hindrance to objectivity, we will not expect a consensus on the conclusion by these scholars pertaining to whether Jesus was resurrected. Since (for example) some Muslim scholars deny the Holocaust in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we cannot anticipate that these would acknowledge the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus even if it is the best explanation of the data. In fact, Muslims deny Jesus’ death by crucifixion, a fact granted by nearly a universal consensus of historians.<sup>161</sup> Therefore, we will seek a nearly universal consensus on the historical bedrock to be employed by hypotheses. This will allow us to proceed without being hindered by those who unquestionably are guided by their horizons more than historical method.

## **2.6. A. J. M. Wedderburn/James D. G. Dunn**

In his 1999 book *Beyond Resurrection*, Wedderburn devotes the first three chapters to a discussion on whether it is possible to answer the historical question concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Chapter one discusses whether the question can even be asked. He notes that when events in antiquity are the subject of investigation, the evidence is often fragmentary and the factual is mingled with bits of legend. The result is that it is unlikely that the historian may conclude what is true beyond all doubt on these matters.<sup>162</sup> He then states that since no one actually claimed to have seen the

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<sup>158</sup> Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136 and Tucker (2005), 385. Also see Fasolt (2005), 21, 22.

<sup>159</sup> Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

<sup>160</sup> See chapter 1.2.4.

<sup>161</sup> Habermas in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007) writes, “since when is convincing a person of the opposite persuasion a prerequisite for arguing that one’s view is fairly indicated by the data? Is it not the case that the opposite could also be said with assurance? How likely is it that the argument constructed by a skeptic or agnostic would convince a believer against his/her position? I doubt that either side wants this to be a prerequisite for their rationality” (286)!

<sup>162</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 11.



resurrection-event, statements by those who believed they had seen a resurrected Jesus are interpretations of what occurred at the tomb.

What the first witnesses experienced was not the resurrection-event itself, but an encounter with Jesus, an encounter which they then interpreted as meaning that Jesus was risen, had previously been raised so as to be in a position to encounter them.<sup>163</sup>

James D. G. Dunn distinguishes among event, data, and fact. Historical events belong to the past and cannot be relived or observed directly. Data, such as reports, artifacts, and circumstantial data are what have survived. Data in reports are never raw. When historians encounter descriptions of a subject, they are interacting with data that have been soaked in the horizon of the descriptor. Modern historians interpret these and attempt to reconstruct what occurred. Accordingly, the data have been influenced by the horizons of several people. These interpretations of the data are referred to as “facts.”<sup>164</sup> Dunn asks how we may speak of Jesus’ resurrection as historical. He answers that the empty tomb and the appearances, both of which he grants, cannot be considered data. The real data are the reports one might appeal to in order to arrive at these “facts” of the empty tomb and the appearances. What about the resurrection itself?

The conclusion, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead’, is further interpretation, an interpretation of interpreted data, an interpretation of the facts. The resurrection of Jesus, in other words, is at best a second order ‘fact’, not a first order ‘fact’—an interpretation of an interpretation.<sup>165</sup>

In other words, for the historian to conclude that Jesus was resurrected, she would be making an interpretation of what a few in the first century had interpreted given the data before them.

Wedderburn and Dunn are willing to inquire concerning the cause of the first-level facts: the empty tomb and the beliefs of some that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to them. Wedderburn argues that this inquiry is limited. The explanation that Jesus was actually raised “passes beyond the historian’s competence as a historian to deliver a verdict upon it. He or she may be able to weigh up the

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<sup>163</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 12. Also Marxsen (1970), 138, although his position is quite different regarding the data. Wedderburn and Dunn state that “resurrection” was the interpretation given by those who had a genuine experience of what they perceived was Jesus after his death. They experienced him and believed he had been resurrected according to what they understood resurrection to be. Marxsen (1970) holds that resurrection was the interpretation some assigned to the object of their interpretation: “the finding of faith” (140). “For *the miracle is the birth of faith*. . . . For ‘Jesus is risen’ simply means: today the crucified Jesus is calling us to believe” (128, emphasis in original). However, Marxsen does not believe that the interpretation assigned by the eyewitnesses limits us from making a historical judgment. Instead, he holds that there is not enough evidence available for us to recover what actually occurred.

<sup>164</sup> Dunn (2003), 102-103. Dunn acknowledges R. G. Collingwood’s work *The Idea of History* (133, 176-77, 251-52) as the source of his view. See my discussion in chapter 1.2.9.

<sup>165</sup> Dunn (2003), 877; cf. Marxsen (1970): “in our historical enquiry into the background of our texts, we do not come upon the fact of Jesus’ resurrection; we come upon the faith of the primitive church after Jesus’ death” (141). Bultmann (1985): “The event of Easter as the resurrection of Christ is not a historical event; the only thing that can be comprehended as a historical event is the Easter faith of the first disciples” (39-40).

probabilities of natural, this-worldly explanations.”<sup>166</sup> But the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” is “imponderable.”<sup>167</sup> We are back to Meier’s objection. According to Wedderburn, this should not encourage historians to raise their hands in surrender and conclude all is hopeless when approaching the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. For him, although the resurrection may be outside the reach of historical research, historians can approach it through the back door, since an event(s) is needed in order to explain the data.<sup>168</sup>

There are further challenges posited by Wedderburn. One must know what is meant by “resurrection” in order to answer the question “Did Jesus in fact rise from the dead?”<sup>169</sup> He maintains that Paul’s interpretation of what happened to Jesus is quite different than what is portrayed in the Gospels. Citing Dunn, “What Luke affirms (Jesus’ resurrection body was flesh and bones), Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood!)”<sup>170</sup> Wedderburn continues, “Orthodoxy insisted upon the corporeality of the resurrection in a form foreign to Paul’s thought.”<sup>171</sup> Because of the perceived discrepancy, Wedderburn arrives at a conclusion of agnosticism when it comes to our ability to make a historical assessment pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

And in the case of the traditions of Jesus’ resurrection these methods lead, in my opinion, to a high degree of uncertainty as to exactly what happened, regardless of how the early Christians may have seen it and proclaimed it. The logical conclusion of such an investigation seems therefore to be, apparently, a regrettable and thoroughly unsatisfactory ‘Don’t know’, a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith . . . As far as the resurrection of Jesus itself is concerned, a decisive historical judgment is to my mind epistemologically improper and impossible.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 13.

<sup>167</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 14. Contra Lüdemann (2004), 21.

<sup>168</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 14. This is the approach taken by Wright (2003), 686-96, 706-18.

<sup>169</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 22.

<sup>170</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 66; cf. Dunn (1985), 74. Dunn’s statement is surprising given what he would write three years later in his commentary on *Romans 1-8*: “Insofar as it is their mortality which gives sin and, of course, death their hold over his readers, it is the death and resurrection of these same bodies, of the ‘I’ into a new embodiment (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-49), which will at last bring to an end that dimension where sin and death still exercise their sway, when the *posse non peccare* will at last give way to the *non posse peccare*. Of this Christ’s own resurrection from the dead has provided both the pattern and the assurance (cf. 6:7-10)” (445). With Wedderburn and the earlier Dunn on seeing a contradiction between Luke’s “flesh and bone” and Paul’s “flesh and blood” is Barclay in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 24; R. Brown (1973), 87; Crossan’s comments in Halstead (1995), 521; Robinson (1982), 12; Segal (2004), 442.

<sup>171</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 111.

<sup>172</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 96-98. Carnley (1987) is stronger, suggesting that when the early Christians spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, the question of meaning is so important that “many contemporary theologians have raised doubts as to whether the category of ‘historical event’ can be appropriately used with respect to the resurrection of Jesus without emasculating it to the point of destroying it” (33). Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) argues similarly. He agrees with Wright that the “predominant understanding of the New Testament in the first century was that Jesus’ resurrection was bodily” (121). However, he adds that bodily resurrection meant different things to different New Testament writers. This means that the New Testament writers were more interested in a “community of opinion” rather than a settled meaning. Accordingly, we cannot go from the reports of Jesus’ resurrection to a historical conclusion that Jesus rose, having his corpse transformed (122-23).

**2.6.1.** It can forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend as Wedderburn notes. We may also be reading poetic language or legend at certain points, such as Matthew's report of the raising of some dead saints at Jesus' death (27:51-54)<sup>173</sup> and the angel(s) at the tomb (Mark 16:5-7; Matt. 28:2-7; Luke 24:4-7; John 20:11-13).<sup>174</sup> While fragmented data and possibly legendary or poetic elements command caution on the part of historians, the question to be asked is whether these challenges prohibit a positive historical judgment. Most of our historical knowledge is fragmented, since both ancient and modern writers tend to report only those details they deemed important. Yet historians are not necessarily left without any legitimate conclusions that can be made. What must be answered is whether there are enough data to justify a positive historical conclusion. If legendary or poetic elements exist, can these be identified? Can a historical core be identified? If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, there are no *a priori* reasons why a historical judgment cannot be made.

Wedderburn and others correctly note that should a historian make a positive judgment for the resurrection of Jesus, it would be a second-order fact, an interpretation of an interpretation of data from an event that cannot be retrieved. However, this is not nearly as sobering as it may at first appear. Jurors hear testimonies from eyewitnesses who have interpreted an event and then the jurors interpret the testimonies for themselves. Thus, we have an interpretation of an interpretation of an irretrievable event. Should we apply this objection of Wedderburn across the board, our legal system would collapse as well.<sup>175</sup>

Neither will this line of reasoning work in historical research, since fact and interpretation appear in every text reporting the past.<sup>176</sup> Let us suppose that a historian of the American Civil War read a paper before a group of American Civil War historians pertaining to the victorious army at the battle of Gettysburg on July 31, 1863. In his paper he notes that the battle itself is irretrievable. The surviving data are numerous documents written by soldiers on both sides, secondary testimonies from those who knew them, civilians who saw the battle, and artifacts such as bullets, cannon balls, and the remains of soldiers who were mortally wounded as a result. After our historian considers all the data, he concludes that there was a certain belief of those present at the battle that the Union Army won. That is a first-order fact. However, that is as far as historians may go. The conclusion of modern historians that the Union Army won is a second-order fact, since it is an interpretation of an interpretation of data from an irretrievable event. Therefore, the historian is not

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<sup>173</sup> We will comment extensively on this passage in chapter 5.5.2.4.

<sup>174</sup> That angels are part of a poetical genre is not so strongly supported. However, R. Brown (1993) argues they are "describing God's visible presence among men" (260; see also 129, 156). Quintilian provides a list of devices for praising gods and men in Greco-Roman writings (*Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.10-18), although angels are not included in the list. Josephus reports that he employed beautiful narrative, a harmony of words, and adornment of speech in his writing of history in order to provide a reading experience that is both gracious and pleasurable, although he was careful to omit no facts and to conform to the standards expected of historians in his day (*Ant.* 14:1-3). See also Ecclesiastes 12:10.

<sup>175</sup> See chapter 1.2.10.

<sup>176</sup> Even atheist New Testament critic Lüdemann (2004) maintains this is a poor objection to adjudicating on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (21).

warranted in concluding that the Union Army was victorious. Once the shock of his assertion had worn off, our historian would be laughed out of the room.<sup>177</sup>

Historians simply do not practice writing history in this manner. They proceed by inference, often working with second-order facts, such as Augustus's death on August 19th, AD 14, and the burning of Rome during Nero's reign in AD 64. Why is the argument advanced by Wedderburn and others appealing when applied to Jesus' resurrection, yet scornful when applied to another historical event, such as the battle at Gettysburg? One could only be certain after hearing them on the matter. Perhaps that it is because the former is an event in antiquity whereas the later is much more recent. But this would shift the objection away from second-order facts and toward a time factor. In other words, this objection asks how far in the past the event occurred. Perhaps the hesitancy stems from the suggestion that a miracle was involved. This is a good reason for being much more careful and reserved before arriving at a historical judgment. But that is all it warrants. It does not support the position that no historical judgment is possible when that judgment involves second-order facts.<sup>178</sup> Neither is it an argument specifically directed against miraculous events.<sup>179</sup>

**2.6.2.** Wedderburn offers one final objection to the resurrection hypothesis as the subject of historical investigation. He correctly claims that in order for one to render a verdict, the historian must have an understanding of what is meant by the term "resurrection." Otherwise, the claim becomes incoherent and no verdict can be made. Wedderburn then claims that we cannot be certain what the first-century authors meant by the term. Quoting Dunn, he claims that the earliest writer on the subject, Paul, presents a different picture of resurrection than do the Evangelists and

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<sup>177</sup> Baxter (1999) provides another illustration. Against the assertion "At most you may put, 'The Twelve made an inductive inference and/or interpretation, that they were consciously encountering Jesus'" (24), he provides the following counterexample: "'That evening Gilbert inferred/interpreted that he consciously met Sullivan; but he got it wrong (in the dark, after drinks at his club)—Sullivan was not there.' So then, both those two, contrasting statements about Gilbert are surely meaningful for you. And surely you can envisage proceeding as a historian to evaluate which, as a hypothesis, elucidates the data better; which is true. In principle, you could come down in favour of either. Surely you would reckon perverse any contrary suggestion: that a priori you are debarred from accepting a statement, 'Gilbert consciously encountered Sullivan', and may not go beyond, 'Gilbert inferred/interpreted that he consciously encountered Sullivan'" (25).

<sup>178</sup> O'Collins (1973) has a related objection to making a historical judgment regarding the resurrection of Jesus. He argues that because the raised Jesus could pass through walls (Luke 24:35-37), was "glorious" (Phil. 3:21) and "pneumatic" (1 Cor. 15:43ff.), it cannot be regarded as an "inner-historical event." "Since the New Testament asserts such a transit to an existence outside normal historical conditions, it seems that either to affirm or to deny the truth of this alleged resurrection is not *as such* to make an historical judgment" (60). Thus, O'Collins concludes that the resurrection of Jesus should be removed from any category of events that are open to historical investigation (62). While historians are certainly unable to affirm the essence of Jesus' resurrection body, this by no means necessitates the conclusion that they cannot determine whether he was seen alive after his death, if the evidence is sufficient.

<sup>179</sup> Postmodernist Barrera (2001) argues that this type of argument against an adjudication on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus offered by Wedderburn and Dunn actually supports a postmodernist view of history: "The use of sources complicates this way of talking, because historians cannot narrate what they saw or what they remember, but only interpret how others beheld it, creating different discourses in order to fashion their own discourse about a referent invisible by definition. In this way, ontological security is snatched from professional historians: their work is just one instance of rational conversation among individuals and groups. This insight might force them to give up, perhaps, that disdain with which those who 'make history' treat those 'metahistorians' dedicated only to talking about how history is written" (201).

Orthodoxy. While Paul seems familiar with an ethereal and spiritual Jesus, the Evangelists know of one who is both corporeal and material, one who can eat and be touched with human hands.<sup>180</sup>

This argument does not have the force Wedderburn imagines. Let us suppose for the moment that Wedderburn is correct and that Paul opposes a corporeal resurrection of Jesus while the Evangelists and Orthodoxy promote it. Historians usually prefer earlier reports. I will argue below that it is very probable that Paul's beliefs pertaining to Jesus' resurrection were similar to Jesus' original disciples.<sup>181</sup> So, his view of resurrection should be preferred over those of the Evangelists and Orthodoxy. It is only if Paul stands alone as an early source against the Evangelists and other relatively early Christian literature that the waters muddy. But I will also argue below that Paul's view of resurrection involved the corpse: bodily resurrection.<sup>182</sup> Accordingly, Wedderburn and early Dunn are mistaken in their interpretation of Paul.<sup>183</sup> If I am correct, Wedderburn's final argument completely fails.

## 2.7. A Turning Point for Historians

In the past, a significant number of historians have tended to reject the miraculous as part of the past. In this chapter we have observed that there are no sound reasons, *a priori* or *a posteriori*, for prohibiting historians from investigating a miracle-claim. It is noteworthy that the climate is changing and professional historians are warming up to the notion of miracles. In the 2006 Theme Issue of *History and Theory*, which focused on "Religion and History," David Gary Shaw opened with the following words:

Another claim . . . is that history works *against* religion, as its other and opposite, but that this is not as it should be. The opposition is an artifact of modernity. Indeed, throughout these papers the theme develops that modernity is the obstacle or prejudice that stands not just between historians and the people of the past, but also between historians and many religious people today. . . . We appear to be at a moment when we need new intellectual and professional approaches to deal with religion. Accounting for our own position is tricky, but always worthwhile, if only to try to appreciate our prejudices and assumptions in advance of doing our scholarship. . . . this Theme Issue shows historians and others concerned with the study of religion to be at a sort of confessional watershed, a moment of collective acknowledgment that the interaction between religion and history is not at the position that most historians have thought, especially when we fall back only upon our own learned memories, graduate training, prejudices, or our grand narratives of historical development. The Issue's papers pulse with a sense that religion has turned out in a variety of ways to be more important and a more clearly permanent factor in history than our paradigms had supposed. The consequences of this include a need to reassess the historian's attitudes toward religious phenomena and religion's trajectory within the mass of forces we call historical. . . . The methods that historians used may need revision or

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<sup>180</sup> See also Fredriksen (1999), 261-62.

<sup>181</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>182</sup> See chapter 4.3.3.9.

<sup>183</sup> See chapter 4.3.3.9 and chapter 3.2.3.4.d.



defense if they are to cope productively with believers past and present, even if we can disregard what historians themselves believe.<sup>184</sup>

A number of contributors in the same issue addressed the negative attitude many historians presently hold toward miracles, and questioned the assumptions of modernity.<sup>185</sup> Cladis asserted that “secularization theories that suggest religious traditions are anomalies in modernity have not, in fact, provided adequate accounts of the modern world as we find it.”<sup>186</sup> Several of the contributors noted a metaphysical bias held by many historians against miracle claims. Gregory identified what he understands as an unrecognized secular bias within the community of professional historians:

Among many academics . . . the belief that miracles are impossible in principle seems natural, normal, obvious, undeniable—rather like religious beliefs in close-knit, traditional societies. The conviction has an aura of neutrality and objectivity, as if dogmatic metaphysical naturalism were somehow not as much a personal conviction as is dogmatic religion, as if rejection of the very possibility of transcendent reality were the default position, one obvious to any intelligent person.<sup>187</sup>

He goes on to refer to this approach as a “secular bias” that “assume[s] metaphysical naturalism or epistemological skepticism about religious claims” and that this “yields a secular confessional history. This goes unrecognized to the extent that such metaphysical beliefs are widely but wrongly considered to be undeniable truths.”<sup>188</sup> Gregory ends with the admonishment that “critical self-awareness should lead us to acknowledge this fact and to move beyond secular confessional history in the study of religion.”<sup>189</sup>

Biblical scholar Ben Witherington echoes these thoughts:

Even some contemporary Bible scholars assume that miracles must be left out of account if we are going to do ‘scholarly’ work like the ‘other critical historians.’ This is a carryover from the anti-supernatural bias of many Enlightenment historians, but it seems a very odd presupposition today. Our

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<sup>184</sup> Shaw (2006), 1, 3-4. See also in the same Theme Issue, Butler (2006), 53; Cladis (2006), 93, 94, 96.

<sup>185</sup> See especially Shaw (2006), 4; Butler (2006), 53; Cladis (2006), 94.

<sup>186</sup> Cladis (2006), 96.

<sup>187</sup> Gregory (2006), 138.

<sup>188</sup> Gregory (2006), 146. A number of biblical scholars have made similar observations: Davis (1993): “The real question is whether our modern beliefs and practices somehow commit us to naturalism or near naturalism. Again, I am unable to see why they should do so” (39); Marsden (1997): “most academics are united in taking a purely naturalistic worldview as their starting point. Not surprisingly, this naturalistic starting point leads them to purely naturalistic conclusions” (30); R. J. Miller (1992): “One problem, which cannot be cavalierly dismissed, is that the cosmological assumptions routinely made in our guild are beholden in part to an obsolete nineteenth-century worldview” (17n33); Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996): “Christian theologians who work in the field of biblical exegesis should challenge the spirit of historical positivism. As theologians they participate in a contest for a more appropriate understanding of reality” (71); Stewart in Stewart, ed. (2006) notes a skepticism about the resurrection of Jesus due to “methodological presuppositions founded upon enlightenment thinking” (3).

<sup>189</sup> Gregory (2006), 149.

postmodern world is experiencing a newfound openness to miracles, magic, the supernatural, the spiritual, or whatever you want to call it.<sup>190</sup>

If our assessments throughout this chapter are correct, historians are within their professional rights to give attention to miracle claims. Moreover, there are signs from the community of professional historians that the epistemological Ice Age of anti-supernaturalism appears to be coming to an end. Given this warming attitude toward miracles, those scholars who claim their rights to investigate miracle claims will find themselves in the company of a growing number of colleagues.

## **2.8. Burden of Proof in Relation to Miracle Claims**

Before concluding, we must address a final concern: Do historical claims involving miracles require a greater burden of proof? It may be helpful to assess a few paradigms and choose from among them. We will look at three: Risk Assessment, the Legal System, and Sagan's Saw.

### **2.8.1. Risk Assessment**

One may read a report that ABC stock is poised to quadruple in its value over the next month and invest \$100 without requiring much evidence. However, it would be wise to conduct a significant amount of additional research in order to assess the company's strength and the probability of its success before reallocating one's entire savings to ABC stock. Principle: When the stakes are higher, we require greater supporting evidence.

Although the principle is pragmatic, probabilities are not determined by our personal interests in a matter. The probability that ABC stock will quadruple is the same whether one is investing \$100 or \$30,000. We are simply less cautious about being mistaken when the potentially negative consequences are minimal.

Pragmatism does not necessarily assist us in ascertaining truth. In this context it is similar to Pascal's Wager, which suggests that, if there is a 50 percent probability that Christianity is true one is wise to embrace it, since one has everything to gain and nothing to lose. But one choosing not to believe has nothing to gain and everything to lose. The Wager is a practical tool for getting people to take seriously the need to commit to choosing the worldview rather than treating the question as of mere academic interest. But it does not assist us in knowing whether Christianity is true.

The stakes may be high when it comes to certain religious claims and for that reason we do well to take our investigation seriously, not cutting corners by failing to work hard at managing our horizon, skimming too quickly through literature that is in conflict with our cherished views, and dismissing hypotheses too quickly that are in conflict with our own. But we reiterate that this is for practical reasons, since cheating in this regard may only hurt ourselves and others. The risk assessment paradigm is not a good model for ascertaining truth.

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<sup>190</sup> Witherington (2006), 5.

### 2.8.2. Legal System

In the American and British legal systems, a greater burden of proof is required in criminal cases than in civil cases. In civil cases, verdicts are to be rendered based on the preponderance of evidence, that is, what is *more probable than not*, whereas in criminal cases, a guilty verdict should be rendered only when guilt has been established *beyond a reasonable doubt*. The burden is heavier in a criminal case because the life and liberty of the defendant is at stake. In other words, the stakes are higher in a criminal case and, thus, a greater burden of proof is required before action against the defendant may be taken, since it is a vile thing to convict the innocent.<sup>191</sup>

If we are to draw from the legal profession, we must choose whether we will adopt the burden of proof required in civil or criminal cases. Most historians proceed along the lines of civil law where the burden of proof is *more probable than not*.<sup>192</sup> One could argue, however, that a greater burden of proof is required for miracle claims like the resurrection of Jesus, since they may call for a change of worldviews, perhaps a change of ethical systems, and may even have ramifications pertaining to the eternal destiny of one's soul. Therefore, the much higher standard of *beyond a reasonable doubt* must be met.

There are difficulties with this application of the legal paradigm's criminal option. While the higher standard of *beyond a reasonable doubt* is required, it is likewise true that in criminal cases the defendant—for instance, the Resurrection hypothesis—is presumed innocent. This is methodical credulity rather than neutrality. In this case, the Resurrection hypothesis would be presumed innocent and it would be its falsehood that must be demonstrated *beyond a reasonable doubt* before rejection! But we have already provided reasons for rejecting this approach.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, placing the higher burden of proof on the Resurrection hypothesis would grossly misappropriate how burden of proof is actually employed in the legal system. The hypothesis (or defendant) is presumed guilty or false (i.e., methodical skepticism) and its truth must be demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt before it may be accepted. This would be the equivalent of presuming the guilt of the defendant since his innocence may result in inconveniences for the jurists.<sup>194</sup> If the legal paradigm is to be employed, the burden of proof in civil cases—*more probable than not*—is our only option.

### 2.8.3. Sagan's Saw

Astronomer Carl Sagan was fond of saying that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” It seems intuitively obvious that when a claim is

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<sup>191</sup> According to Carmy (2008), “In general, the bar of evidence in blood cases [in Talmudic law] is extraordinarily, almost impossibly high, permitting disqualification for minor discrepancies. Judges who have handed down a capital verdict in the face of these restrictions are required to fast. The death penalty requires more than a simple majority but less than a supermajority. This is explicitly justified as a bias in favor of leniency” (45).

<sup>192</sup> See chapter 1.3.4, especially n335.

<sup>193</sup> See chapter 1.2.10.

<sup>194</sup> Further reasons for rejecting *methodical skepticism* are provided in chapter 1.2.10.

extraordinary, the historian must find something additional to support it before granting it historicity.<sup>195</sup>

Landing on the moon in July 1969 was an extraordinary event. It was extremely difficult and had never occurred previously. Yet most people believed the reports when they watched astronauts walking on the moon on their televisions, a medium that often distorts truths and presents untruths, legends, and fictions. The moon events were extraordinary. The reports were believed because they were thought to be credible and the authorial intent to communicate the event as it occurred was known. In neither case was extraordinary evidence required.

Let us suppose that my wife returns from the grocery store and tells me that she saw and spoke with our next-door neighbor while there. Although it is possible she is mistaken, because I know her to be an intelligent and credible witness I have every reason to believe her report without hesitation. Now let us suppose that when she returns from the grocery store, she tells me instead that she saw and spoke with the President of the United States. I may think this far out of the ordinary. However, if after questioning her further I can have confidence that she is not joking, or put another way, if I am confident that I understand her authorial intent as being truthful, I would accept her report—and drive to the grocery store with the hopes of having a similar experience, provided that I like the incumbent President. Her claim that she spoke with the President of the United States in the grocery store is extraordinary in a sense whereas her claim that she spoke with our next-door neighbor is not. The former may give me pause. Yet, I am satisfied because of my confidence that the source is credible and that its authorial intent is to describe an actual event accurately. I would not require extraordinary evidence or even evidence in addition to her report before believing that she spoke with the President of the United States in the grocery store. Instead, I am interested in the credibility of the report and the authorial intent.

Now let us suppose that my wife returns from the grocery store and tells me she saw and spoke with an alien. In this instance, I have a serious tension between the evidence, which may be good, and my understanding of reality. Should I reject the evidence or adjust my understanding of reality? Let us also suppose that my neighbor then telephones and provides a report similar to my wife's. I then turn on the television and observe a number of reports of alien sightings presently taking place around the world. If I am satisfied that the sources are credible and I am secure in my understanding of authorial intent, I may still pause, since I presently regard the existence of aliens as dubious. But I should then reexamine my reasons for believing in the nonexistence of aliens in light of the evidence before me that they do. Perhaps I would be less hasty to reject all of the reports of alien sightings. I should not require *extraordinary* evidence but *additional* evidence that addresses my present

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<sup>195</sup> Beaudoin (2006): "To the extent that deviant miracles must be assumed rare, reports of such events must be looked on with a commensurate degree of suspicion, and so a considerably strong testimony will be needed before we can justly accept such a report. But this is nothing other than what common sense dictates" (123). Henaut (1986) argues that our "present-day knowledge [of reality?] shifts the burden of evidence to the one who alleges the miracle to be true. The defender, in effect, must produce a far stronger rebuttal to set aside the usual warrants and backings" (179). Viney (1989) agrees with Hume that the more unlikely an occurrence is, the greater the preponderance of evidence is required (127). He adds that "we recognize that miracle claims carry a heavier burden of proof than claims for events that fall within the realm of antecedent probability" (127). When the heavier burden cannot be met and no hypothesis adequately accounts for all the facts, as is the case with the resurrection of Jesus, then one should suspend belief (128).

understanding of reality or my horizon, which may be handicapped and in need of revision.

This is similar to answering the objections of a Muslim to Jesus' resurrection or even his death by crucifixion. Since the *Qur'an* states that Jesus was not killed in the first century (Q 4:157-58), the very strong evidence that he was may not be enough to convince a Muslim. This would not mean that extraordinary evidence is required before historians are warranted in concluding that Jesus died by crucifixion in the first century. It only means that a Muslim may require additional evidence for himself before believing, since there is a conflict with his horizon. The worldview of one historian does not place a greater burden on the shoulders of others. It is the responsibility of the historian to consider what the evidence would look like if he were not wearing his metaphysical bias like a pair of sunglasses that shade the world. It is not the responsibility of the evidence to shine so brightly that they render such glasses ineffectual.

If the evidence for the occurrence of a particular miracle is strong, that is, the historian can establish that the authorial intent of the sources is to report what was perceived as a miracle, the event occurred in a context that was charged with religious significance, the report possesses traits that favor the historicity of the event, and no plausible naturalistic theories exist, then a requirement for extraordinary evidence is unwarranted. Some historians may require additional evidence supporting supernaturalism before believing since the event is foreign to their present horizon, but no greater burden of proof is required for a miracle-claim.<sup>196</sup> There is a difference

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<sup>196</sup> Additional evidence supporting supernaturalism could include the evidence for theism. However, I am not in agreement with the following who contend that a case for theism is required of historians proposing the historicity of a particular miracle: Swinburne (2003), 203; Davis (1993), 186; Geivett in Stewart, ed. (2006), 96, 100, 101. Let us suppose that I am mistaken on the above and that the maxim remains that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. We are challenged to define when the evidence may be said to be 'extraordinary.' This, of course, is a subjective endeavor, since what is extraordinary for one may not be enough for another. I would like to suggest that, given the paucity of data that often plagues many historical hypotheses, when a hypothesis fulfills all five criteria for the best explanation and outdistances competing hypotheses by a significant margin that hypothesis may be said to have extraordinary evidence supporting it. I would also like to call attention to the fact that the requirement for extraordinary evidence cuts both ways. If a historian proposes a natural theory such as group hallucinations in order to account for the reports of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to groups, he will be required to present a case for the possibility of group hallucinations. Since modern psychology generally regards group hallucinations as highly improbable if not impossible, the assertion that group hallucinations account for the post-resurrection appearances is an extraordinary claim and, thus, requires extraordinary evidence. Non-theist historians are not licensed to claim that a hypothesis that is terribly *ad hoc* or that strains the data beyond what it can bear should be preferred over a hypothesis with a supernatural element that meets every claim to historicity. And those who feel compelled to do so indirectly admit the strength of the data in favor of a miracle. The non-theist historian may reply that miracles are more unlikely than very rare natural occurrences and, thus, require a greater burden of proof than an unlikely natural hypothesis that accounts for the same data. Accordingly, any hypothesis involving a natural explanation, no matter how improbable or poorly evidenced should be preferred over a hypothesis involving a miracle. (See Pannenberg's observation of this logic throughout biblical scholarship in Pannenberg in D'Costa, ed. [1996], 63.) But how does the non-theist historian know this? Testimonies of God's intervention in history occur with every claim to answered prayer. Although many claims of God's intervention could in reality be coincidence, many claims of coincidence could in reality be God's intervention. This is not to suggest that historians should assign a supernatural explanation when a natural one is available that is at least equally plausible. I am instead challenging the notion that the historian's default position is that we live in a world where God does not intervene.



between demonstrating the historical superiority of a hypothesis and convincing a particular historian to give up a deeply held view.

We have examined three paradigms for determining burden of proof. The first is a risk assessment matrix where higher risk warrants a greater burden of proof. But this directly links risks with ramifications. Probabilities do not work in this manner. The legal paradigm only works when the burden of proof in civil cases is applied: *more likely than not*. This is how historians typically proceed. The third paradigm is Sagan's Saw: *extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence*. But this fails since only additional evidence is required and that by certain historians for whom the conclusion challenges their horizon. We observed that the evidence is not responsible for satisfying the biases of the historian. Rather, the historian is responsible for setting aside his biases and considering the evidence. We are thus left with the conclusion that the paradigm provided by the legal system in civil court is best suited for the investigation of miracle claims.

## 2.9. Summary and Conclusions

Throughout this chapter we have sought to answer the question, "Can historians embark on historical investigations when the subject is a miracle-claim?" We have considered five major positions. We first considered Hume's objections. His arguments challenged us to form criteria for the identification of a miracle and to be able to do so without opening the floodgates of credulity. We next dialogued with McCullagh who reminded us of the challenge posed by horizon discussed in the previous chapter. Historians embarking on a historical investigation of the resurrection of Jesus must be prepared to defend their worldview. We then analyzed Meier's position, which reinforced the challenge to have criteria for identifying a miracle. Meier also prompted us to place a check on how far historians can go in their examination of miracle claims, since a description of "resurrection" carries more than the claim that a corpse was revived; it is theologically charged to the extent that some of its components cannot be verified.

We then read Ehrman who made us consider probabilities and reminded us that the criteria and method we employ must likewise be applicable to miracle claims in non-Christian religions. Finally, our interaction with Ehrman reminded us that historians are prone neither to give much attention to epistemology nor to justifying their methods. Thus, as we proceed we will be careful to understand where we are going and how we are going to proceed. Wedderburn and Dunn reminded us that facts are laden with interpretation and that some facts are built upon a combination of other facts. Finally, we discussed how the burden of proof is impacted by historians arguing for the historicity of a particular miracle-claim and discovered that no greater burden is required.

Each of these challenges has made us consider our steps more carefully and sharpened our thinking every step of the way. We may not agree with those who maintain that historians cannot assess miracle claims for their historicity; but we are thankful for their contribution and are better historians as a result.

Therefore, we conclude that historians are not prohibited from investigating the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, although historians affirming its historicity

cannot grant *resurrection* in its full theological sense. If the resurrection of Jesus was an event that occurred in history, those who refuse historians the right to investigate it or who *a priori* exclude miracles as a possible answer could actually be placing themselves in a position where they cannot appraise history accurately. Ben Meyer explains:

He accordingly finds himself in a situation which does not allow him, as historian, to come to grips with history, for he cannot know whether or not the possibility he dutifully omits to consider offers the best account of a given constellation of data.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Meyer (1979), 102. See also R. Brown (*Death of the Messiah*, 1994), 2:1468; Habermas in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007), 290-91; Padgett (1998), 294-95. Contra is Schweitzer (1964) who maintained that a “hate” for the supernatural elements of the Gospels, “sharpened [the] historical insight” of Reimarus and Strauss (4).

## Chapter Three

### Historical Sources

### Pertaining to the Resurrection of Jesus

#### 3.1. Introductory Comments

Once upon a time there was a farmer who began to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. After a short while, he put the book down and sighed, "I wish I had his worries." The German historian Christian Meier in 1973 told this fable to illustrate the troublesome relationship between philosophers of history and practicing historians.<sup>1</sup> Zagorin notes that "the majority of professional historians . . . appear to ignore theoretical issues and would prefer to be left undisturbed to get on with their work."<sup>2</sup> In this investigation of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, we have not ignored theoretical issues and it is now time to move from being philosophers of history to practitioners of it. We might think the remainder of our task to be much easier. But as we now do the work of the farmer—the historian—we will see that it is by no means a simple task.

Having discussed the nature of historical knowledge, how historians come to know the past, and what impact a miracle claim has on the process, we are now ready to proceed with our investigation. Historians must begin by identifying sources relevant to their investigation. The historian will mine these for data that will eventually be employed as *evidence* for a preferred hypothesis. Accordingly, a discussion related to our primary literature is necessary. Obviously, we will place a premium on the better sources. For example, the historian can assign no historical value to John Wesley's 1739 hymn "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" in an investigation of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. At best, this hymn would tell historians that the resurrection of Jesus was still held by some in the eighteenth century to be a historical event. We are looking for sources much earlier and more closely connected to the eyewitnesses.

Our discussion of sources will focus on those sources that mention the death and/or resurrection of Jesus and are thought by at least some scholars to have been written within one hundred years of Jesus. These include the canonical Gospels, the letters of Paul, possibly pre-Pauline material (namely the much discussed tradition in 1 Corinthians 15, the speeches in the book of Acts, oral formulas, *Q*, and pre-Markan material), non-Christian literature of the period, a few of the Apostolic Fathers who are believed to have had connections with one or more of the original disciples of Jesus, and the earlier Apocryphal literature that includes but is not limited to some of the Gnostic literature.<sup>3</sup>

After discussing each source or category I will assign it a rating in terms of the likelihood that it provides independent testimony relevant to the present investigation. Christian sources will be rated according to the likelihood that they provide independent testimony to apostolic teaching. Ratings include the following: *unlikely*,

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<sup>1</sup> As told by Lorenz (1994), 297.

<sup>2</sup> Zagorin (1999), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Although Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian wrote within the same period, their works are regarded as largely dependent on the canonical literature.

*possible-minus, possible, possible-plus, highly probable, indeterminate, and not useful.*

## 3.2. Sources

### 3.2.1. Canonical Gospels

Since the most detailed reports of Jesus' resurrection appear in the canonical Gospels, we will discuss them first, although any detailed discussion would take us well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Some scholars take a very skeptical view of the Gospels, contending that much of their content was created by the Evangelists and emerges largely out of their theological interests.<sup>4</sup> Others view the Gospels as containing mostly accurate reports that are based to varying degrees on eyewitness testimony even while having theological interests.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the 1990's, a large segment of New Testament scholarship maintained that the Gospels represent a *sui generis*, that is, a genre unique to them. This *sui generis* was viewed as a type of mythology. Consider what the Jesus Seminar wrote in 1992: "[T]he gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand. Supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so."<sup>6</sup> In other words, according to the Jesus Seminar at that time, the Gospels belong to a mythical genre and, thus, anyone making a claim of historicity pertaining to any portion of them bears the burden of proof.

If the Gospels belong to a mythical genre, then it is true that claims of historicity bear the burden of proof. However, the converse is likewise true. If the Gospels belong to a historical genre, then claims of myth bear the burden of proof. What, then, is the genre of the Gospels? This is a question that has received much attention over the past twenty years, resulting in advances in our understanding of the issue. As a result, the consensus of scholarship has shifted significantly from the opinion held by the Jesus Seminar.<sup>7</sup> This shift was initiated by Charles Talbert's work followed by the more comprehensive and influential work by Richard Burridge.<sup>8</sup> Burridge is a classicist who set out to disprove the thesis first proposed by Talbert and a few other American scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of ancient biography. During

<sup>4</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1997), 462; Lüdemann (2004), 111; Pierce (1995), 134; Sheehan (1986), 33; Wedderburn (1999), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Bauckham (2006); Byrskog (2002), 236, 275; Craig (1998), 17-20; Grant (1977), 204; L. T. Johnson (1996), 110-11.

<sup>6</sup> Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997), 4-5. See also Koester (1990), 25-31.

<sup>7</sup> France (2002): "Fifty years ago we were drilled in the critical orthodoxy of the form-critical school which insisted that the gospels were not to be seen as biographies, but since then there has been a massive swing in scholarly opinion on this point, and increasingly sophisticated study of the nature of biographical writing in the ancient world has led to a general recognition that, for all the distinctiveness of its Christian content and orientation, in terms of literary form Mark's book (and those of Matthew, Luke and John) would have seemed to an educated reader in the first century to fall into roughly the same category as the lives of famous men pioneered by Cornelius Nepos and soon to reach their most famous expression in the 'Parallel Lives' of Plutarch" (5).

<sup>8</sup> Talbert (1977). Burridge (2004). Other significant contributions have come from David Aune, Philip Shuler, Robert Guelich, and Albrecht Dihle.

the course of his research, he reversed his opinion.<sup>9</sup> Graham Stanton wrote in the foreword to BurrIDGE's book that "very few books on the Gospels . . . have influenced scholarly opinion more strongly" and that it "has played a key role in establishing that the Gospels were read in the early centuries primarily as biographies." He adds, "I do not think it is now possible to deny that the Gospels are a sub-set of the broad ancient literary genre of 'lives,' that is, biographies."<sup>10</sup> Of BurrIDGE's book, Talbert comments, "This volume ought to end any legitimate denials of the canonical Gospels' biographical character."<sup>11</sup> BurrIDGE shows that ancient biographers were concerned with a number of issues pertaining to the person who is the subject, including his death, moral philosophy, teachings, political beliefs, stories told in tribute to and praise of him, and that they presented all of this in a narrative format. Although the Gospels do not possess all of the internal and external features of ancient biography, they do not differ from the genre "to any greater degree than other [works belonging to the genre of biography]; in other words, they have at least as much in common with Graeco-Roman [*bioi*], as the [*bioi*] have with each other. Therefore, the gospels must belong to the genre of [*bios*]."<sup>12</sup>

Each biographer usually had an agenda behind writing. Accordingly, they attempted to persuade readers to a certain way of thinking about the subject. Just as with many contemporary historical Jesus scholars, persuasion and factual integrity were not viewed as being mutually exclusive. It was not an either/or, but both.<sup>13</sup>

Flexibility was certainly a trait of *bioi*, although ancient historians had different views pertaining to the allowable extent to which liberties could be taken. For example, Lucian maintained that historians ought to follow a chronological arrangement of events<sup>14</sup> whereas Suetonius interrupted straight narrative with "material classified according to subject-matter, dealing successively with the different characteristics which his personages displayed."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> BurrIDGE (2004), 101.

<sup>10</sup> BurrIDGE (2004), viii-ix. For exceptions, see Fullmer (2007) who concludes that Mark's Gospel is "not primarily a history or biography of the life of Jesus, but rather an entertaining story of good news aimed at the wide audience of non-elite people of the ancient Hellenistic world" (210). Sheehan (1986) asserts that Mark "launched [a] new biblical genre" (32). Pierce (1995) contends that resurrection narratives belong to the genre of *testimony* (136, 139). Pierce provides little evidence that such a genre existed and some of what he does provide is inaccurate. For example, he writes, "Matthew's lack of interest in producing 'proof' of the resurrection is especially clear in this account of the encounter with the risen Jesus in Galilee: despite his presence and teaching we are told that some doubted (28:18)" (137). In reply, an empty tomb, an appearance of Jesus to the women, and one in Galilee to the disciples provides the proof Pierce seeks to avoid. Moreover, we will see in chapter 5.5.2.4 that Matthew's report that some doubted is not nearly as problematic as some have thought. Witherington (*Acts*, 1998) argues that Luke's Gospel is "Hellenistic Historiography" rather than *bioi* (1-39, esp. 15-20). However, Witherington states that it can often be difficult to distinguish historical monographs from biographies (18).

<sup>11</sup> Talbert, "Review," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993), 715, cited by Keener (2003), 1:12.

<sup>12</sup> BurrIDGE (2004), 250. Keener (2003) writes, "The Gospels are . . . too long for dramas, which maintained a particular length in Mediterranean antiquity. They also include far too much prose narrative for ancient drama" (1:10). However, Keener adds in agreement with Witherington that John is probably a biography using the mode of tragedy (1:10-11). See also Perkins (2007), 2-11.

<sup>13</sup> Byrskog (2002), 223; Hemer (1990), 79. See Lucian, *Her.* I 3.4; Cicero *De Inv.* I 19:27; Quintilian, IV 2.21, 31, 67, 89, 107, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Lucian, *How to Write History*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Grant in Suetonius (1989), 8.



Was ancient biography concerned with history? BurrIDGE answers that it was “a flexible genre having strong relationships with history.”<sup>16</sup> Keener writes, “The central difference between biography and history was that the former focused on a single character whereas the latter included a broader range of events.”<sup>17</sup> Aune writes, “While biography tended to emphasize encomium or the one-sided praise of the subject, it was still firmly rooted in historical fact rather than literary fiction. Thus while the Evangelists clearly had an important theological agenda, the very fact that they chose to adapt Greco-Roman biographical conventions to tell the story of Jesus indicated that they were centrally concerned to communicate what they thought really happened.”<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that ancient biographers varied in the liberties they took pertaining to their use of embellishment and invention. Lucian reports that Alexander the Great was distressed upon reading a newly written biography of himself by Aristobulus who had falsely ascribed to him specific deeds of valor and invented achievements too great to be true.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, Suetonius is praised for “his relatively high degree of objectivity.”<sup>20</sup> His biographies of *The Twelve Caesars* are regarded by modern Greco-Roman historians as being largely accurate, although he is somewhat indiscriminant of his sources. Because the commitment to accuracy and the liberties taken could vary greatly between biographers, identifying the canonical Gospels as *bioi* will take us only so far. Each Evangelist will need to be judged by his performance.<sup>21</sup> Each may be evaluated by how accurate his report accords with other facts held with a high degree of certainty. Moreover, each may be evaluated by how much liberty he takes with his sources. Thus, Matthew and Luke may be judged by how closely they stick to Mark when they use him. Fortunately for us, that may be quite often. BurrIDGE and Gould note that “Something over 95 per cent of Mark’s Gospel is repeated in Matthew and Luke.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, we may assess how accurately Matthew and Luke employ hypothetical *Q* and may gain insights by observing where Mark and *Q* overlap.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> BurrIDGE (2004), 67.

<sup>17</sup> Keener (2003), 1:12.

<sup>18</sup> Aune, “Greco-Roman Biography” in Aune, ed. (1988), 125.

<sup>19</sup> Lucian, *How to Write History*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Grant in Suetonius (1989), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Hemer (1990), 94.

<sup>22</sup> BurrIDGE and Gould (2004), 26. They also recognize an overlap of about 10 percent of the Synoptics in John (27).

<sup>23</sup> Keener (2003), 1:31-32. On a negative side, there are challenges to Luke’s accuracy, such as his report concerning the census by Quirinius. See R. Brown (*Birth*, 1993), 547-56. On a positive side, Keener (2003) contends that when an analysis of the use of Mark and *Q* by Matthew and Luke is done, the Synoptics “appear among the more accurate of ancient historians. . . . When one examines Luke’s use of these sources, one is repeatedly impressed with his restraint. Granted, Matthew and Luke exercise freedom in arranging and editing Mark and other sources that they share in common; but this editing must be judged minimal by ancient standards, not affecting the content as substantially as those who cite this ‘freedom’ often assume” (1: 31). Keener provides the following examples of where Mark and *Q* overlap: “Mark 1:7-13 with Matt 3:7-4:11/Luke 3:7-17, 4:1-13; Mark 3:22-27 with Matt 12:24-30/Luke 11:15-23.” Luke is not given to embellishment as is Josephus. For example, Luke reports that an Egyptian led a revolt and 4,000 followed him into the wilderness (Acts 21:38). Josephus reports the number at 30,000 (*War* 2:261-263). In another text, Josephus reports that “no less than three million” Jews appeared in Jerusalem complaining to Cestius Gallus about Florus (*War* 2:280). Such a number in that time and location is dubious (Hemer [1990], 98). An appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter is suggested in Mark 14:28 and 16:7 and merely mentioned in Luke 23:34. Perhaps Mark’s narrative of the appearance was lost or he died before he was able to report it. But Luke completed his Gospel and

The date of composition of the canonical Gospels is likewise disputed. Although nearly all scholars place them in the first century, more specific dating is somewhat arbitrary, as Luke Timothy Johnson comments:

The conventional dating of Mark between 67 and 70, for example, rests entirely on solving the ‘synoptic problem’ (the literary dependence among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke) in favor of Markan priority, and then understanding the ‘apocalyptic discourse’ of Mark 13 as a reflection of the tribulations experienced by Jerusalem in the war with Rome before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Why are Matthew and Luke conventionally dated about 85 C.E.? Because they are considered to be literarily dependent on Mark, and some time must be allowed for Mark’s circulation before revision by Matthew and Luke. . . . The problem is real and insoluble: the majority of the sources on which any historical reconstruction of early Christianity must be based are themselves impossible to locate historically because of the lack of firm geographical and chronological controls.<sup>24</sup>

The traditional authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is likewise insecure. Outside of the titles that begin each Gospel—titles themselves which are historically dubious in terms of their presence in the autographs—none of the canonical Gospels directly identifies its author by name. This has led numerous scholars to question the traditional authorship. However, at present the momentum appears to be moving in the opposite direction. Gundry argues for the traditional authorship of Mark<sup>25</sup> and asserts that a denial of the traditional authorship of Mark or Luke “would draw wide scholarly resistance.”<sup>26</sup> Witherington and Bruce argue that an eyewitness who was a disciple of Jesus is the author of John’s Gospel,<sup>27</sup> while Blomberg, Keener, and Wenham contend for traditional authorship.<sup>28</sup> Still others argue that behind John’s Gospel lays significant eyewitness testimony from an original disciple of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Some maintain that the resurrection narrative in John may be earlier than Mark’s,<sup>30</sup>

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simply may have chosen not to narrate the appearance. If he was unaware of the details, he restrained himself from inventing them and creating a narrative (Fergusson [1985], 304n38).

<sup>24</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 91. See also J. A. T. Robinson (2000), 86-117, 254-311. Although a number of New Testament scholars now acknowledge that we do not know precisely when the canonical Gospels were written, the nearly universal consensus among them is that all of the canonical Gospels were written in the first century, between AD 50-100 or within 20-70 years of the life of Jesus. Most New Testament scholars date the first Gospel, Mark, between AD 65-70 (35-40 years after Jesus) and the last Gospel, John, between AD 90-100 (60-70 years after Jesus). See Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 57 who says this is the view of “almost all scholars” (57). On John, see van der Watt (2007), 123. For exceptions, see Crossan (1992) who dates the “first edition” of John’s Gospel “very early in the second century C.E.” (431); Mack dates the Gospel of Luke c. AD 120 (Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993], 259); Vermes (2008) dates the completion of John’s Gospel to between AD 100-110 (112).

<sup>25</sup> Gundry (1993), 1026-45.

<sup>26</sup> Gundry in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 117n15.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington (1995), 11-18; Bruce (1983), 1-12.

<sup>28</sup> Blomberg (2001), 22-41; Keener (2003), 1:81-115, 139; Wenham (1992), 50.

<sup>29</sup> Pagels (2003), 59.

<sup>30</sup> Segal (2004), 455.

while others are agnostic on the matter.<sup>31</sup> At present, a significant number of scholars maintain that some of the traditions in John's Gospel are the oldest in the Gospels.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars also debate the extent to which the Gospels are dependent on one another. At minimum, most agree that Matthew and Luke knew Mark. Whereas in some places they appear largely dependent on Mark, the resurrection narratives in which we are most interested provide a much more difficult scenario. Wright observes that only 16 of 123 words in Luke 24:1-9 have equivalents in the 138 words in Mark 16:1-8, that only 35 of 136 words in Matthew 28:1-8 are in Mark's account, and that there is no *Q* to be seen.<sup>33</sup> While this does not rule out some literary dependence among the resurrection narratives, dependence may also be an illusion resulting from "a natural overlap" in oral tradition or the presence of terms that would be common even if all four Gospels were completely independent when they included reports of women going to the tomb, discovering it empty, and being told by an angel that Jesus has risen from the dead.<sup>34</sup> Wright states, "It is of course virtually impossible for four sources to tell essentially the same story without using any of the same words."<sup>35</sup>

While scholars maintain different attitudes toward the canonical Gospels, more are recognizing their historical worth.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, when it comes to the historical Jesus and early Christianity, many and perhaps most scholars assert that the canonical Gospels are our best sources, despite their hesitations.<sup>37</sup>

As stated previously, in our research we will approach the Gospels with methodical neutrality, that is, with neither approval nor skepticism.<sup>38</sup> Claims made of a particular text bear the burden of proof. Accordingly, neither claims of divine inspiration nor general trustworthiness will play any part in our investigation. Historians can always find valuable information in sources with which they do not agree. Willitts states, "It is acknowledged today that the Gospels and the New Testament are themselves a historical witness for Judaism of the first century. Scholars are now using the New Testament to help illumine the diversity of Second Temple Judaism."<sup>39</sup> I do not believe that the *Qur'an* is in any sense divinely inspired, but that does not make it unsalvageable for historians. From the many Quranic verses pertaining to battle, we know that Islam must have received resistance in seventh-century Saudi Arabia. In Q 5:116-17 we read of a dialogue between Allah and Jesus where Allah asks Jesus if he had instructed others to worship himself and his mother Mary as gods along with Allah. Jesus answers with an emphatic denial.<sup>40</sup> While I do not believe that such a dialogue between God and Jesus ever took place, this text informs me that there were

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<sup>31</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 490.

<sup>32</sup> F. Just, "Epilogue: Where Do We Go From Here?" in Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, eds. (2007), 292; Keener (2003), 1:46 (on 47 he notes Charlesworth in agreement: J. H. Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel according to John," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black, eds. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 65-97, esp. 66); Wright (2003), 679.

<sup>33</sup> Wright (2003), 589-90.

<sup>34</sup> Wright (2003), 590-91; cf. Lüdemann (2004), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Wright (2003), 589.

<sup>36</sup> C. A. Evans ("Assessing," 2006), 20; Willitts (2005), 75.

<sup>37</sup> Ehrman (2004), 215; L. T. Johnson (1996), 89; Meier (1991), 48; Witherington (2006), 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 1.2.10.

<sup>39</sup> Willitts (2005), 76.

<sup>40</sup> cf. Q 4:171, 19:35.

discussions between Muslims and a sect of Christians sometime during the seventh century in which either the Christians were proclaiming the deity of Jesus and Mary or that Muhammad mistakenly believed that they were. Thus, the claim of a text to be divinely inspired does not negate its use by historians.

Do the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels contain apostolic traditions? While many scholars contend that they do to varying degrees, there is much debate over what may and may not go back to Jesus and his original disciples. For this reason, in terms of whether the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels largely reflect independent apostolic tradition, I will assign them a rating of *possible*. We will rely most heavily on earlier sources for which it may be easier to identify traditions that can be traced back to the apostles with a higher degree of certainty.

### 3.2.2. The Letters of Paul

The next item on our list is the letters of the apostle Paul. Paul is very important for two reasons. He is our earliest written source that mentions the resurrection of Jesus, since his letters very probably predate the Gospels and were written sometime between AD 48-65 or 18-35 years after Jesus' crucifixion. He also claims to have been an eyewitness to whom the risen Jesus had appeared.

All four canonical Gospels are quite clear that the resurrection of Jesus was something that occurred to the corpse of Jesus. When the women and others came to the tomb on Easter morning, the body was no longer there. Jesus is later seen, he prepares and eats food, he is touched, and he invites others to touch him.<sup>41</sup> However, a significant minority of scholars claim that the empty tomb was a legend invented by Mark and that Luke and John invented a physical Jesus in their Gospels as a response to the Docetists who did not believe that Jesus ever actually had a physical body.

Paul is, thus, a very important source for us in understanding the early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection, especially when comparing his view of resurrection with the views expressed in the canonical Gospels.<sup>42</sup> If Paul wrote about resurrection in terms of something that occurs in a "spiritual" sense, that is, a person's spirit lives on while his corpse decays and is never raised, the chances significantly increase that the Evangelists invented the empty tomb and bodily appearances. On the other hand, if Paul thought about resurrection as something that occurs to a corpse, then it is much more difficult to argue that Mark invented the empty tomb and that the resurrection narratives in the Gospels were invented, since the earliest extant Christian literature that comments on Jesus' resurrection would appear to be in agreement with the Gospels.

Although Paul was not one of Jesus' original disciples, he was an apostle who knew the major Jerusalem apostles: Peter, James, and John. He also claimed to have been someone to whom the risen Jesus had appeared. Accordingly, it is *highly probable* that Paul preserves apostolic testimony pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

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<sup>41</sup> Mark 16:1-8; Matt. 28:9-10; Luke 24:37-42; John 20:17, 27; 21:1-13.

<sup>42</sup> Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) writes that "source criticism and tradition criticism are everything here. You have to start with Paul and see that the Gospel stories are later developments" (55).

Whether it is similar to what Peter, James, and John were preaching will be discussed below.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.2.3. Sources that Potentially Antedate the New Testament Literature

Irrespective of their theological convictions, most biblical scholars are confident that the Evangelists had sources available to them that they employed to varying degrees. Luke is clear that these sources existed when he wrote his Gospel and that he himself was dependent on other sources (Luke 1:1-3). What if we were able to ascertain what some of these sources reported? To some extent, form criticism may allow us to do just that.

#### 3.2.3.1. Q

When we read the Synoptic Gospels carefully, we notice that there are a significant number of passages where all three report the same story in very similar terms, length, and order. How did this phenomenon occur? Since Luke reported that other accounts of Jesus existed in his day (Luke 1:1-2), it is plausible that Matthew, Mark, and Luke used one or more of those sources. Although it is not an indisputable conclusion, most scholars believe that Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels to be written. That opinion may change in the future, but for this dissertation I will assume Markan priority, that John was written last, and that Matthew and Luke were written sometime in-between.

We may also note numerous occasions where there appears to be tradition common to Matthew and Luke that is *not* found in Mark. Consider the following example:

Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For every one asking receives and the one seeking finds and to the one knocking it will be opened.<sup>44</sup>

This saying of Jesus appears verbatim in Matthew 7:7-8 and Luke 11:9-10 but is absent from Mark. There appear to be two reasonable explanations that account for this similarity:

1. Matthew and Luke received this saying from a common source, which may have been a person, an oral tradition, or a written source.
2. Luke used Matthew as his source or *vice versa*.

Let us look at a longer example that is quite impressive: Matthew 12:41-42 and Luke 11:31-32. Either Matthew or Luke inverted the order. Thus, to appreciate the similarities, I have inverted Luke 11:31-32 so that it reads as 32-31. Differences between the two texts are italicized.

The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the [day of] judgment with this generation and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold one greater than Jonah is here.<sup>42</sup> The queen of the south will be raised in the

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<sup>43</sup> See section 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>44</sup> Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὐρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν· πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὐρίσκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται.



[day of] judgment with this generation and will condemn *it*, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold one greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:41-42)<sup>45</sup>

The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the [day of] judgment with this generation and will condemn *it*, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold one greater than Jonah is here.<sup>31</sup> The queen of the south will be raised in the [day of] judgment with *the men of* this generation and will condemn *them*, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold one greater than Solomon is here. (Luke 11:32-31)<sup>46</sup>

With the exception of the inverted order of the two verses, the only differences are that Matthew asserts that the queen will be raised with *this generation* and will condemn *it* whereas Luke writes that the queen will be raised with *the men of this generation* and condemn *them*.

As with the prior example, there are two probable explanations for this similarity: Matthew and Luke shared a common source or one used the other as his source. We cannot know with certainty which of these options is correct. Perhaps Matthew received it from another and Luke received it from an oral tradition started by Matthew's source. Perhaps they had a common source for the first and Luke used Matthew for the second. We may never know. There are numerous passages like these within the Synoptic Gospels that vary in degrees of resemblance. Some of them are extremely close in the words they use and the order in which they appear. However, in many instances one must look very carefully to see the similarities and we must wonder whether they are the result of a common source or multiple sources reporting the same story. Because of the impressive number of passages with similarities, most scholars prefer the option that Matthew and Luke had a common source, although many others view the option that one used the other as equally plausible. I see no reason why either must be held as the exclusive answer for all similar texts. Notwithstanding, it appears that, at times, Matthew and Luke are drawing on traditions that are earlier than the Gospels they penned.

Many scholars who opt for a common source shared by Matthew and Luke (oral or written) take an additional step. Since the *source* they used was necessarily earlier, they hold that it was probably as early as the Gospel of Mark and perhaps earlier. In any case, it was distinct from Mark. By the end of the nineteenth century, scholars began to refer to this source as *Q* (for the German *Quelle*: source). *Q* is identified as the source of traditions that are similar in Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark. If a tradition appears in all three Synoptics, Mark is regarded as the source for Matthew and Luke. This rule should not be held hard and fast, since Mark may also have been using *Q* and may have chosen another source or omitted material where he

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<sup>45</sup> ἄνδρες Νινευίται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν, ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωάν, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Ἰωάν ὧδε. <sup>42</sup> βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομώντος, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Σολομώντος ὧδε.

<sup>46</sup> ἄνδρες Νινευίται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν· ὅτι μετενόησαν εἰς τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωάν, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Ἰωάν ὧδε. <sup>31</sup> βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτούς, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομώντος, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Σολομώντος ὧδε.

differs from a tradition common to Matthew and Luke. For traditions present only in Matthew or Luke, scholars assign the hypothetical sources of *M* and *L* respectively.

It is important to keep in mind that the existence of *Q* cannot be proven, since it is possible that Matthew and Luke received their information from a common witness (person) or oral traditions that had been carefully constructed about or even by Jesus and preserved.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the differences between similar reports by Matthew and Luke, often quite different, may be accounted for by slight differences in the oral tradition or perhaps Jesus localized his teachings. No manuscript of a “lost Gospel” resembling *Q* has ever been discovered. Aside from the possible allusion in Luke 1:1-2, it is not even mentioned in ancient literature. Still, *Q* is an interesting potential lead that cannot be ignored.

Among others, John Kloppenborg, James Robinson, and Burton Mack, all of whom reside on the theological left, refer to *Q* as a “sayings Gospel” or the “*Q* Gospel.”<sup>48</sup> Some like Kloppenborg and Mack believe they can even identify several earlier versions of *Q* and that there was even a *Q* community which had somewhat different beliefs than those who penned the canonical Gospels. For example, Mack makes the following assertions:

- “Lying at the bedrock of the earliest traditions about Jesus and his first followers, *Q* documents a Jesus movement that was not Christian.”<sup>49</sup>
- “*Q* is the best record we have for the first forty years of the Jesus movements.”<sup>50</sup>
- “The first followers of Jesus did not know about or imagine any of the dramatic events upon which the narrative gospels hinge. These include the baptism of Jesus; his conflict with the Jewish authorities and their plot to kill him; Jesus’ instruction to the disciples; Jesus’ transfiguration, march to Jerusalem, last supper, trial, and crucifixion as king of the Jews; and finally, his resurrection from the dead and the stories of an empty tomb. All of these events must and can be accounted for as mythmaking in the Jesus movements, with a little help from the martyrology of the Christ, in the period after the Roman-Jewish war. Thus the story of *Q* demonstrates that the narrative gospels have no claim as historical accounts.”<sup>51</sup>

Mack strays far beyond what the data warrants. It is certainly true that a “reconstructed *Q*” does not contain a resurrection of Jesus and this is noteworthy in our discussion of sources. However, this by no means warrants the conclusion that *Q* was unaware of it. For *Q* also does not clearly mention Jesus’ death by crucifixion.<sup>52</sup> Are we to suppose that the alleged *Q* community—in any of its hypothetical layers of development—was unaware of this event? Kloppenborg himself admits that “*Q* does

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<sup>47</sup> This would be different than what is imagined by those who think of *Q* as another Gospel or as sayings literature.

<sup>48</sup> Kloppenborg (2000); Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. (2002).

<sup>49</sup> Mack (1993), 245.

<sup>50</sup> Mack (1993), 245.

<sup>51</sup> Mack (1993), 247. Smith (2003) argues that pre-Mark and *Q* probably contained traditions that spoke of Jesus’ assumption rather than resurrection (123-137). Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003) seems open to the possibility that *Q* did not maintain “a literal belief in Jesus’ resurrection” (58).

<sup>52</sup> Carnley (1987), 212; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 231. However, it is possible that Jesus’ death is known by *Q* 14:27 and possibly 11:49-51 indicated by the expression “this generation.”

not offer a complete catalogue of the Q group's beliefs."<sup>53</sup> It may also be noted that "all of the data available (including Q) were retained by churches which did celebrate his resurrection."<sup>54</sup> It would be very odd for there to have been widespread use within the Christian communities of a source from another community that denied the very heart of their faith! Moreover, a number of explanations ranging in plausibility can explain the absence of Jesus' resurrection in Q without the least bit of strain: (1) Q did not exist and Luke simply used Matthew as his source on these points or *vice versa*; (2) Q was only a collection of Jesus' sayings/teachings and a resurrection narrative would have been as out of place in Q in terms of genre and purpose as it would have been in Paul's letters;<sup>55</sup> (3) Q contained a resurrection narrative but Matthew and Luke used other sources which they preferred;<sup>56</sup> (4) Mark used or intended to use Q for his resurrection narrative but it was lost with his ending.

We must always keep in mind that Q is a hypothetical source which, given our current data, we cannot know much about, much less be certain of a hypothetical community that produced it. Q is by no means as certain as the discovery of an ancient document.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, a number of scholars either remain unconvinced that Q ever existed or see a great deal of unverified speculation in Q studies.<sup>58</sup>

Problems with Mack's conclusions continue to mount when he provides unverified possibilities, then proceeds as though they are secured facts. This is a logical fallacy known as *potest ergo est: It is possible; therefore, it is.*<sup>59</sup> It is wishful thinking rather than careful scholarship. In the field of Jesus studies where much is on the line and it is impossible to be completely objective, there is no room for this kind of approach by serious scholars, especially one as experienced as Mack. Adams's comments on Mack's conclusions are piercing:

If we had an actual (rather than theoretical), complete (rather than fragmentary) document (rather than embedded materials), then we might need to posit a community for which such a document would be foundational. Given what we in fact have in the hypothetical source known as Q, to speak about a non-Christian Jesus movement that survived the crucifixion without a belief in the resurrection is to engage in speculation that borders on fantasy.<sup>60</sup>

Johnson refers to Mack's thesis that Q knew nothing of the resurrection of Jesus as "an exercise in baseless speculation."<sup>61</sup> For Johnson, Mack's overall thesis that the Q

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<sup>53</sup> Kloppenborg (2000), 371.

<sup>54</sup> Dunn (2003), 826.

<sup>55</sup> Wright (2003), 434; cf. Wright ("A New Birth?" 2000), 77n10. Also see Dunn (2003), 160.

<sup>56</sup> Wright (2003), 434n104.

<sup>57</sup> Contra is Tabor (2006) who refers to Q as "our most authentic early Christian document" (150).

<sup>58</sup> Perkins (2007), 89; Wright ("A New Birth?" 2000) notes that "a significant minority who practice [source criticism] come to very different conclusions to the majority (e.g. doubting the existence of Q); and that within the Q-believing majority a significant number do not think that we can read between the lines of different sources and produce, with any certainty at all, layers of 'development', of which 'Early Q' and 'Late Q' are obvious examples" (75). Wright (2003) himself is uncertain about the existence of Q (403). For extensive criticisms of the Q hypothesis, see Goodacre and Perrin, eds. (2004).

<sup>59</sup> Adams (1996), 152, 153; Kofoed (2005), 48.

<sup>60</sup> Adams (1996), 153-54. See also Perkins (2007), 85.

<sup>61</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 138. Hurtado (2003) refers to such speculation as "dubious" (231); Perkins (2007), 125.

community was “non Christian” is “pure flimflam.”<sup>62</sup> There is no positive evidence in its favor, it requires eight arbitrary assumptions pertaining to “the way texts and communities work,” it ignores all of the evidence provided by Paul and Acts, and cannot account for the proliferation of literature about Jesus.<sup>63</sup> As I read Mack’s epilogue I got the impression that there are certain political ideas that motivated his conclusions. Johnson makes a similar observation and judges it “very unlikely” that Mack is sincerely interested in history at this point.<sup>64</sup> While this may be correct, we cannot know. And bias does not necessarily distort historical judgment. However, when we note the weak arguments upon which Mack’s thesis is built, it may not be a stretch to maintain that Mack’s political convictions have (at least temporarily) handicapped his ability to conduct responsible historical research pertaining to the historical Jesus.

There may have been a source employed at times by Matthew and Luke, and for all we know, Mark too. If *Q* existed, it necessarily predated Matthew and Luke. We have no assurance that *Q* reported the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, to conclude that *Q* knew nothing of Jesus’ resurrection seems highly improbable. Accordingly, *Q* does not provide us with any valuable information for our investigation at hand and receives a rating of *unlikely*.

### 3.2.3.2. Pre-Markan Traditions

Many scholars believe that Mark had a source that provided information he used in his Gospel. There is no wide scholarly agreement or consensus about what a pre-Markan tradition may have included, especially when we speak of a pre-Markan Passion narrative. Marion Soards examined thirty-five scholars who have provided detailed analyses of a pre-Markan passion narrative and demonstrated that scholarly agreement on the pre-Markan material is non-existent.<sup>65</sup> Not a single verse was agreed upon by all thirty-five scholars. In fact, of the eighty-seven verses in the Markan passion narrative (Mark 14:32-15:47), only eight verses (or nine percent) enjoyed more than a seventy percent agreement.<sup>66</sup> Of the pre-Markan resurrection narrative, Crossan complains of “a wide disagreement” among scholars who “have been quite unsuccessful in obtaining any consensus on the pre-Markan tradition [and reconstruction] in 16:1-8.”<sup>67</sup> O’Collins asserts that “whereas many scholars accept in general that Mark drew on earlier written and/or oral sources for his passion and resurrection narratives, any particular reconstructions of these sources remain at best tentative and do not command wide scholarly agreement.”<sup>68</sup> In reference to the empty tomb narrative, Engelbrecht comments that “here we seem to be at an impasse, because after years of discussing the form-critical aspects of the story we still know very little, if anything at all, about the story in its pre-Markan form.”<sup>69</sup> Soards

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<sup>62</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 53.

<sup>63</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 53.

<sup>64</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 53.

<sup>65</sup> This essay was edited and presented by R. Brown: M. L. Soards, “Appendix IX: The Question of a Premarkan Passion Narrative” in R. Brown (*Death*, 1994) 2:1492-1524.

<sup>66</sup> Five had seventy-four percent agreement: 14:46, 15:20-21, 27, 34; two had seventy-six percent agreement: 15:22, 37; one enjoyed seventy-nine percent agreement: 15:24.

<sup>67</sup> Crossan, “Empty Tomb and Absent Lord (Mark 16:1-8)” in W. Kelber, ed. *The Passion in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 136, 145 as reported by Waterman (2006), 100.

<sup>68</sup> O’Collins (*Easter Faith*, 2003), 67.

<sup>69</sup> Engelbrecht (1989), 245.

concludes that the task of separating tradition from Markan redaction “may finally be an impossible one.” He adds that we do not need to abandon the notion that Mark edited his source but that we should instead focus our efforts on the material Mark presents.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, while a pre-Markan source may have existed, its contents are too uncertain to posit with any degree of plausibility that it differed essentially from what we read in Mark.<sup>71</sup> I assign it a rating of *indeterminate*.

### 3.2.3.3. Speeches in Acts

Scholars have noted Luke’s unparalleled interest in speeches. These may serve as possible sources for our investigation. Principal speeches comprise approximately twenty-two percent of Acts.<sup>72</sup> However, when direct speeches outside of the principal ones are included, “slightly more than half the book of Acts is taken up with the recording of direct speech.”<sup>73</sup> Given Luke’s interest in speeches, this leads us to question whether they are summaries or his creations. If summaries, do they refer to actual speeches or do they encapsulate the early preaching of the Church?

There has been much discussion over the use of speeches by other ancient historians as a background for understanding Luke’s intentions. Consider the statements by Thucydides:

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one’s memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.<sup>2</sup> And with reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible.<sup>3</sup> My conclusions have cost me some labour from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eye-witnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other.<sup>74</sup>

Thucydides attempted to reproduce speeches with accuracy, employing his own recollections when he had been present as well as those who also witnessed the event. Because of the difficulty of recalling a speech verbatim, he arranged them as he thought they may have been uttered, keeping as nearly as he could to the general sense of what had been said. It is difficult to know whether Thucydides is saying that conflicting eyewitnesses and imperfect memory were responsible for discrepancies in

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<sup>70</sup> Soards in R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 2:1523-24. See also Wright (2003), 403.

<sup>71</sup> I am, thus, in disagreement with Marxsen (1990) who asserts, “[The four resurrection narratives] can all be traced back to the *one* narrative which the author of the Gospel of Mark had in front of him and which, with the help of literary criticism, can be rather easily reconstructed” (51-52).

<sup>72</sup> Hemer (1990), 415.

<sup>73</sup> Hemer (1990), 416.

<sup>74</sup> Thucydides, *Histories* 1.22.1-3. English translation provided by Perseus 2.0.



the accounts he used or whether he intentionally preserved the differences in his own accounts.<sup>75</sup>

Polybius provides us with further comments on speeches:

Surely an historian's object should not be to amaze his readers by a series of thrilling anecdotes; nor should he aim at producing speeches which *might* have been delivered, nor study dramatic propriety in details like a writer of tragedy: but his function is above all to record with fidelity what was actually said or done, however commonplace it may be. For the purposes of history and of the drama are not the same, but widely opposed to each other. In the latter the object is to strike and delight by words as true to nature as possible; in the former to instruct and convince by genuine words and deeds; in the latter the effect is meant to be temporary, in the former permanent. In the latter, again, the power of carrying an audience is the chief excellence, because the object is to create illusion; but in the former the thing of primary importance is truth, because the object is to benefit the learner.<sup>76</sup>

For Polybius, historians should only report speeches known to have actually occurred. They are to attempt to report as closely as possible what actually was said and done. A third ancient author, Lucian, exhorts historians to write speeches that suit those giving them and that they should be clear. The historian is permitted to show off his own skills as an orator when reconstructing a speech.

If a person has to be introduced to make a speech, above all let his language suit his person and his subject, and next let these also be as clear as possible. It is then, however, that you can play the orator and show your eloquence.<sup>77</sup>

There are two extant reports of a speech delivered by the emperor Claudius to the Roman senate in AD 48. Tacitus provides a version of the speech in *Annals* 11.24. Remarkably, fragments of that speech are also preserved on a bronze plaque discovered at Lugdunum (Lyons) in 1528. Although a core is clearly discernable,<sup>78</sup> there are differences between the accounts and it is difficult to know which is more accurate. Most favor the plaque, since Tacitus's writing style is present in his version.<sup>79</sup> It is certain that either one or both are far from a verbatim account.

A number of scholars hold there are reasons for believing old material exists behind Luke's speeches and that they are not free inventions. Stanton notes that some Semitic material is probably behind the speeches that appear in the first fifteen

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<sup>75</sup> If the latter, I cannot help but think of the three slightly differing accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9, 22, and 26.

<sup>76</sup> Polybius 2.56. English translation (corrected) by Perseus Project at [www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0234&layout=&loc=2.56#anch2](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0234&layout=&loc=2.56#anch2) (accessed June 12, 2008).

<sup>77</sup> Lucian, Volume VI, *How to Write History*, 58, K. Kilburn, transl. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1959), 71.

<sup>78</sup> An English translation of the Lugdunum tablet is provided by William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), 2:186-88 and may be read online at [www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/48claudius.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/48claudius.html).

<sup>79</sup> Byrskog (2002), 212; Hemer (1990), 76.

chapters of Acts, while Bauckham notes that the speeches seem “strikingly independent of Luke’s Gospel.”<sup>80</sup>

Whether Luke conformed to the standards held by historians of his day or was the negative type of historian Polybius had in mind can only be argued through two means. The first would be to demonstrate Luke’s respect—or lack of it—for his sources. The second would be to demonstrate that Acts is of a specific genre—either one that shows Luke intended to write an accurate history of the first three decades of the Church or one that shows he was more interested in entertainment.<sup>81</sup> Detecting Lukan vocabulary and style in the Acts speeches does nothing to undermine their accuracy except to show that they are not verbatim reports, which nearly all scholars would acknowledge. Although some scholars are encouraged that earlier material may lay behind the speeches in Acts, any appeal to them in our investigation must be accompanied with great caution and restraint.<sup>82</sup> For at the end of the day, we just do not know enough about their origin, as Soards explains:

[O]n the issue of Luke’s creativity in composing the speeches, responsible critics have drawn remarkably different conclusions. While no one thinks the speeches are verbatim records of early Christian declamation, many scholars are actually not far from such an idea, themselves believing that Luke always offers a valid summary of actual addresses. Luke, Thucydides, Polybius, Lucian, and others are read as is necessary to support this contention. Other scholars, however, interpret the same ancient writers to indicate that Luke had a free hand in composing the speeches, even perhaps reporting speeches when none were made. The fact is, we do not know.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Stanton (1974), 70; Bauckham (2002), 305. See also Vermes (2008): “the ideas attributed to the beginning of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem and Judea, chronicled in the Acts of the Apostles, have every probability of mirroring in substance the earliest thoughts of the first Jewish-Christian communities of Palestine” (112).

<sup>81</sup> Although he sees “a number of novelistic touches” in Acts, Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) is doubtful that entertainment is in mind. After providing a number of reasons in support he concludes that “Luke meant to write a history of early Christianity, not a novel. Indeed, all of the ancient Christian authors who refer to the book appear to have understood it in this way” (143, box 10.1). Witherington (*Acts*, 1998) argues that Luke-Acts are two volumes written as Hellenistic Histories and that Luke regarded himself as a serious religious historian (2-51).

<sup>82</sup> Hemer (1990): “But there is a *prima facie* case for saying, whatever view one takes of the Synoptic Problem, that the ‘speeches’, of Luke’s Gospel in particular, are largely dependent on extant or inferable sources. There is editing; there is rearrangement—and that may hardly be surprising in an ‘episodic’ narrative—but the striking thing is the extent to which Luke uses sources almost verbatim” (78-79); Stanton (1974): “The vocabulary, tone, style and even the theology of the first chapters of Acts all differ so markedly from the later chapters that if all the material stems from Luke’s pen, he must have been one of the most brilliant authors and stylists of the first centuries of the Roman Empire” (68-69); Witherington (*Acts*, 1998): “One of the factors which must count in favor of seeing these as narratives of real events and real speeches is their obvious differences. If Luke were to set out to compose on his own multiple accounts of Saul’s conversion, we would have expected the narratives to be somewhat more similar than they are” (310).

<sup>83</sup> Soards (1994), 16n53. Soards speculates that at minimum Luke’s speeches represent what was likely to have been said (17n53). Byrskog (2002) asserts that “the consensus, it seems, has now moved away from U. Wilckens’ insistence on the strongly redactional character of most of them [i.e., speeches in Acts] and acknowledges the author’s thorough dependence on earlier material” (284). Hemer (1990) presents “three different levels of possible historical value in the speeches”: (1) they represent what actually was said on that specific occasion; (2) they present a “fair comment suitable to the tenor of the time, or the like”; (3) they are Lukan creations (419). Arguments for and against each option appear on 420-26. In summary, Hemer concludes that “the reliability and source of the material in the speeches is

Accordingly, in terms of understanding them as reflecting the teachings of the Jerusalem apostles I assign the Sermon Summaries in Acts a rating of *possible*.

### 3.2.3.4. Oral Formulas

Oral traditions played a large role in the Greco-Roman world, since only a small minority, perhaps less than ten percent, could read and write.<sup>84</sup> Peppered throughout the New Testament are a number of short formulas that mention the resurrection of Jesus. Many scholars believe these are oral traditions uttered in worship or baptismal settings that have found their way into the New Testament and, thus, are earlier than the literature in which they appear. Here are a few examples:

#### 3.2.3.4.a. Romans 1:3b-4a

τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, <sup>4</sup> τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν

He was born from the seed of David according to the flesh; <sup>4</sup> He was declared the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness [by] his resurrection from the dead

Many scholars believe there is an older formula that Paul here employs that may go back to the Jerusalem church even if Paul has recast its wording.<sup>85</sup> Dunn notes the following features that have lead many to this conclusion:

- “the two relative clauses in antithetic parallelism” (τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ / τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει)
- “the parallel verbs as aorist participles” (τοῦ γενομένου / τοῦ ὀρισθέντος)
- “two sets of parallel phrases attached” (ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ / υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει and κατὰ σάρκα / κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης)
- “the untypical Pauline term” (ὀρίζω)
- “the Semitism” (πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης). Käsemann adds the typically Semitic placing of the verb (a participle in this case: τοῦ γενομένου / τοῦ ὀρισθέντος) first (e.g., 1 Tim 3:16).<sup>86</sup> This is significant since Paul is mostly writing to Gentile readers in Rome. Semitic components tend to point to an origin in the Jerusalem Church where it is likely to have been formed or approved by the leadership there: Peter, James, and John.
- “and the primitive description of Christ’s resurrection as ‘the resurrection of the dead’”
- “the evidence of similar primitive balanced formulations (son of David, son of God) in 2 Tim 2:8; Ign. *Smyrn.* 1.1 and in the common tradition lying behind

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far from settled. There remain good reasons for taking them as abstracts of real addresses rather than fabrications” (427).

<sup>84</sup> Malina, Joubert, and van der Watt (1996), *Logos Libronix*.

<sup>85</sup> Barrett (1957), 19; Bruce (1985), 68; Dunn (2002), “Form and Structure,” *Logos Libronix*; Hengel (2004), 157-58; Hurtado (2003), 107, 171, 326; Käsemann (1980), 10-11; Longenecker (1970), 80; R. Longenecker, “Christological Materials in the Early Christian Communities” in Longenecker, ed. (2005), 71.

<sup>86</sup> Käsemann (1980), 10.

the birth narratives (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:32-35; see Brown, *Birth*, 133-43, 309-16).<sup>87</sup>

What is important for our investigation is that we have here a statement that Jesus rose from the dead that may date back earlier than Paul's letter to the Romans, which is typically dated between AD 55 to 58.

### 3.2.3.4.b. Luke 24:33-34

Καὶ ἀναστάντες αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ εὔρον ἡθροισμένους τοὺς ἑνδεκά καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς, <sup>34</sup> λέγοντας ὅτι ὄντως ἠγέρθη ὁ κύριος καὶ ὤφθη Σίμωνι.

[Referring to the Emmaus disciples] “And getting up that same hour they returned to Jerusalem and found gathered the Twelve and those with them <sup>34</sup> saying, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.”

The statement in 24:34, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon,” is of interest. Two factors have led some scholars to identify this expression as an oral formula. First, it seems somewhat foreign to Luke's narrative since the appearance to Simon was not narrated by Luke or by any other Evangelist. It is mentioned in what will be the most important of our oral traditions, 1 Corinthians 15:3ff., where Paul reports in v. 4, καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ. Second, the risen Jesus is now referred to as ὁ κύριος and has a Christological flavor.<sup>88</sup> I am not persuaded by this second argument, since Jesus is referred to as ὁ κύριος by himself and by his disciples elsewhere in Luke's Gospel.<sup>89</sup> If this is a formula, it predates Luke's Gospel which was probably written between AD 60-85 with the majority of scholars favoring the latter end.

### 3.2.3.4.c. Other Formulas

Many scholars have noted what appear to be a number of short formulas that bear a resemblance to the statement, “God raised Jesus/him (from the dead)” (Rom. 4:24; 6:4; 7:4; 8:11a, b; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12, 15, 20; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; Acts 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33, 37; 17:31; 1 Pet. 1:21; Pol. *Phil.* 2:1).<sup>90</sup> Many regard this formula as the earliest nucleus of the tradition of Jesus' resurrection, since it predates all of the New Testament literature.<sup>91</sup> Another formula contains the two-fold statement of Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Thess. 4:14; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; 2 Cor. 5:15; Mark 16:6; Acts 2:23-24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30-31 [exaltation rather than resurrection]; 10:39-40; 13:28-30; Ign. *Rom.* 6:1; Pol. *Phil.* 9:2).<sup>92</sup> A few of these texts are more weighty in terms of the probability that they reflect confessional tradition. Romans 10:9 contains the introductory words “confess

<sup>87</sup> Dunn (2002), “Form and Structure,” *Logos Libronix*.

<sup>88</sup> Marshall (1978), 900.

<sup>89</sup> 7:13; 10:1, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:6; 18:6; 19:31, 34; 22:61. Of these, however, only 19:31 and 34 are declarations of Jesus or his disciples.

<sup>90</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 229-32; R. Brown (1973), 78, 78n133, 84-85; Dunn (2003), 826n4; Theissen and Merz (1998), 483. By “formula,” I do not mean that a formal approved statement is always at hand, but rather a statement of belief in a given order.

<sup>91</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 229; Dunn (2003), 826n4; Theissen and Merz (1998), 483.

<sup>92</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 230-31; Theissen and Merz (1998), 483.

that” while the baptismal context of Romans 6:4 lends itself to material that was part of a confessional tradition. The frequency in which similar content appears indicates that Jesus’ death and resurrection was part of the apostolic preaching.

### 3.2.3.4.d. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς <sup>4</sup> καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς <sup>5</sup> καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα· <sup>6</sup> ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν· <sup>7</sup> ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν· <sup>8</sup> ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη καμοί.

For I delivered to of primary importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures <sup>4</sup> and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas [i.e., Peter] then to the Twelve, <sup>6</sup> then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, from whom most remain until now, but some have fallen asleep, <sup>7</sup> then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> And last of all, as to one untimely born he appeared to me.

In nearly every historical investigation of the resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 weighs heavily and is perhaps the most important and valuable passage for use by historians when discussing the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Its first valuable quality is that it is early. Like the formulas just discussed, we have what seems to be tradition that predates the letter in which it appears. It is believed that Paul wrote the letter we now refer to as 1 Corinthians in AD 54 or 55. If Jesus died in AD 30, we are reading a letter that was written within twenty-five years of Jesus’ death by a major Church leader who knew a number of those who had walked with Jesus. If this letter contains tradition that Paul has preserved, we are even closer than twenty-five years to the events it claims to report.

What supports the widespread conclusion that we are reading tradition? There are two terms Paul employs that indicate he is imparting tradition in the careful manner used by various schools of the day: παραδίδομι and παραλαμβάνω.<sup>93</sup> Paul asserts that he is about to impart content he received from another; in other words, tradition handed down to him. Numerous Pauline passages inform us that the importance of tradition to Paul and the authority it carried cannot be overstated.<sup>94</sup> Mark and Josephus report that a zeal for tradition was standard for Pharisees, a group to which Paul had belonged.<sup>95</sup> And Paul is not hesitant to acknowledge his zeal for tradition

<sup>93</sup> BDAG (2000), #3, 762; R. Brown (1973), 81; Burrige and Gould (2004), 70; Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 2; Dunn (2003), 855n127; Gerhardsson (1998), 288-90, 295; Hayes (1997), 254-55; Kloppenborg (1978), 351; Meier (2001), 139; Segal (2004), 400; Büschel in *TDNT* (1964-76), 2:171, #6; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487.

<sup>94</sup> 1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:1, 2 (τίνι λόγῳ), 3; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 2:13 (παραλαβόντες λόγον); 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6 from Gerhardsson (1998), 290, 296.

<sup>95</sup> Mark 7:1-13, esp. 3, 5; Jos. *Ant.* 13:10:6 §297; 13:16:2 §408; cf. Phil. 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:4-8. See Setzer (1996, c1992), in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:638; M. B. Thompson, “Tradition” in Hawthorne and Martin, eds. (1993), 943-45. For more on tradition within ancient Judaism, see A. J. Avery-Peck,



while a Pharisee prior to his conversion (περισσότερως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων; “being more earnestly zealous [than others] of the traditions of my fathers”; Gal. 1:14).<sup>96</sup> It is not surprising that Christian Paul maintained a commitment to tradition, although he was now committed to the Jesus and apostolic traditions.

There are a number of components in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. consistent with Paul’s assertion that he is imparting tradition. First, the text contains a number of non-Pauline traits. As examples, with a lone exception in Galatians 1:4, ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (“for our sins”) is absent elsewhere in Paul (and the rest of the New Testament) who prefers the singular: “sin.”<sup>97</sup> The phrase “according to the Scriptures” is absent elsewhere in the Pauline corpus and the New Testament where we read γέγραπται.<sup>98</sup> Instead of the typical aorist, the perfect passive “he has been raised” is found only in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 16, 20 and in 2 Timothy 2:8 which is also a confessional formula believed to be pre-Pauline.<sup>99</sup> “On the third day” is only here in Paul.<sup>100</sup> In Paul, the term ὡφθη is found only in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 and 1 Timothy 3:16.<sup>101</sup> “The Twelve” is only here in Paul. Elsewhere he uses “the apostles.”<sup>102</sup>

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“Tradition in Judaism” and J. Neusner, “Tradition in Judaism (Supplement)” in Neusner, Avery-Peck, and Green, eds. (Brill and Logos Libronix Software, 2000).

<sup>96</sup> See also Phil. 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5.

<sup>97</sup> “Sin” appears 64 times in Paul; three occurrences in the Pastorals and five occurrences in OT quotations. Of the remaining 56, 50 are “sin” (singular and does not take the genitive). In the six occurrences where plural “sins” appears or with the genitive, “the influence of tradition is to be seen (I Cor. 15:3: kerygmatic influence; I Cor. 15:17: consequence of the kerygma; Gal. 1:4: Christological formula; Rom. 7:5; Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:14: un-Pauline formulations)” (Craig [Assessing, 1989], 2-3). See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 234; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487. This argument is weakened by the fact that περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν appears in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 while τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν occurs in Luke 11:4 and 1 Peter 2:24.

<sup>98</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005, 234); Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 3; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487.

<sup>99</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005, 234); Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 3; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487. Paul uses the aorist elsewhere: Rom. 4:24, 25; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11 (2x), 34; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15 (2x); 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:15; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10. In my opinion, this point is noteworthy though not exceedingly strong, since of a total of 25 Pauline occurrences of ἐγείρω applied to Jesus, seven (28%) are in the perfect passive. This is a substantial number. Of the seven, all but one could be said to be related to the tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 and 2 Tim. 2:8 appears itself to be credal. This would strengthen the argument that 1 Cor. 15:3-5 is tradition, since the perfect passive of ἐγείρω is employed by Paul only once outside of it and the text immediately proceeding from and relating to it. However, two occurrences of the aorist in 1 Cor. 15:15 are equally related to the tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3-5.

<sup>100</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 3.

<sup>101</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005, 234); Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 3; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487. See also Acts 13:31; 16:9. We may ask, however, what other term Paul may have employed to state that Jesus had appeared. He could have used φανερώω as he does in 2 Cor. 5:10 and Phil. 2:15.

<sup>102</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005, 234); Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 3; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487. For me, non-Pauline terms alone carry limited weight for establishing non-Pauline tradition, since we cannot rule out that these are his very words which he simply does not use in his other extant letters. It is the cumulative weight of the cluster of uncharacteristic expressions, the stylized form of the affirmations, and the introduction of this material as tradition that Paul had transmitted to them, that make the conclusion of pre-Pauline tradition so compelling. For this reason I also do not find some of the arguments against Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians convincing. Over the years, Gary Habermas and I have shared numerous email correspondences. He had a graduate assistant in his service at one point, and this assistant was charged with replying to a number of e-mails sent to Habermas. I received an email from Habermas (10/16/01) that led me to believe it came from his graduate assistant. His greeting and signature were different than on any emails I had previously

Second, parallelism exists where the first and third lines are longer, have the same construction (verb, closer modification, proved by the Scriptures), and are followed by a short sentence introduced by *ὅτι*.<sup>103</sup> Third, Paul uses *κήρυγμα/κηρύσσω* to describe the tradition. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Paul states that he is going to tell them *τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην, ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε* (the gospel that we preached which also you received) and which he also refers to as *τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν* (the word I preached to you). However, when referring back to the content of 15:3ff., he says “*οὕτως κηρύσσομεν*” (15:11), *Χριστὸς κηρύσσεται ὅτι ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγήγερται* (15:12), and *κήρυγμα ἡμῶν* (15:14). *Κήρυγμα/κηρύσσω* is a more formal term than *εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζω* and can refer to an “official announcement” though this need not be the case.<sup>104</sup> It is interesting, therefore, to see that after citing the tradition, Paul changes his description of his message and the activity of imparting it from *εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζω* to *κήρυγμα/κηρύσσω*.

There are good reasons for concluding that this tradition probably came from Jerusalem. Paul states elsewhere that spiritual teachings came from the Church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27; cf. 1 Cor. 9:11). In 1 Corinthians 14:36, the church in Corinth appears to have been forming its own policies pertaining to public worship. Paul asks them, *ἢ ἀφ’ ὑμῶν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθεν, ἢ εἰς ὑμᾶς μόνους κατήτησεν* (Did the word of God come [out] from you or did it come to you only)? As Gerhardsson comments, “These arguments are fully recognizable from the sayings of the Rabbis, are built on two basic principles: that the chosen people of God are to have *one* common ‘law’ (Lev. 24.22), and that the law is to proceed from Jerusalem (Deut. 17.8 ff., Isa. 2.3). We may quote a close parallel from rabbinic sources. R. Hananiah (ca. 110), in the Babylonian town of Nehar-Paqod, had taken the liberty of making some decisions which, according to the tradition, a local authority had no right to do; R. Natan’s scornful comment was: ‘Does the Torah proceed from Babel, and the word of God from Nehar-Paqod?’”<sup>105</sup>

Paul’s letter to the Galatians and numerous references in Acts indicate that the original Church leaders were headquartered in Jerusalem.<sup>106</sup> They were in Jerusalem during the days of Paul’s persecution of the Church. They were there three years after his conversion and still there fourteen years later.<sup>107</sup> In the latter meeting, Paul’s actions tell us that the Church in Jerusalem was the supreme doctrinal authority to which even he submitted.<sup>108</sup> Decisions made by the Jerusalem leadership held equally

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received and he used an ampersand which I did not recall observing in his numerous previous emails to me. I replied the same day noting the differences and adding that it did not appear to me he had written the email. In jest I then concluded, “Either the principles of higher criticism have some merit here or my playful analysis has let out some of the gas in certain arguments that call into question Pauline authorship of Ephesians.” Two days later I received a reply with the usual greeting and signature. In the main text were the words, “You’re wrong—I sent the memo. Conclusion: Paul wrote Ephesians!” Examples from electronic correspondence notwithstanding, non-Pauline terms in the text are consistent with Paul’s claim that he is imparting tradition and they do not stand alone in support.

<sup>103</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 7.

<sup>104</sup> BDAG (2000), #1, 543.

<sup>105</sup> Gerhardsson (1998), 275; cf. 306.

<sup>106</sup> Gal. 1:17-18; 2:1-10; Acts 1:8; 4:16; 5:28; 6:7; 8:1, 14; 9:26; 11:27; 12:25; 13:13; 15:2, 4-6; 16:4; 21:17-18.

<sup>107</sup> Gal. 1:17-18; 2:1-10.

<sup>108</sup> Gerhardsson (1998), 276-77. Cf. Acts 15:1-2.

for the Church outside of the city.<sup>109</sup> If Jerusalem controlled doctrine, it is most plausible, even very probable, that Paul received Jesus tradition from the Jerusalem apostles. Moreover, Hurtado asserts that the list of figures in the tradition who are not further explained indicates that this is “‘ingroup’ community tradition.” It must have been formulated in a setting where all of this was familiar and associates the tradition with Jerusalem.<sup>110</sup> The “we” who are preaching the *kerygma* in 15:11 are not only Paul but also the other apostles:

εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι, οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε.

Therefore, whether I or they, in this manner we preach and in this manner you believed.<sup>111</sup>

This may likewise point to an origin in Jerusalem.<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, although certainty eludes us, it is most reasonable to conclude that the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. was formed in Jerusalem and that Paul either received it directly from the Jerusalem apostles or from someone he deemed very credible.<sup>113</sup> If the latter, we can be certain that at a later time he checked it out with the Jerusalem apostles or had already heard the same from them.<sup>114</sup> One might claim that the tradition(s) Paul cites in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 had no ties to the Jerusalem Church, but whoever does so bears the burden of proof. It is widely accepted today that the tradition goes back to the Jerusalem church.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, that Paul personally knew the Jerusalem apostles is abundantly supported.<sup>116</sup>

What is also important for our purposes is that, as mentioned previously, Paul placed a lot of weight on the authority of the tradition he had received and had passed along to others. He employed tradition to resolve problems in the church, both practical and theological (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23; 15:1-3, 12). Believers are to practice and hold firmly to the traditions (1 Cor. 11:2, Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:15). They are not to associate with those believers who lead a life contrary to what is taught in the tradition until they repent (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). He chides the Corinthian believers for taking the liberty to form their own policies without first consulting Church leaders

<sup>109</sup> Acts 15:1-29, esp. 19-33.

<sup>110</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 168-69.

<sup>111</sup> It is clear that the “they” in 15:11 is the apostles. See 15:9-10 where Paul mentions the “apostles” and that he worked harder than all of them.

<sup>112</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 15.

<sup>113</sup> Habermas (2003), 20. See also Goulder (2005), 189-91; Vermes (2008): “[Paul] passes on to his flock in Corinth a tradition he has inherited from his seniors in the faith concerning the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus” (119).

<sup>114</sup> Gerhardsson (1998), 297.

<sup>115</sup> Engelbrecht (1989), 244; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 168; Lindars (1986), 91; Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998) writes, “The appearance reports may well have originated a few days, or weeks, or months, after Jesus’ death. . . . How long it was after that flight before the resurrection faith arose is impossible to say, except to note that the conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead had already taken root by the time Paul was converted about 33 C.E. On the assumption that Jesus died about 30 C.E., the time for development was thus two or three years at most” (466); M. Goulder, “The Explanatory Power of Conversion Visions” in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000): “Paul ‘received’ the tradition—that is, he was taught it at his conversion—perhaps two years after Jesus’ death (1 Cor 15:3-8)” (98).

<sup>116</sup> Gal. 1:18-19; 2:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:11; Acts 9:26-28; 15:1-30; 21:17-26; not to mention his time with Barnabas and Silas who were from among the Jerusalem Christians, the latter of which was a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22).

who must have been outside Corinth (1 Cor. 14:36). If the tradition did not address a specific topic, Paul believed as an apostle he could speak with authority on it. However, he was careful to distinguish his teaching from the tradition (1 Cor. 7:10-13, 25).<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, we never find Paul setting aside the tradition for a new teaching as we find Jesus doing in the Gospels: ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν.<sup>118</sup> At least portions of the tradition were regarded as commandments of the Lord Jesus. This is evident in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 where the teachings of Jesus pertaining to living a morally pure life are mentioned and in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 where Paul specifies the teaching of the Lord on marriage.<sup>119</sup> Some have identified numerous references to the Jesus tradition in Paul's letters. Kim lists eleven references that he regards as "Certain or Probable."<sup>120</sup> He then lists more than 30 additional examples in which possible echoes of Jesus' sayings may be found.<sup>121</sup>

When did Paul receive the tradition? A few possibilities readily present themselves. We may first consider the location of Damascus just after Paul's conversion, which is generally placed one to three years after the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>122</sup> According to Luke, Paul entered Damascus after his conversion experience. After Ananias healed his resulting blindness three days later, he spent several days with the Damascus Christians and increasingly became more powerful in his ability to confound his newly found Jewish opponents, proving that Jesus is Messiah (Acts 9:19-22). Perhaps he learned tradition during this period from Ananias or some of the other Christians there. If this is where Paul learned portions of the tradition, its reception by Paul may be dated to within three years of Jesus' death.

We may next consider the location of Jerusalem and there are two or three occasions that stand out. The first is three years after Paul's conversion when he visited Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion experience (Gal. 1:18).<sup>123</sup> During this trip he visited with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. Of interest is the term Paul uses to describe what he did while with Peter: ἱστορήσαι (or "visit"), from which

<sup>117</sup> He also distinguished his advice from his commands (1 Cor. 7:1-6; 12-17, 25). Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003) comments that since the Jerusalem leaders were active and able to speak for themselves, Paul "was not at as much liberty to make specious attributions and claims about the origins of Christian traditions as we modern scholars" (231)! Meier (1991) similarly comments, "For all his claims to apostolic authority, Paul does not feel free to create teachings and put them into the mouth of Jesus" (46)

<sup>118</sup> Mark 10:2-12; Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28; 31-32; 33-37; 38-42; 43-47 (cf. Luke 6:27); 12:1-8; 15:2-6; 19:8-9. That Paul invented New Testament Christianity is, of course, now widely rejected: Ehrman (2004), 147; L. T. Johnson (1996), 119, 122; Segal (2004), 400.

<sup>119</sup> See Mark 10:11-12; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18. Moreover, as we will observe below (3.2.5.1-2), it is more likely than not that Clement of Rome was a disciple of Peter and it is possible that Polycarp was a disciple of John. If Paul's teachings had differed fundamentally from those of the Jerusalem apostles, we would not expect the type of comments from Clement and Polycarp regarding Paul that we have. Clement places Paul on par with Peter who was perhaps his mentor (*I Clem.* 5) and Polycarp comments that the "glorious Paul . . . taught the word about the truth, accurately and reliably" (Pol. *Phil.* 3:2).

<sup>120</sup> Kim (2002), 259-70. He lists the following in this category: 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 5:1-7; Rom. 14:14; Rom. 12:14-21/1 Cor. 4:11-13; Rom. 13:8-10/Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:7; Rom. 8:15/Gal. 4:6; references to the "kingdom of God." D. Wenham (1995) lists multiple connections in Paul's writings to the Jesus traditions and rates them as "highly probable," "probable," and "plausible" (381-85).

<sup>121</sup> Kim (2002), 270-74.

<sup>122</sup> Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 98.

<sup>123</sup> Barnett (1993), 30.

derives our English term “history.” The term may mean “to get information from,”<sup>124</sup> “to inquire into a thing, to learn by inquiry.”<sup>125</sup> What was it to which Paul inquired? He could have been attempting to get to know Peter, the leading Jerusalem apostle at the time.<sup>126</sup> But from his letters Paul does not appear to be the type of person who would want to take just over two weeks simply to develop a friendship with a colleague for the sake of having another friend. “A Paul does not go up to Jerusalem to Peter, ‘the Rock’, merely in order to talk about the weather (Dodd). And a man with Peter’s commission does not waste a fortnight talking rubbish. It [sic.] can be little doubt that during this time the word of Christ ‘was between them’” (cf. Col. 3:16).<sup>127</sup>

With others, a different motive seems more likely to me. Paul’s conversion experience had turned his world upside down. He was convinced he had experienced a personal encounter with the risen Christ and it now forced him to rethink everything he had learned and thought about the Messiah, Jewish praxis, and theological matters including atonement, the kingdom of God, eschatology, and even the nature of God. He had spoken about his new views of Jesus in the synagogues and debated with his Jewish countrymen. But Paul had much work ahead of him. He would study these matters through an intensive examination of the Scriptures in order to make sense of what he now regarded as reality. Emerging from his three-year sabbatical in Arabia, we can imagine Paul wanting to complete his task by interviewing one or more of the people who had traveled with Jesus. There were no better sources for Paul than the Jerusalem apostles. There he would talk with Peter and learn about Jesus’ teachings. He would ask him what it was like to travel with Jesus. He would have the heavy theological discussions he so much valued during which he would share and hone his findings. This, I admit, is mere speculation. However, from what we appear to know about Paul, it may not be very far from what actually occurred. If this is the occasion when Paul received the tradition, we may place the tradition within four to six years of Jesus’ crucifixion and, even more importantly, it comes from the purported eyewitnesses themselves.

Paul appears to have visited Jerusalem perhaps two more times prior to penning 1 Corinthians (Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-29; Gal. 2:1-10).<sup>128</sup> On the occasion mentioned in Galatians, Paul met with the Jerusalem leadership in private. If Acts 15:1-29 reports the same visit, his interaction with the Jerusalem leadership went beyond his

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<sup>124</sup> BDAG (2000), 483.

<sup>125</sup> LS (1996), 385. See Esth. 8:12 (LXX); Esd. 1:33 (twice), 40; 2 Macc. 2:24, 30, 32 (twice); 4 Macc. 3:19; 17:7.

<sup>126</sup> Büschel in TDNT 3:396.

<sup>127</sup> Gerhardsson (1998), 298. See also Dodd (1964): “At that time he stayed with Peter for a fortnight, and we may presume they did not spend all the time talking about the weather” (16); Fergusson (1985), 292. The observations of Bruce and Vermes are of interest. The tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 refers to appearances to Peter and James. Bruce (1977) writes, “In that list two individuals are mentioned by name as having seen the risen Christ, and two only: ‘he appeared to Cephas’ and ‘he appeared to James’ (1 Corinthians 15:5, 7). It is no mere coincidence that there should be the only two apostles whom Paul claims to have seen during his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion [in Gal 1:19]” (85; cf. 93). He adds, “It was almost certainly during these fifteen days in Jerusalem that Paul received this outline” (86). Vermes (2008) agrees (119-20).

<sup>128</sup> Koester (2000) maintains that Acts 11:27-30 is “a Lukan invention” (109). There is considerable debate among scholars as to whether the visit of Gal. 2:1-10 should be equated with the visit of Acts 11 or of Acts 15.



interaction described in Galatians 2. Paul could have been the recipient of tradition during these visits.

Even more possibilities exist. He may have received some of the tradition from Barnabas or James during his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Gal. 1:19). In Galatians 2:11, Paul reports a visit by Peter to Antioch. Paul may have received tradition from Peter or from one of those who had accompanied him during this time. In Acts 11:25-30 and 12:25-15:40, Luke reports that Paul and Barnabas spent a significant amount of time together. Paul could have received tradition from this Jerusalem leader during this period. Luke also reports that, after the Jerusalem Council, ἄνδρας ἡγουμένους ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς (leading men among the brethren) named Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver the resolution. Barsabbas and Silas could have delivered some of the tradition to Paul during this trip. Silas would also accompany Paul during his next missionary journey (Acts 15:40-17:14; 18:5-11). Thus, we can place Paul and Silas together from AD 49-51. It would be toward the end of this journey when Paul would deliver to the church in Corinth the tradition he had received and of which he reminds the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7.

It is not necessary to think that Paul received *all of the tradition* on any single occasion. What is important to note, however, is that Paul was rich in opportunities to receive tradition from the Jerusalem apostles and leading Jerusalem figures. Allison asserts, “Indeed, Paul knew Peter and James [Gal. 1:18-19; 2:1-9] and presumably others who claim to have seen the risen Jesus. First Corinthians 15:3-8 is not folklore.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, even if Paul received the tradition embedded in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. from someone outside of the Jerusalem leadership, his constant interaction with these leaders in and outside of Jerusalem coupled with his high regard for tradition virtually guarantees that the details of the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. are precisely in line with what the Jerusalem leadership was preaching (1 Cor. 15:11). We have what amounts to a certifiably official teaching of the disciples on the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) 234. See also Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 82; Lüdemann (2004), 35.

<sup>130</sup> It is also possible that Paul was familiar with at least some of Jesus’ teachings while Jesus was alive. In Acts, Paul indicates that he had lived in Jerusalem for a long time (16:4). The son of Paul’s sister lived in Jerusalem (23:16). So, he would have had at least one known place where he may have stayed while in town. Moreover, he would have been in Jerusalem every Passover and every time Jews were expected to be there. If Pharisees were trained in Jerusalem, he would have spent a considerable amount of time there. Accordingly, it is very probable that Paul and Jesus were in Jerusalem at that same time on numerous occasions. If the Gospels can be trusted in their claim that Jesus preached there publicly, it is possible that Paul heard Jesus himself or had discussions concerning his teachings with Jewish leaders prior to his crucifixion. Even after Jesus’ execution, Paul demonstrates that he is familiar with Christian teachings, since he is so opposed to them that he launches a persecution against the Christians. See Marxsen (1990), 71; Stanton (1974), 93. Paul probably heard a number of early Christian preachers in Jerusalem like Stephen. As Barnett (1994) comments, “There can be no doubt that, both before he was a disciple but also afterwards, Paul knew a lot about the historical Jesus. There can be no support for the idea that Paul was some ‘Robinson Crusoe’ figure cut off from historical knowledge and entirely dependent on ‘heavenly revelation’” (4). Paul apparently knew of tradition or perhaps even firsthand that Jesus was condemned by earthly rulers (1 Cor. 2:8), was crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:8; Gal. 3:1), and buried (1 Cor. 15:4; Rom. 6:4) (120). (1 Timothy 6:13 alludes to the trial scene with Pilate. Johnson [1996, 119-21] adds that Hebrews alludes to Jesus’ prayer in the garden [Heb. 5:7] and that he died by crucifixion [12:2]. He comments that there is “no reason to date Hebrews any later than the letters of Paul” [121].) In 1 Thess. 2:14-16, Paul is aware that the Jerusalem Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death (cf. Jos *Ant.* 18:3). As much as Lüdemann (in Copan

We may never know with more precision when Paul received the tradition and from whom. What we have seen, however, is quite impressive. Atheist New Testament critic Gerd Lüdemann comments,

I do insist, however, that the discovery of pre-Pauline confessional formulations is one of the great achievements of recent New Testament scholarship.<sup>131</sup>

Theissen and Merz write,

The analysis of the formula tradition about the resurrection of Jesus allows the following conclusion: a tradition in I Cor. 15.3b-5, which goes back very close to the events themselves, attests appearances to both individuals and groups. The credibility of this tradition is enhanced, because it is part confirmed by the narrative tradition, which is independent, and because in the case of Paul we have the personal testimony of an eye-witness who knew many of the other witnesses.<sup>132</sup>

Craig comments that we should

keep firmly in mind the astounding fact, at which we cease to wonder because of its familiarity, that we have here the testimony of a man who actually talked with Jesus's brother and one of his principal disciples, both of whom claim to have personally seen Jesus risen again from the dead.<sup>133</sup>

For the aforementioned reasons, virtually all critical scholars who have written on the subject, including rather skeptical ones, maintain that in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, Paul has provided tradition(s) about Jesus that he did not form but rather received from others as he claims.<sup>134</sup> There is likewise widespread agreement that it was composed very early<sup>135</sup> and may very well be the oldest extant tradition pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>136</sup>

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and Tacelli, eds. [2000], 67, 156-58) and Segal ([2004], 453) would like to see anti-Semitism in Paul and the Evangelists, it must be remembered that the statements appealed to are made *by Jews* within two to five decades after Jesus' death. These traditions in Paul indicate that these things were already known by his readers, even those in Rome whom he had never met. These traditions were both early and widespread within twenty years of Jesus' death. Johnson concludes that data from Paul's letters demonstrate that these recollections of Jesus were widespread at a quite early time and render it "less likely that the corresponding points in the Gospels were the invention of a single author or group [since] . . . such invention would have to be early enough and authoritative enough to have been widely distributed and unchallenged across the diverse communities with which Paul dealt. To propose such would work *against* the premise that Paul's form of Christianity had little to do with those interested in shaping the memory of Jesus" (122). Johnson also includes the letter by James in this observation.

<sup>131</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 37.

<sup>132</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 490. The eyewitness quality of the tradition in 1 Cor 15:3ff is also noted by others. For examples, see Crossley (2005), 176; Habermas (2003), 19; Kee (1990), 1-2 (Kee's statement refers to the tradition in general received by Paul of which 1 Cor 15:3ff. belongs. I am grateful to Gary Habermas for this reference); Koester (1990), 51.

<sup>133</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 34, cf. 379.

<sup>134</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 233-34; Barnett (1999), 181; Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 454; Habermas (2003), 17; cf. Habermas (1996), 153; Koester (2000), 91; (1990), 6-7; Theissen and Merz (1998), 487; Wedderburn (1999), 113.

<sup>135</sup> Barclay (1996): "may date from as early as the 30s" (16); Barnett (1994): "within two or three years of the First Easter" (6); BurrIDGE and Gould (2004): "dating from only a few years after Jesus' death"

These formulas take us back to what are datably some of the earliest proclamations of the Church. I will refer to this as *kerygma*, a term that has been assigned a number of meanings over the years.<sup>137</sup> Here I use *kerygma* in the sense that it was the formal proclamation of the early Church. The apostle Paul makes use of the *kerygma* and there are compelling reasons to believe that its origin was Jerusalem where it was known and approved by the leading apostles. Although the precise origin of the oral tradition we have previously examined is uncertain, what is certain is that the resurrection of Jesus was part of the *kerygma* and the official preaching of the Jerusalem church.<sup>138</sup>

I assign the following ratings to the oral formulas just discussed: Romans 1:3b-4a (*possible-plus*), Luke 24:34 (*possible*), other formulas (*possible*), 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (*highly probable*).

### 3.2.4. Non-Christian Sources

We will now spend a little time focusing on non-Christian sources who mention Jesus, although a detailed examination is beyond the scope of this paper.

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(46); Dunn (2003): “This tradition, we can be entirely confident, was *formulated as tradition within months of Jesus’ death*” (JR, 855); Engelbrecht (1989): “probably reaching back to within the first five years after Jesus’ death” (244); Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998): within “two or three years at most” (466). Funk also stated that most of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar believe the tradition predates Paul’s conversion around AD 33 (454); Grant (1977): “very early” (177); Hayes (1997): “within about three years after Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem” (255); Koester (2000): “the traditions extant in Paul’s letters can be dated to the time before Paul’s calling, that is, no later than within five years after Jesus’ death” (90); Lüdemann (2004): within “the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus” (31); Shanks and Witherington (2003): “This list dates to at least within twenty years of Jesus’ death” (109n3); Wedderburn (1999): “first half of the 30s” (113). Contrary is Marxsen (1990) who writes that “it is by no means an ancient formula, but a relatively late one.” In support he appeals to oral formulas in Rom. 5:8 and 10:9, claiming they are earlier. Based on these, he reconstructs a “faith formula”: “We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead” (54). However, this is not a legitimate reason for postdating 1 Cor. 15:3ff. to the oral formulas discussed earlier in this chapter (3.2.3.4). The tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3ff. may have served for teaching purposes whereas the oral formulas were designed for worship. Moreover, even if the formation of other oral formulas predate the tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3ff., it is of little importance, since, as we have observed, the latter was certainly in line with the teachings of the Jerusalem apostles, many of whom were eyewitnesses.

<sup>136</sup> Kendall (1988), 91; Lapidé (2002, c. 1982), 98; Lindars (1986), 91. See also Bauckham (2002), 259; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 71; Lüdemann (2004), 138.

<sup>137</sup> Stanton (1974) prefers “preaching” over “kerygma,” since the latter has been employed in different ways by different writers (10).

<sup>138</sup> Ackerman (2006), 68; Alsop (1975), 274; Dunn (2003), 876; Ehrman (1999), 227. It is also interesting to note that in the *kerygma*, Jesus is not only raised but raised “from the dead” (ἐκ νεκρῶν). This indicates that Jesus was raised from a group among whom Jesus once was but is no longer a member. Who are “the dead”? They cannot be those who are presently living in the presence of God. For Jesus was raised from among a group to become a member of another. Since he is now in heaven, “the dead” cannot refer to the souls of those in heaven. Perhaps it could mean that Jesus existed among the corpses in somewhat of a “soul sleep” until his spirit was raised. Then again, with the canonical Gospels and Paul’s understanding of resurrection, Jesus’ corpse could have been with the others until he (i.e., his corpse) was raised to life.

### 3.2.4.1. Josephus

Josephus was born about AD 37 to a highly respected priest in Jerusalem named Matthias.<sup>139</sup> This places Josephus geographically and chronologically in a position where he would have heard about Jesus from the Church at its inception. In his youth, Josephus was pious in his Jewish faith and very much interested in spiritual matters.<sup>140</sup> Since his dad was a priest, the Christian gospel would likely have been a topic discussed around his family dinner table. Josephus fought against the Romans, was defeated by them, and then joined them as the court historian for the Emperor Vespasian.<sup>141</sup>

Josephus mentions Jesus on two occasions. There is much dispute by scholars over the first, since it appears that a Christian doctored the text sometime between the first and fourth centuries. However, the second mention possesses no such traits and is regarded by the large majority of scholars as being authentic in its present form. We will look first at the second reference.

ἄτε δὴ οὖν τοιοῦτος ὢν ὁ Ἄνανος νομίσας ἔχειν καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον διὰ τὸ τεθνάναι μὲν Φῆστον Ἀλβίνου δ' ἔτι κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ὑπάρχειν καθίζει συνέδριον κριτῶν καὶ παραγαγὼν εἰς αὐτὸ τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ Ἰάκωβος ὄνομα αὐτῷ καὶ τινὰς ἑτέρους ὡς παρανομησάντων κατηγορίαν ποιησάμενος παρέδωκε λευσθησομένους (Jos. *Ant.* 20:200)

Having such a character, Ananus thought that with Festus dead and Albinus still on the way he would have the proper opportunity. Convening the judges of the Sanhedrin, he brought before them the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, whose name was James, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.<sup>142</sup>

Meier provides five reasons for holding that the present text is authentic in its entirety.<sup>143</sup> First, it appears in all of the Greek manuscripts of *Antiquities* 20 “without any notable variation.”<sup>144</sup> Second, the text provides a passing and blasé reference to James who is here of little consequence, since Josephus is more interested in the illegal behavior of Ananus (and Jesus is even less of a subject, only inserted to identify James).<sup>145</sup> Thus, it fits well in the context of Ananus’s removal from the office of high priest.<sup>146</sup> Third, no New Testament or early Christian writer wrote of James “in a matter-of-fact way as ‘the brother of Jesus’ (*ho adelphos Iēsou*), but rather—with the reverence we would expect—‘the brother of the Lord’ (*ho adelphos tou kyriou*) or ‘the brother of the Savior’ (*ho adelphos tou sōtēros*).”<sup>147</sup> The words

<sup>139</sup> Jos. *Life* 1:5, 7.

<sup>140</sup> Jos. *Life* 1:9ff.

<sup>141</sup> Jos. *Life* 3:1ff.

<sup>142</sup> English translation by Maier (1994), 281.

<sup>143</sup> Meier (1991), 57-59.

<sup>144</sup> Meier (1991), 57; Maier (1994), 284. Eusebius cites this passage (*HE* 2.23.22).

<sup>145</sup> Meier (1991), 57-58. See also Maier (1994), 284; Shanks and Witherington (2003) add that “it is often what one says in passing, which is less likely to reflect the ax one is grinding, that is most historically revealing” (168); Theissen and Merz (1998), 65; Van Voorst (2000), 84.

<sup>146</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 83.

<sup>147</sup> Meier (1991), 58. See also Maier (1994), 284-85; Van Voorst (2000), 84.

τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ are neutral and appear to be employed to distinguish Jesus from others in his writings by the same name.<sup>148</sup> Fourth, Josephus's account of James's execution differs significantly in its time and manner from that offered by the second-century Christian author Hegesippus and Clement of Alexandria in the third century.<sup>149</sup> If Josephus's account was invented by a Christian hand, we would expect that it would better reflect the Christian accounts. Fifth, Josephus's account is short and matter-of-fact compared to the Christian accounts by Hegesippus and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>150</sup> Shanks and Witherington add what we may regard as a sixth reason for authenticity. Contrary to what might be expected, the text has no hints of anti-Semitism. The Jews seem in fact to have liked James. Neither is the text positive about Christianity or Jesus.<sup>151</sup> In short, this text gives no indication of tampering by Christians<sup>152</sup> and the large majority of scholars regard the entire passage as the authentic words of Josephus.<sup>153</sup>

From where did Josephus receive his information? We may never know with certainty. However, he seems to have been in the right places at the right times and, given his father's position as well as his own, had a network of good contacts from which he could receive reliable news. He may also have heard one or more of the apostles firsthand as they preached throughout Jerusalem and may himself have been an eyewitness to the execution of James.

The other occasion where Josephus mentions Jesus is in *Antiquities* 18:63, commonly referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. The literature on this passage is enormous. Leading Josephus scholar Louis Feldman lists eighty-seven discussions on the authenticity of this passage between 1937 and 1980.<sup>154</sup> There are three general positions on this passage held by scholars: (1) the entire text is authentic, (2) the entire text is a Christian interpolation, (3) Josephus mentions Jesus in this text but it was subsequently doctored by a Christian interpolator. The first two positions have few adherents whereas the third enjoys a majority.

Γίνεται δὲ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Ἰησοῦς σοφὸς ἀνὴρ εἶγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή ἦν γὰρ παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητὴς διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῇ τάληθῃ δεχομένων καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ' ἡμῖν σταυρῶ ἐπιτετιμηκότος Πιλάτου οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν τῶν θείων προφητῶν ταῦτά τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων

<sup>148</sup> Maier (1994) notes that there are twenty-one Jesuses in the works of Josephus then adds, "In fact, the very high priest who succeeded Ananus, who instigated the death of James, was Jesus, son of Damnaeus" (285); Theissen and Merz (1998), 65; Van Voorst (2000), 84.

<sup>149</sup> Both of these accounts are no longer extant but have been preserved by Eusebius (*HE* 2.1.4; 2.23.3-19) who claims that Hegesippus's account is more accurate than the one provided by Clement of Alexandria. However, he asserts that they are both largely in agreement (*HE* 2.23.3, 19).

<sup>150</sup> Meier (1991), 58-59.

<sup>151</sup> Shanks and Witherington (2003), 169.

<sup>152</sup> Maier (1994), 284; Wright (1992), 354.

<sup>153</sup> L. H. Feldman, "A Selective Critical Bibliography of Josephus" in Feldman and Hata, eds. (1989), 434. See also Dunn (2003), 141; C. A. Evans, "Jesus in Non-Christian Sources" in Green and McKnight, eds. (1992), 364; Maier (1994), 285; Meier (1991) 66; Shanks and Witherington (2003), 168; Van Voorst (2000), 83. See also Theissen and Merz (1998), 65.

<sup>154</sup> Feldman in Feldman and Hata, eds. (1989), 430. See Feldman (1984), 680-684, 957-958.



εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένοι οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φῶλον

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one should call him a man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. He was the Messiah. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out.<sup>155</sup>

The text leads one to believe that Josephus must have converted to Christianity. However, in the early third century, Origen claimed that Josephus was not a Christian.<sup>156</sup> This creates a problem. If Origen is correct, it would be odd that a non-Christian Jew would say some of the things reported in this passage. Three parts stand out as candidates for interpolations: (1) “if indeed one should call him a man,” (2) “He was the Messiah,” and (3) “For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him.” Meier provides a modified passage without the probable additions:

At that time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.<sup>157</sup>

Meier and Feldman argue that if the three questionable components are removed, there are good reasons for maintaining that Josephus wrote the remaining text.<sup>158</sup> Meier provides a number of arguments for the authenticity of the modified passage. First, the passage appears in every Greek and Latin manuscript of *Antiquities* 18. It must be admitted that there are only three Greek manuscripts, the earliest of which appears to have been written in the eleventh century. However, there are numerous Latin manuscripts dating to the sixth century.<sup>159</sup> It must also be noted that the passage is not mentioned by any Church fathers prior to Eusebius in the fourth century.

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<sup>155</sup> English translation by Meier (1991), 60. Others have proposed versions quite similar. See Dunn (2003), 141; Ehrman (1999), 61-62.

<sup>156</sup> *Commentary on Matthew* (2.10.17; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10); *Contra Celsum* 1.47.

<sup>157</sup> Meier (1991), 61.

<sup>158</sup> Meier (1991), 60-67; Feldman expressed agreement with Meier in a personal e-mail to me (Aug. 28, 2001). Allison (1998) appears to agree with Meier's assessment (49, 49n161). Although not in complete agreement with Meier and Feldman, Zvi Baras writes that the “more plausible” position is “accepting parts of the passage and rejecting others” (Z. Baras, “The *Testimonium Flavianum* and the Martyrdom of James” in Feldman and Hata, eds. [1987], 339). While Morton Smith is pessimistic about a reconstruction of the passage, he concludes that Josephus certainly mentions Jesus (M. Smith, “The Occult in Josephus” in Feldman and Hata, eds. [1987], 252).

<sup>159</sup> Meier (1991), 62.

Second, given Josephus's later mention of "Jesus who was called Christ" some earlier reference to Jesus becomes likely, since he does not pause to explain more about Jesus.<sup>160</sup> Third, the vocabulary and grammar of Meier's modified passage "cohere well with Josephus' style and language; the same cannot be said when the text's vocabulary and grammar are compared with that of the NT. . . . [I]n fact, most of the vocabulary turns out to be characteristic of Josephus."<sup>161</sup> Meier also contends that his modified *Testimonium* is a simpler move than omitting it in its entirety, which to him is "sometimes on flimsy grounds." For him, "[a] basic rule of method is that, all things being equal, the simplest explanation that also covers the largest amount of data is to be preferred."<sup>162</sup>

Meier's modified Josephus text does not include Jesus' resurrection. There are reasons, however, to prefer a modified text over Meier's that is less trimmed.

And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For they reported that he appeared to them alive. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.

We have already established that the resurrection of Jesus was part of the early *kerygma*. And there are strong reasons for believing that Josephus was familiar with it. He was appropriately situated geographically, chronologically, and vocationally. Josephus was raised in Jerusalem in the late 30s, 40s, and into the 50s in the very city where the Church was headquartered and during the period when the apostles were publicly preaching there, making it likely that Josephus and his father had even heard the apostles themselves preaching. Until the destruction of the temple, Jewish Christians continued to meet in the synagogues and go to the temple. If Luke is correct, many of the priests and some of the Pharisees were embracing the Christian message (Acts 6:7; 15:5). Remembering that Josephus himself and his father were priests, they may have even known some of those priests who had embraced Christianity. They would certainly have heard of the Christian teachings from many of their colleagues who were criticizing the heresy. Moreover, according to Josephus, he became familiar with being a Pharisee at age nineteen (c. AD 56).<sup>163</sup> In short, Josephus had a keen interest in spiritual matters, had close connections to Jewish

<sup>160</sup> Meier (1991), 62; Theissen and Merz (1998), 66.

<sup>161</sup> Meier (1991), 62-63. See also Theissen and Merz (1998), 67; Van Voorst (2000), 88-90; E. M. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in Moreland and Wilkins, eds. (1995), 213. Meier provides a fourth reason that concerns four "implied theological views" of the content (63-68). First, the Christology of the modified statement is low, since "wise man" is likewise used of Solomon and Daniel by Josephus (63-64; Solomon [*Ant.* 18:5:2 §53], Daniel [*Ant.* 10:11:2 §237]). Thus, if Meier's modified statement is what Josephus penned, Josephus is understandably ignorant of certain material found in the canonical Gospels. Second, his statement that "many Gentiles" followed Jesus contradicts the Gospels' report that Jesus primarily came for the Jews and little is said of a Gentile following. However, Meier admits that Josephus could have retrojected the situation of the late first century where many Gentiles were following him. Josephus is known to be careless elsewhere (64-65). Third, Josephus's final statement strikes him as communicating amazement: "And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out." Even after their leader was executed shamefully, Josephus is surprised that Jesus' followers still persist when he thinks they should have given up by now and found something else in which to believe. See also Theissen and Merz (1996, 67) who regard this as possible.

<sup>162</sup> Meier (1991), 66-67.

<sup>163</sup> Jos. *Life* 1:10, 12.

priests and Pharisees, grew up and spent a lot of time in Jerusalem precisely during the period when the Church was growing and a number of Jews had embraced the Christian message. So, we have very good reason to think that Josephus had heard Jesus' resurrection proclaimed in Jerusalem.

The less trimmed version above may be more plausible than Meier's, since it is more closely represented in all of the extant manuscripts while maintaining neutrality toward Jesus and his followers. Moreover, it provides an insight concerning *why* the "tribe" of Christians had not died out: They were convinced that their spiritual leader had risen from the dead. This eliminates the tension Meier feels when considering the possibility that Josephus heard directly from Christians and yet neither knew about nor mentioned the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>164</sup>

Meier himself does not exclude the possibility that Josephus mentioned Jesus' resurrection and some other scholars are quite open to it, even regarding it as equally plausible to Meier's.<sup>165</sup> Wright suspects that more of the *Testimonium* "is original to Josephus than is sometimes allowed."<sup>166</sup> And Meier concludes that "all opinions on the question of Josephus' source remain equally possible because they remain equally unverifiable."<sup>167</sup>

A few more arguments for at least a modified original *Testimonium* have been put forth. If the *Testimonium* is a complete interpolation, we may wonder why the interpolator did not doctor up Josephus's account of John the Baptist—the genuineness of which is quite certain.<sup>168</sup> Feldman comments that "[t]o these arguments, we may add that, aside from this passage, and possibly those about John and James, there are no other passages in Josephus whose authenticity has been questioned; hence, the burden of proof rests upon anyone who argues for [wholesale] interpolation."<sup>169</sup> By far, the majority of scholars grant that Josephus mentions Jesus

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<sup>164</sup> Meier (1991), 67. Although controversial, an Arabic version of the *Testimonium* quoted in the tenth century by the bishop of Hierapolis named Agapius is quite similar to the less modified version. Maier (1994) favors the Agapian version (284). In a personal correspondence with Maier (March 7, 2003), he told me that he once wrote Paul Winter, the ranking authority on Josephus at the time, to ask whether he thought *any* part of the *Testimonium Flavianum* was genuine, and if he did, how he thought the original passage read. Maier said, "He wrote me back with a yes for 1) and a reconstruction on 2) that *closely resembles the Agapian text!* Tragically, he died before the AT [Agapian Text] was announced by Schlomo Pines." Also open to the authenticity of the Agapian text is Theissen and Merz (1998), 72-73. Not so sanguine are C. A. Evans, "Jesus in Non-Christian Sources" in Green and McKnight, eds. (1992), 365; Feldman in Feldman and Hata (1989) comments, "the fact that the order of statements in Agapius differs from that in Josephus [Greek text] would seem to indicate that we are dealing here with a paraphrase. Furthermore, Agapius declares that according to Josephus, Herod burned the genealogies of the tribes, whereas there is no such passage in Josephus, but there is in Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.7.13). This is further indication that Agapius did not consult Josephus directly" (433).

<sup>165</sup> Meier (1991), 68; Maier (1994), 284; Theissen and Merz (1998), 72-74; Van Voorst (2000), 103. Vermes (2008) asserts that Josephus's reference to Jesus' resurrection in the *Testimonium* "is considered by all modern experts as a Christian interpolation" (158). 'All' is a dangerous term and easily disproved, since a number of modern scholars are open to the idea that Josephus mentioned Jesus' resurrection in the *Testimonium*.

<sup>166</sup> Wright (1992), 354n44.

<sup>167</sup> Meier (1991), 68.

<sup>168</sup> Feldman in Feldman and Hata (1989), 446; Meier (1991), 66. For arguments for the genuineness of Josephus's passage on John the Baptist, see, Feldman in Feldman and Hata (1989), 429-430.

<sup>169</sup> Feldman in Feldman and Hata (1989), 430.

in the *Testimonium*, although there is wide disagreement regarding the extent to which the original text has been altered.<sup>170</sup>

Unless and until an early manuscript of *Antiquities* 18 is discovered, uncertainty will have a valid presence in discussions pertaining to whether Josephus mentioned Jesus in 18:63 and, if so, what precisely he said. Scholars will continue to debate reconstructions that differ in plausibility. Accordingly, any use of Josephus in our investigation will be done with great caution. I assign this text a rating of *possible*.

### 3.2.4.2. Tacitus

Tacitus (c. AD 56-120) is generally regarded as the greatest of the Roman historians.<sup>171</sup> He was the proconsul of Asia from AD 112-13. The *Annals*, Tacitus's last work, was written c. AD 116/117.<sup>172</sup> According to Van Voorst, "[Tacitus] seems to use his sources carefully, and he writes an account whose basic accuracy has never been seriously impeached."<sup>173</sup> In his *Annals*, Tacitus mentions Jesus once. Writing of the burning of Rome and that a rumor was spreading that Nero was responsible, Tacitus reports,

Therefore, to squelch the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called "Christians," [a group] hated for their abominable crimes. Their name comes from Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land which originated this evil, but also in the city of Rome . . .<sup>174</sup>

Although the authenticity of this text is occasionally questioned, the vast majority of scholars grant it.<sup>175</sup> The text shows no signs of Christian influence.<sup>176</sup> The style belongs to Tacitus, it fits in the context of the report of Rome's burning, and it is doubtful that a Christian interpolator would have penned such insulting remarks of

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<sup>170</sup> Although no formal research has determined the percentage of Josephus scholars who accept parts of the passage versus those who reject it in its entirety, Feldman is perhaps the most qualified to make an informed guess. In *Josephus and Modern Scholarship: 1937–1980*, he lists eighty-seven scholarly treatments on the *Testimonium* during that period. In a personal e-mail correspondence to me on Nov. 26, 2001, Feldman admitted that his list for the period of 1937 to 1980 is incomplete and that much more on the passage has appeared since 1980. Asked to make a rough guess of where contemporary scholarship stands on the authenticity of the *Testimonium*, he responded, "My guess is that the ratio of those who in some manner accept the *Testimonium* would be at least 3 to 1. I would not be surprised if it would be as much as 5 to 1." Jewish scholar Vermes (2000) agrees: "declaring the whole notice a forgery would amount to throwing out the baby with the bath water. Indeed, in recent years most of the experts, including myself, have adopted a middle course, accepting that part of the account is authentic" (227). Dunn (2003) refers to a "broad consensus" that holds that the authentic Josephus version was a modified version of our extant texts. See also C. A. Evans in Green and McKnight (1992), 364.

<sup>171</sup> Gilderhus (2007), 20; Van Voorst (2000), 39.

<sup>172</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 81.

<sup>173</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 39.

<sup>174</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. English translation by Meier (1991), 89-90.

<sup>175</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 42-43.

<sup>176</sup> Dunn (2003), 141; Johnson (1996) notes that Tacitus uses "extreme penalty" rather than crucifixion as found in Christian writings, and there is no mention of the Jewish leaders' involvement (115-16).

Christians.<sup>177</sup> It is difficult to know where or from whom Tacitus received his information. Unlike Josephus, one cannot reasonably place him with certainty near Jerusalem or the apostles during his lifetime. He may have received his information from imperial records and/or perhaps from his friend Pliny the Younger who had run-ins with Christians just a few years earlier.<sup>178</sup> Tacitus may also have received his information from Christian proclamations in his day.<sup>179</sup> We can only speculate.<sup>180</sup> I will assign this text in Tacitus a rating of *possible*.

#### 3.2.4.3. Pliny the Younger

Pliny was a senator, an avid letter writer, and friend of Tacitus. Around AD 111, he penned a letter to the emperor Trajan providing information pertaining to his experience with Christians. While of interest in studies of early Christianity and Christology, Pliny provides no information pertaining to the historical Jesus. I assign it a rating of *not useful*.

#### 3.2.4.4. Suetonius

Pliny the Younger was the patron of a lawyer and Roman historian named Suetonius. Suetonius composed biographies of twelve Caesars (Julius Caesar through Domitian) probably between AD 117 and 122.<sup>181</sup> One passage has been of limited interest to historians of early Christianity in which Suetonius writes: “He [Claudius] expelled the Jews from Rome, since they were always making disturbances because of the instigator Chrestus.”<sup>182</sup> Historians generally believe that this event occurred in AD 49. Since Luke makes mention of the same event, the passage is of interest to historians of early Christianity.<sup>183</sup> However, we do not know where or from whom Suetonius received this information and we do not know whom he had in mind when he mentions “Chrestus.”<sup>184</sup> Perhaps he is referring to Jesus and to conflicts in Rome at the time between Jews and Christians. We may never know. But one thing appears certain: this text cannot be of any assistance in our investigation. I give it a rating of *not useful*.

#### 3.2.4.5. Mara bar Serapion

A Syrian Stoic who wrote to his son from a Roman prison, Mara suspects he may be executed. Although the only manuscript of the letter is dated to the seventh century, the dating of the original is uncertain.<sup>185</sup> Some place its composition around or shortly after AD 73 while others assert that its dating cannot be narrowed further than

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<sup>177</sup> Meier (1991), 90; Van Voorst (2000), 43.

<sup>178</sup> Meier (1991), 91.

<sup>179</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 52.

<sup>180</sup> Of interest is that outside of the New Testament writings, Jewish authors Philo and Josephus mention Pilate. Tacitus is the only non-Christian pagan writer to mention him. Bruce (1974) comments, “it may be regarded as an instance of the irony of history that the only surviving reference to him in a pagan writer mentions him because of the sentence of death which he passed upon Christ” (23).

<sup>181</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 83.

<sup>182</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4. English translation by Van Voorst (2000), 30.

<sup>183</sup> Acts 18:2.

<sup>184</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 84

<sup>185</sup> British Museum Syriac MS Additional 14,658.



sometime after AD 73.<sup>186</sup> Its mention of Jesus is brief: “Or what did it avail the Jews to kill their wise king, since their kingdom was taken away from them from that time on?”<sup>187</sup> Little is known of Mara and one can only speculate pertaining to whether he had been a witness to Jesus’ execution or received his information from another source and, if so, who that may have been. At most, Mara informs us what some of his day believed or knew about Jesus’ fate. I assign it a rating of *not useful*.

#### 3.2.4.6. Thallus

Around AD 55, Thallus wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War until c. AD 50. Although no longer extant, portions of his writings have been preserved by others. Of interest to us is a Christian author named Julius Africanus (c. AD 220) who interacts with Thallus’s works. Unfortunately, that text is likewise lost. However, a section is cited by Georgius Syncellus (c. AD 800). Speaking of the portents that occurred at the death of Jesus, Julius Africanus comments, “On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.”<sup>188</sup> Through a third-hand source (Thallus—Africanus—Syncellus) it appears that a historian named Thallus made note of the darkness that occurred at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. Although this text cannot be ignored, it is not very useful. One can only speculate about the identity of Thallus. We do not even know when he wrote, although the date of composition has been placed c. AD 55.<sup>189</sup> Even less knowable is from where and whom he received his information. Given the date, it is possible Thallus was in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. Perhaps he was merely responding to Christian reports of the darkness. We cannot know based on the information we have, which unfortunately comes from a man some 750 years removed from Thallus and who received his information from another source about 165 years removed from Thallus. While we may assign a rating of *possible* to Thallus, the only value in this source is a possible corroboration of the darkness during Jesus’ crucifixion reported by the canonical Gospels.

#### 3.2.4.7. Lucian

Lucian (c. AD 115—200) was born in Samosata and refers to himself as a Syrian. He mentions Jesus twice in *The Death of Perigrinus*, written c. AD 165. He calls him a σοφιστής (sophist: a wise man).<sup>190</sup> But this could be a sarcastic play on the word σοφία (wisdom) and could be referring to one who teaches for money or a cheat.<sup>191</sup> He also reports that Jesus had been crucified in Palestine.<sup>192</sup> As with all of the other pagan writers who mention Jesus, we do not know from where or whom Lucian

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<sup>186</sup> Around AD 73 is C. A. Evans in Green and McKnight (1992), 366; shortly after AD 73 is Theissen and Merz (1998), 77; an indeterminate time after AD 73 is Bruce (1974), 30.

<sup>187</sup> Schulthess, ‘Mara bar Sarapion,’ 371ff. quoted by Theissen and Merz (1998), 77.

<sup>188</sup> Georgius Syncellus, *Chronicle*, 322 or 256 in ANF 1.6.2.1.3.25 (Logos Libronix).

<sup>189</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 22.

<sup>190</sup> Lucian, *The Death of Perigrinus*, 13.

<sup>191</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 62; LS (1996), 738, II, 2.

<sup>192</sup> Lucian, *The Death of Perigrinus*, 11, 13.

received this information.<sup>193</sup> Meier is probably correct: “no doubt Lucian is reflecting the common knowledge ‘in the air’ at that time, not an independent source of historical data.”<sup>194</sup> Lucian and these pagan historians tell us what educated pagans of the second century knew or believed about Jesus.<sup>195</sup> I assign this text in Lucian a rating of *not useful*.

### 3.2.4.8. Celsus

Our last pagan author to mention Jesus within a reasonably short period after his death is Celsus, a Middle-Platonic philosopher who penned an attack on Christianity titled *Ἀληθῆς Λόγος* (*The True Word*) sometime between AD 177 and 180.<sup>196</sup> Origen wrote a rebuttal to this work in c. AD 248.<sup>197</sup> While Celsus’ pamphlet or book is no longer extant, most of it is preserved by Origen who quotes it verbatim in response. Of interest to our investigation, Celsus mentions the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. However, he shows familiarity with the Gospel narratives, which appear to be his source. Accordingly, Celsus provides no independent material of interest for our investigation. I assign him a rating of *unlikely*.

### 3.2.4.9. Rabbinic Sources

Scholars have given attention to a few rabbinic sources as candidates for traditions about Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>198</sup> However, there is much disagreement over whether the person referred to is actually Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>199</sup> For purposes of our investigation, only one of these passages is of interest: *b. Sanhedrin* 43a.

It was taught: On the day before the Passover they hanged Jesus. A herald went before him for forty days [proclaiming], ‘He will be stoned, because he practiced magic and enticed Israel to go astray. Let anyone who knows anything in his favor come forward and plead for him.’ But nothing was found in his favor, and they hanged him on the day before the Passover.<sup>200</sup>

This passage appears in the Mishna in the Babylonian Talmud, which was produced by Jewish scholars in the fifth century and contains some material that was not put into writing until the third century.<sup>201</sup> We cannot know whether any information they

<sup>193</sup> Since there were Gentile Christian and Jewish non-Christian authors, I use “pagan” here in the sense of a Gentile non-Christian and not in a pejorative sense.

<sup>194</sup> Meier (1991), 92. See also Van Voorst (2000), 64.

<sup>195</sup> Meier (1991), 92.

<sup>196</sup> Marcovich (2001), 14.

<sup>197</sup> Marcovich (2001), 14.

<sup>198</sup> Van Voorst (2000, 109-14) lists the following: *b. Shabbat* 104b; *t. Shabbat* 11.15; *b. Sanhedrin* 67; *t. Sanhedrin* 10.11 (cf. *y. Sanhedrin* 7.16); *m. Sanhedrin* 10.2; *m. Abot* 5.19; *b. Gittin* 55b-57a; *b. Sanhedrin* 106b; *b. Sanhedrin* 107b (cf. *b. Sotah* 47a); *y. Hagigah* 2.2 (cf. *y. Sanhedrin* 23c); *m. Yebamot* 4.13;

*b. Yoma* 66d (cf. *t. Yebamot* 3.3-4); *b. Sanhedrin* 106a; *b. Hagigah* 4b; *b. Sanhedrin* 43a (cf. *t. Shabbat* 11.15; *b. Shabbat* 104b); *b. Sanhedrin* 103a (cf. *b. Berakhot* 17b); *b. Sanhedrin* 106a.

<sup>199</sup> For a discussion, see Van Voorst (2000), 104-22. See also Ehrman (1999), 62-63; Meier (1991), 93-98, esp. 95; Theissen and Merz (1998), 74-76.

<sup>200</sup> English translation by Van Voorst (2000), 114.

<sup>201</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud was produced in the fourth century and is regarded as the less authoritative of the two. See Ehrman (1999), 62-63. Johnson (1996) dates the Talmud’s final composition to the fifth

utilized from third-century sources was based on reliable first-century sources. The rabbis typically were not interested in history and their “creative imagination . . . ran free in creative storytelling.”<sup>202</sup> Accordingly, some hold that in *b. Sanhedrin* 43a we are reading polemic against Christians of the period or an apologetic response to the Passion narratives in the canonical Gospels.<sup>203</sup> In summary, the rabbinic sources were compiled in the fourth and fifth centuries, contained a chunk of information that was written in the third century that may have origins in earlier sources of unknown origin and reliability. And we can have no confidence that the rabbinic sources used their third-century sources responsibly or that their third-century sources used their earlier sources responsibly. The rabbinic sources probably tell us what educated Jews of the third century and perhaps earlier knew or believed about Jesus. Ehrman summarizes the opinion of many when he writes,

In view of the dates of these writings, and the complications of establishing the origins of their traditions, scholars by and large realize that they can no longer (as they once did) simply quote a passage from the Talmud and assume that it reflects conditions in the first century of the Common Era, any more than one can quote a modern newspaper editorial and assume that it reflects conditions of colonial America.<sup>204</sup>

I assign the Rabbinic sources a rating of *unlikely*.

### 3.2.5. Apostolic Fathers

Several extant writings remain in a corpus commonly known as the Apostolic Fathers. Rather than being written by the apostles as its name implies, the literature in this collection was written largely by Church leaders who came after the apostles in the first and second centuries. Unfortunately, many questions remain concerning nearly all of these writings. Who were their authors? When were they written; to whom and why? One qualifying issue determines whether we will employ any of these writings in our investigation: Are there any reasons for believing some of their content provides us with insights into what the original apostles had taught pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus? We remind ourselves that our present research is not concerned with the diversity of early Christianity as it existed in the first and second centuries. Rather, it is concerned with the fate of Jesus. Accordingly, it will be most important to attempt to ascertain what the original disciples were teaching on the matter and whether they were unified on the matter. For example, the seven letters of Ignatius (middle recension) are widely accepted as authentic and are dated c. AD 100-138 and more commonly to c. AD 110.<sup>205</sup> Ignatius makes mention of the death and

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or sixth century (114) while Wright (2003) at “roughly AD 400” and the Mishnah at “roughly AD 200” (191).

<sup>202</sup> Van Voorst (2000), 120-21. As an indicator that these rabbis were disinterested in accurate history, he notes their failure to place Jesus in the correct century (121-22). Johnson (1996) notes that the Talmud’s “references to Jesus and Christians have been subject to medieval censorship” (114).

<sup>203</sup> Ehrman (1999), 63; Meier (1991), 97-98; Theissen and Merz (1998), 75; Van Voorst (2000), 121-22.

<sup>204</sup> Ehrman (1999), 63.

<sup>205</sup> Ehrman, Vol. I (2003) appears to favor Eusebius’ statement that it occurred in the middle of Trajan’s reign which was between AD 98-117 (205); C. A. Evans (2005): AD 110-118 (270); P. Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch” in Foster, ed. (2007): AD 125-150 (89), although he admits that the majority favor c. AD 110 (88); Jefford (2006): AD 107-109 (12).

resurrection of Jesus. However, there are no traditions that link him directly to the apostles as there are for his possibly younger friend and colleague Polycarp. Thus, while providing valuable insights for our knowledge of the early second-century Church, the letters of Ignatius do not assist us in our investigation of the resurrection of Jesus. Another example is the *Fragments of Papias*. Although these short remaining fragments preserved in the writings of others contain numerous references that identify Papias as a companion of the apostle John, they make no mention of the death or resurrection of Jesus and, thus, are of no value in our investigation.<sup>206</sup>

### 3.2.5.1. Clement of Rome

*1 Clement* is a letter written to the church at Corinth from the church at Rome. Although the letter does not claim to have been written by a particular person, it has been attributed to Clement of Rome. It is about the same size as Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth.<sup>207</sup>

Who was Clement? A few possibilities have been proposed. Paul mentions a Clement in Philippians 4:3. Eusebius (c. AD 260-339) reports that this Clement later became the bishop of Rome in AD 92.<sup>208</sup> However, he does not make a connection between him and the author of *1 Clement*. The *Shepherd of Hermas* (end of first century/first half of second century) refers to a Clement whose job it is to send books to all the other churches.<sup>209</sup> Irenaeus (c. AD 140-202) mentions a Clement who became the third bishop of Rome. He adds that Clement had seen and conversed with the apostles.<sup>210</sup> This is perhaps consistent with the Clement in Philippians, although it is not required. Irenaeus also reports that *1 Clement* was written by the church in Rome to the church in Corinth while Clement was bishop at the former. This is the first clear attribution of *1 Clement* to the bishop of Rome and is consistent with the "we" passages found in *1 Clement*. Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215) attributed the text of *1 Clement* to the "apostle Clement" and provided numerous quotations from it.<sup>211</sup> Tertullian (c. AD 160-220) wrote of a Clement ordained by Peter for the church in Rome but makes no mention of *1 Clement*.<sup>212</sup> A Clement is mentioned in Ignatius's letter to the Trallians (long recension) where he is a helper of Peter.<sup>213</sup> Of interest is that there are no traditions that reject Clementine authorship or that question Clement's link to the apostle Peter.

In summary, there is a tradition that a man named Clement, who was possibly the one mentioned by Paul, became the bishop of the church in Rome at the end of the first century. This Clement may have personally known a number of the apostles, perhaps even Peter or Paul. Because there are a number of sources that appear to link Clement to the apostles in some manner, this possible relationship cannot be ignored. On one hand, we cannot be certain of the reliability of the statements made about Clement, since with the possible exception of *Hermas*, the sources are fairly late (c. AD 140-

<sup>206</sup> Pap. Frag. 1:4; 3:1-4, 7; 11; 15; 16:1.

<sup>207</sup> A word count of the Greek text of each using BibleWorks 7.0 yielded the following results: 1 Cor.: 9,648 words; *1 Clem.*: 9,833 words, a difference of +1.92% for *1 Clem.*

<sup>208</sup> HE 3.4.10; 3.15.1.

<sup>209</sup> *Hermas* 8:3.

<sup>210</sup> AH 3.3.3.

<sup>211</sup> *Strom.* 4.17.

<sup>212</sup> *Prescription* 32.

<sup>213</sup> Ign. *Trall.* 7:3 (long version).

325). On the other hand, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and the long version of Ignatius's letter to the Trallians are four sources that link Clement to Peter and/or *1 Clement* and there are no competing traditions that claim otherwise.<sup>214</sup> Thus, although historical certainty eludes us, I regard it *more probable than not* (i.e., *possible-plus*) that Clement of Rome personally knew the apostle Peter.

When was *1 Clement* written? We will begin by establishing a broad range of dates. Since *1 Clement* mentions the deaths of Peter and Paul (*1 Clem.* 5), if the traditional dating for these of c. AD 64 is correct, *1 Clement* could not have been written earlier than AD 64. On the other end Hegesippus (c. AD 170) appears to be aware of *1 Clement*.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, Eusebius (c. AD 325) cited a portion of a letter written by Dionysius the bishop of Corinth to Soter the bishop of Rome (AD 166-74). In this letter he commends the church in Rome and informs Soter that his letter was read among the church in Corinth just that day (Sunday). Dionysius tells Soter that he believes his letter will always be helpful, just as will be an earlier letter written through Clement to the Corinthian church. This dates *1 Clement* earlier than AD 174.<sup>216</sup> Accordingly, we have a *terminus a quo* of post-AD 64 and a *terminus ad quem* of pre-AD 170.

Perhaps we can narrow our range further. Two dates are generally proposed: the traditional date of AD 95-97 and an earlier date, perhaps in the 60s or 70s. The traditional date has for some time remained the majority opinion.<sup>217</sup> Arguments for preferring this date over the earlier one are as follows: First, those who carried *1 Clement* from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth are said to have behaved faithfully and sensibly among them from youth (*νεότητος*) to old age (*γήρους*) (63:3).<sup>218</sup> This suggests a considerable amount of time. However, “youth” need not at all refer to one's teenaged years or earlier. Polybius tells of a man named Flaminius who is young (*νέος*) “for he was not more than thirty years” (*Histories* 18.12.5). Irenaeus refers to the thirty-year-old Jesus as a “young man” and he suggests that one could be considered “young” up until age forty (*AH* 2.22.5). Luke referred to Saul as a *νεανίας* (“young man”) when witnesses laid their robes at his feet during the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).<sup>219</sup> Saul approved of the stoning and immediately began to persecute the Church, having enough authority for the arresting and imprisoning of Jewish Christians (8:1-3). Therefore, young Saul is probably not a teenager. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul tells Timothy who is an overseer not to let others think little of him because he is young (*νεότητος*). If the date of Jesus' death is assigned the latter of the two most likely candidates—AD 30 and 33—and we assign *1 Clement* the earliest possible dating—AD 64—the Church would have been already three decades of age and the carriers of *1 Clement* could have aged from thirty-five at the time of Jesus' crucifixion to sixty-five at the time *1 Clement* was composed. This fits easily with Clement's statement pertaining to the faithfulness of the carriers' from

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<sup>214</sup> Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Ignatius (long) link Clement to Peter while Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria link Clement to *1 Clement*.

<sup>215</sup> The writings of Hegesippus are no longer extant. However, Eusebius had them before him and quotes from them. On one occasion, he reports that Hegesippus comments on Clement's letter to the Corinthians (*HE* 4.22.1).

<sup>216</sup> *HE* 4.23.11.

<sup>217</sup> Ehrman, Vol. I (2003), 24; C. A. Evans (2005), 269; A. Gregory, “*1 Clement: An Introduction*,” in Foster, ed. (2007), 28; Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007), 35-36; Jefford (2006), 18; Koester (2007), 212.

<sup>218</sup> Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007), 35.

<sup>219</sup> BDAG (2000): “fr. about the 24<sup>th</sup> through the 40<sup>th</sup> year” (667).



youth to old age (63:3).<sup>220</sup> Moreover, Clement could be referring to those who had lived as pious Jews prior to their conversion.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, in my opinion, this first argument is equally consistent with both the traditional and early datings.

A second argument for the traditional dating is that an early dating is difficult to reconcile with the description of the Corinthian church as “the most stable and ancient” (τὴν βεβαιοτάτην καὶ ἀρχαίαν) (47:6). A congregation founded by Paul less than 20 years prior to an early dating of *1 Clement* could not have been regarded as “ancient.”<sup>222</sup> However, ἀρχαίωv may also be translated as “early.” The word is related to ἀρχή, which can mean “beginning,” so that ἀρχαίωv can mean simply “from (near) the beginning (of the Church).” At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:7, Peter reminds the others that “from the early days” (ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίωv) God chose him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. If we place the Jerusalem council event in AD 49-50, it is only twenty years from the most commonly accepted date of Jesus’ crucifixion (AD 30)! Thus, in this context, “ancient” is less than twenty years. In Acts 21:16, Mnason of Cyprus is referred to as “an ancient disciple” (ἀρχαίω μαθητῆ). The NRS renders “an early disciple,” while in the NASB he is “a disciple of long standing.” If Paul’s stay with Mnason occurred in AD 57,<sup>223</sup> Mnason was a disciple of Jesus for no more than three decades, even if he was one of the minor disciples who had accompanied Jesus prior to his execution. Accordingly, Clement may simply be saying that some of them went back to the earliest days of the Corinthian church or be referring to the early days of Paul’s preaching there.<sup>224</sup> In my opinion this argument is likewise consistent with both the traditional and early datings.

A third argument for the traditional dating is that Clement mentions leaders in the Corinthian church that are at least twice removed from the apostles (44:3-5).<sup>225</sup> This places the letter’s composition more comfortably with the traditional dating, especially if ἔγκαρπον καὶ τελείαν ἔσχον τὴν ἀνάλυσιν in 44:5 is rendered “they died fruitful and mature [in age]” though this rendering is by no means required. Paul founded the church in Corinth in c. AD 51-52. We do not know when he or one of the other apostles would have established the office of overseer/elder/bishop. But if we propose that he left some leadership in place when leaving Corinth in AD 52 and solidified the office a few years later (c. AD 55), given the possible advanced age of the overseer when installed in office and a premature death by disease or martyrdom, it seems entirely possible that the office might need to be assumed by a successor a little over a decade later. However, it also seems to me that this argument weighs in favor of the traditional dating.

A fourth argument sometimes advanced is that the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul are said to have occurred τῆς γενεᾶς ἡμῶν (in our generation; 5:1) as did the persecution and martyrdom of a large number of Christians in the same period (6:1-2). This text

<sup>220</sup> In John 21:18, Jesus speaks of Peter’s martyrdom when he is “old” (γηράσῃς).

<sup>221</sup> Gregory in Foster, ed. (2007), 29.

<sup>222</sup> Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003), 1:25.

<sup>223</sup> Witherington (*Acts*, 1998), 85.

<sup>224</sup> Gregory in Foster, ed. (2007), 28.

<sup>225</sup> Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003) refers to chapter 46. But I think this is a typographical error, since nothing in that chapter tells of other generations of leaders. The reference is more likely 44:1-5 as noted by Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007), 1:35.

has been used to argue for both the traditional and early datings.<sup>226</sup> Although it is difficult to be precise, the “great multitude” points to a notable persecution. Whereas a persecution by Domitian during the time of the traditional dating has been questioned, the brutal persecution of Christians by Nero is quite firm, being reported by Tacitus.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, as Gregory notes, ἔγγιστα in 5:1 is a superlative rather than a comparative. Thus, the examples of the suffering and deaths of the apostles are not “more recent” than the other examples he provided, but they are the “most recent.”<sup>228</sup> Since as of AD 95 Peter and Paul could have been the most recent heroes martyred, it seems to me that this passage fits well with both early and traditional dates.

A fifth argument for the traditional dating is Eusebius’ report that Clement was installed as bishop of the church in Rome in AD 92. However, this argument varies in its weight according to the amount of reliability one is inclined to assign Eusebius. Moreover, Clement may have written the letter prior to being ordained as bishop.<sup>229</sup>

Although the traditional date enjoys favor by most scholars on the subject, “there have been important challenges to this consensus.”<sup>230</sup> Based on an earlier proposal by Herron, Jefford finds an early dating more satisfying.<sup>231</sup> Herron provided seven arguments. I will only focus on the first two, which I find the weightiest of the seven. The first is a counterargument for the traditional dating that states that Clement is reported to be a secretary of the church in Rome rather than a bishop for which church leaders were known in the early second century (*Hermas* 8:3). However, the term for “bishop” (ἐπίσκοπος) was used of elders or overseers in the middle of the first century.<sup>232</sup> The second is a positive argument. Clement’s discussion of the temple (40-41) assumes that it is still standing and that its liturgical practices were still in effect. This, of course, places the composition of *1 Clement* prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.<sup>233</sup> The use of the present tense in this passage is quite impressive. The high priest, the priest, and the Levites are carrying on their services in Jerusalem in front of the sanctuary at the altar (40:4-5; 41:2-3) and those who make their offerings in the temple at the proper time are “accepted and blessed. For they are following the laws of the Master and are not straying” (εὐπρόσδεκτοὶ τε καὶ μακάριοι τοῖς γὰρ νομίμοις τοῦ δεσπότου ἀκολουθοῦντες οὐ διαμαρτάνουσιν). Given the general message in the New Testament that Christ was the final sacrifice, to me this seems unthinkable coming from a Christian of the period. However, we are reminded of Acts 21:17-26 where Paul took four others with him, purified himself with them, went into the temple and made preparations for the sacrifices that would

<sup>226</sup> For use in support of the traditional date, see Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007), 35. For use in support of an early date, see Gregory in Foster, ed. (2007), 28-29.

<sup>227</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003) comments that the view that *1 Clement* was written in the midst of a Domitian persecution “is now by and large rejected” and that “there is no solid evidence from the period itself of a persecution of Christians under Domitian” (1:24).

<sup>228</sup> Gregory in Foster, ed. (2007), 29. See also BDAG (2000), 270.

<sup>229</sup> Jefford (2006), 18.

<sup>230</sup> Gregory in Foster, ed. (2007), 28. Gregory is open to a composition as early as the 70s (29).

<sup>231</sup> Jefford (2006, 18) acknowledges his dependence upon the analysis by T. J. Herron, “The Most Probable Date of the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” in *StPatr* 21 (1989), 106-21. Jefford is a member of the Jesus Seminar and argues for Clementine authorship and a date of composition between AD 64-69 (17-19). He asserts that “many prefer something earlier” than the traditional dating (18).

<sup>232</sup> See Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7; Acts 20:28.

<sup>233</sup> Jefford (2006), 18.

be offered for them. Whatever the extent of the relationship Christians maintained with the temple until its destruction in AD 70, they had not pulled away from it completely until sometime after AD 57 when this event in Acts purportedly took place. We might answer that Clement is using a narrative present. While this is possible, I think it problematic. The occasion of the letter was to provide guidance and correction to the Corinthian believers. The advice being given in this text is relevant only if the temple events being described are still occurring. Clement's readers would have known whether the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed. Thus, in my opinion, we have evidence in support of an early dating of *1 Clement*.

If *1 Clement* was written after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul and prior to the destruction of the Temple, this gives us a date of composition between AD 64 and 70. If one senses that the persecution had ended before the time of writing, the end of Nero's persecutions with his death in AD 68 would assist us in further narrowing our date to sometime between AD 68-70.

In summary, we have considered five arguments for preferring the traditional dating and discovered that the first two and the fourth can just as easily be employed for an earlier dating, the fifth is weak, and the third weighs in favor of the traditional dating. However, the earlier dating has a fairly strong argument in its favor. Accordingly, we have one strong argument in favor of each. A good position is able to explain away the strong points of competing positions without strain. This becomes somewhat of a subjective enterprise. I find the argument in favor of an early date compelling but I cannot dismiss the argument for a later dating. It appears to me that neither can be explained away without any strain. While I would personally like to assign an early date to *1 Clement*, I feel constrained to refrain from a decision at this time. Of greater importance than the date of writing is the matter of authorship and I do not think we can know with adequate certainty whether the Clement of this letter personally knew the apostles. However, if he did, Clement's letter becomes very valuable, since it allows us access to the teachings of one who had known some of those who had walked with Jesus and perhaps had been ordained by not only one of the three top leaders of the Jerusalem church but one of Jesus' closest disciples: Peter. I assign *1 Clement* a rating of *possible-plus*.

### 3.2.5.2. Polycarp

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna (present day Izmir, Turkey) when he wrote a letter to the church in Philippi. We have more information about Polycarp than any of the other Apostolic Fathers. As Ehrman notes, "[a]mong the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, there is one text written *to* him (by Ignatius), another written *about* him (the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*), and yet another written *by* him . . ." <sup>234</sup> These other texts assist us in dating his letter. According to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, he was executed by the Romans at the age of eighty-six. <sup>235</sup> However, the year of his martyrdom is uncertain, some placing it between AD 155-160 (c. AD 156) or AD 161-180 (c. 167).

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<sup>234</sup> Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003), 1:324

<sup>235</sup> *Mart. Pol.* 9:3.

Scholars debate whether Polycarp's letter to the Philippians is one letter or two letters that have been combined.<sup>236</sup> However, they all appear to hold that Polycarp is the author even if they think a later editor combined the two.<sup>237</sup> If there was only one letter, we may date Polycarp's letter to c. AD 110 or very shortly thereafter, since he appears to know that his friend Ignatius was on his way to being executed and either knows of his death or desires an update (1:1; 9:1; 13:2). The traditional date of Ignatius's letter accepted by most scholars is sometime between AD 107-110.<sup>238</sup> Irenaeus asserts that Polycarp was instructed by the apostles, especially John with whom he had interacted, and also spoke with a number of others who had seen Jesus. While in his early youth, Irenaeus saw Polycarp while he was bishop of Smyrna and heard him tell about Jesus' miracles and teachings, which he had learned from the apostles and which the Church had handed down.<sup>239</sup> If Irenaeus was being truthful, similar to Clement of Rome, Polycarp's writings become very important, since he personally knew and followed one of Jesus' closest disciples who was one of the three major leaders of the Jerusalem church: John. However, without an ability to know and with only Irenaeus linking Polycarp to John, we may only assign Polycarp a rating of *possible*, in terms of preserving apostolic teachings pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

### 3.2.5.3. Letter of Barnabas

Although the author of this letter does not identify himself, four ancient authors attribute it to the apostle and companion of Paul named Barnabas: Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215), Origen (c. AD 185-254), Didymus the Blind (c. AD 313-98), and Jerome (c. AD 342-420).<sup>240</sup> With the exception of Clement of Alexandria (who may be the least critical of the early Church Fathers),<sup>241</sup> these are later than those who link Clement of Rome to Peter and *I Clement*. Eusebius (c. AD 260-339) asserted that *Barnabas* was spurious and most modern scholars agree, since *Barnabas* contains some teachings and an approach to the Law that differs from Paul's and more importantly a radical reversal from what we read about Barnabas in Galatians 2:13-14.<sup>242</sup> Paget asks, "Would the Levite Barnabas, who had shown himself somewhat conservative on occasions in relation to the Jewish law (Gal. 2.11f.), have subscribed to *Barnabas*' radically hostile attitude to literal implementation of the Jewish law?"<sup>243</sup> On the other hand, we cannot rule out that, after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Barnabas more fully understood Christianity's break from the temple cult and made a large step in the other direction.

<sup>236</sup> For those supporting a unified letter, see M. Holmes, "Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians*" in Foster, ed. (2007), 123; Jefford (2006), 14-15. Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003) appears to favor the "two letter" hypothesis, although he does not state such (1:328-29).

<sup>237</sup> Jefford (2006), 13.

<sup>238</sup> Jefford (2006), 12. However, see Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003): "around 110 CE" (328); C. A. Evans (2005): "dated broadly to 100-118 C.E., though some narrow the span to 107-110" (270); Holmes in Foster, ed. (2007): "possibly as early as 110-20" (108).

<sup>239</sup> AH 3.3.4. Also see Eusebius (*HE* 5.20.5-8) for a relevant fragment he preserved but which is no longer extant.

<sup>240</sup> J. C. Paget, "The Epistle of Barnabas" in Foster, ed. (2007), 72n1-4, 73. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.6; 2.7; 2.20; 5.10.

<sup>241</sup> Meier (1991), 151n50.

<sup>242</sup> HE 3.25. That the majority of scholars reject authorship by the NT Barnabas, see Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003), 2:6; C. A. Evans (2005), 272; Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007), 372-73; Jefford (2006), 32; Paget in Foster, ed. (2007), 73-74.

<sup>243</sup> Paget in Foster, ed. (2006), 74n14.

When was *Barnabas* written? According to *Barnabas* 16:3-5, the temple has been destroyed and plans to rebuild it were in process.<sup>244</sup> This places the composition of *Barnabas* after AD 70 and perhaps as late as sometime in the AD 130s. It is difficult to set a more narrow date with any certainty, although talk of rebuilding the temple in *Barnabas* inclines most to assign a date no earlier than the end of the first century.<sup>245</sup> If the letter was written at this time or later, this also weighs against authorship by the apostle Barnabas who was Paul's companion, given his required age. For example, if written c. AD 95, Barnabas would have to have been at least eighty years old at the time of composition. I assign *Barnabas* a rating of *possible-minus*.

### 3.2.6. Other Non-Canonical Christian Literature

#### 3.2.6.1. Gospel of Thomas

Of all of the non-canonical Christian literature, the *Gospel of Thomas* has perhaps received the most attention.<sup>246</sup> When was *Thomas* written? This is a difficult question to answer. Koester dates its composition "[n]o later than the beginning of the second century, and perhaps even earlier,"<sup>247</sup> although he thinks it "quite likely that an early version of the *Gospel of Thomas* was composed as a sayings gospel around the year 50 CE, probably also in the area of Syria/Palestine."<sup>248</sup> Pagels places its composition around AD 90-100.<sup>249</sup> The fellows of the Jesus Seminar place the original *Gospel of Thomas* in the 50s.<sup>250</sup> Many other scholars place it sometime between the early and late second century.<sup>251</sup>

Three Greek Oxyrhynchus Papyri fragments contain approximately 20 percent of the Coptic version of *Thomas*.<sup>252</sup> These Greek fragments are usually dated between AD 200-300 with most scholars leaning toward around AD 200.<sup>253</sup> The Coptic

<sup>244</sup> The rebuilding may mean the Jewish temple or the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus that Hadrian built on the former location of the Jewish temple. See Paget in Foster, ed. (2007), 74-75.

<sup>245</sup> Ehrman (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2003): after AD 70 and before AD 135 (2:6-7); C. A. Evans (2005): "late first century or in the early second" (272); Holmes, ed. and trans. (2007): after AD 70 "but before the city was rebuilt by Hadrian following the revolt of AD 132-35. Within these limits it is difficult to be any more precise" (373); Jefford (2006): AD 96-100 and asserts this is where the majority of scholarship is today (34); Paget in Foster, ed. (2007) speaks of a "developing consensus" of "sometime in the 130s" (75).

<sup>246</sup> Elliott (2005), 122; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 452; Perrin (2002), 191.

<sup>247</sup> Koester (2007), 221.

<sup>248</sup> Koester (2000), 157.

<sup>249</sup> Pagels (2003), 45. In a television discussion between Pagels and me in February 2005, Pagels dated *Gospel of Thomas* somewhere between AD 80-90. See "The Missing Gospels" from *Faith Under Fire*, segment 3. The discussion may be viewed at <http://www.4truth.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=hiKXLbPNLrF&b=784449&ct=1201303>.

<sup>250</sup> Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997), 18. S. J. Patterson, "Outside the Bible: Can it be Jesus?" in Scott, ed. (2008) asserts that "most scholars now date the Gospel of Thomas sometime in the last third of the first century" (42). Although Patterson is most likely correct if by "scholars" he is referring to the fellows of the Jesus Seminar, I very much doubt the truth of his statement if he is referring to the broad and mainstream community of scholars.

<sup>251</sup> Perrin (2002) and C. A. Evans (2006) date *Thomas* c. AD 180. Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003): "the literary origin of *Gos. Thom.* is best located sometime between 90 and 160" (473). Witherington (*Jesus Quest*, 1995) is open to a composition as early as the late first century (261n31).

<sup>252</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 63.

<sup>253</sup> Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar (1997): around AD 200 (470); Perkins (2007): "late second or early third century" (68); Witherington (*Jesus Quest*, 1995): "no later than about A.D. 200" (49).



manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi are dated to the fourth century.<sup>254</sup> The *Gospel of Thomas* is first mentioned by Hippolytus and Origen no later than AD 235.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, we can set a confident *terminus ad quem* of sometime prior to AD 235. Establishing a *terminus a quo* is much more difficult, complex, and hotly disputed.

Some scholars contend that *Thomas* contains material that is independent of and predates all of the canonical Gospels. Three major arguments are usually forwarded in support. First, *Thomas* appears to be of the genre of *sayings literature*, since no extensive narrative is offered when Jesus is teaching.<sup>256</sup> Some scholars compare *Thomas* with *Q*. Koester notes that neither *Q* nor *Thomas* describes Jesus' crucifixion or resurrection. For him, *Q* and *Thomas* assume that the power for the early Church lay in the logia of Jesus rather than his death and resurrection. Koester holds that *Q* went through at least one major redaction. It is the pre-redacted *Q*—written 10-20 years after Jesus' death—that shares parallels with *Thomas*. In support, he notes that 46 of 79 logia in *Thomas* parallel *Q*. Koester concludes that a lot of *Thomas*'s material pre-dates the Synoptics. He also suggests that on a number of occasions John may be writing specifically against *Thomas*.<sup>257</sup>

Second, the logia in *Thomas* appear in a different order than we find in the Synoptics and they are not situated in the same narrative context we find in the canonical Gospels.<sup>258</sup> This weighs in favor of an independence of the logia in *Thomas* from the canonical Gospels.

Third, a few of the logia found in *Thomas* appear in a manner that suggests an earlier form than that in which parallel logia appear in the Synoptics. Many logia in *Thomas* are shorter and less theologically adorned than their parallels in the canonical Gospels. They also lack references to the Old Testament.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, these scholars conclude that *Thomas* is earlier than and independent of the canonical Gospels.<sup>260</sup>

However, a slight majority of scholars are more skeptical of an early dating of *Thomas*. A text's belonging to the genre of "sayings literature," as *Thomas* does, does not require an early dating. Sayings literature existed in the second and third

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<sup>254</sup> Koester (2000) observes that a comparison between the Greek Oxyrhynchus fragments and the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* fragments found at Nag Hammadi reveals that redactions to the text occurred during the period between their compositions (157). Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003) makes a similar observation and adds that this demonstrates "fluidity" between the original composition and extant manuscripts (453). But this goes further than the evidence warrants. If we imagine a timeline containing three points (A, B, C), redactions occurring in the period between B and C do not provide evidence that they also occurred between A and B.

<sup>255</sup> Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5:7:20 (AD 222-235) and Origen, *Luc. Hom.* 1.

<sup>256</sup> Koester (1990), 82.

<sup>257</sup> Koester (1990), 122-24. See also Pagels (2003), 39-73; esp. 58ff.

<sup>258</sup> Koester (1990), 82. See also Ehrman (*Lost Christianities*, 2003), 55.

<sup>259</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Christianities*, 2003), 55-56; Koester (1990), 85.

<sup>260</sup> Koester (2007), 229. Koester (2000) also adds the following argument: "The contrast between *Thomas* and Jesus' brother James (*Gos. Thom.* ##12 and 13) allows the conjecture that the author of this gospel belongs to circles of disciples who sought to strengthen and defend the right of their tradition in the name of *Thomas* against the authority of James of Jerusalem, without denying the latter's claim to leadership in ecclesiastical matters. This reflects a church-political situation in Palestine in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century rather than a controversy from a later period" (157).

centuries, even in Syria. Examples include the rabbinic collection *Pirque Avot* and the *Sentences of Sextus*, the latter of which was composed in second-century Syria.<sup>261</sup>

Hurtado regards as “unlikely” the contentions of Koester, Pagels, Riley, and DeConick that John in places is writing against *Thomas*.<sup>262</sup> While John’s emphasis on Jesus’ bodily resurrection contrasts with Thomas’s conception of disembodied postmortem existence,<sup>263</sup> such a view is not unique to John but is present in the Synoptics and Paul, all of whom are earlier. Thus, a response to *Thomas* on this matter is completely unnecessary, unless *Thomas* predates both the Synoptics and Paul. Moreover, John’s portrayal of Jesus’ being able to materialize behind solid and locked doors (20:19, 26) is not the sort of detail one invents to counter an ethereal resurrection and “scarcely reflects a supposed aim of making some specific assertion about the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body over against a rival view.”<sup>264</sup>

What about John’s negative portrayal of Thomas as a skeptic in 11:16 and 20:24-29 and as an “ignorant and obtuse disciple” in 14:5?<sup>265</sup> I think this is both a selective reading and a misreading of John. We need not think that Thomas is being portrayed in a negative and doubting manner in John 11:16 (“Let us go also in order that we may die with him”). Perhaps Thomas was speaking sarcastically as Pagels appears to believe. However, I do not see why this is any more likely than that he was speaking with boldness and total commitment to his Lord. I likewise do not view Thomas’ statement directed to Jesus in John 14:5 (“We do not know where you are going. How are we able to know the way?”) and Jesus’ answer to him in 14:6 (“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”) as a negative portrayal of Thomas. John may simply be narrating the discussion and has Thomas utter the statements many early Christians were asking. The only of the three examples provided by Pagels that come close in my mind to John’s portrayal of Thomas in a negative light is in 20:24-29 where Thomas refuses to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead unless he himself sees and touches him. Were Jesus’ words to Thomas a “rebuke” as Pagels claims?<sup>266</sup>

ἑώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες.

You have seen me and believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. (20:29)

Why is Thomas any worse than the others in John’s resurrection narrative? Mary Magdalene believed Jesus’ corpse had been stolen prior to actually seeing him alive again (20:2, 16-18). And what about Peter and the other disciples (see 20:3-10, 20) who apparently do not believe until they actually *see* Jesus?<sup>267</sup> Indeed, this is what we

<sup>261</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 76.

<sup>262</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 475. Hurtado cites DeConick (2001), 68-85; Riley (1995), 78-126.

<sup>263</sup> *Gos. of Thom.* 37.

<sup>264</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 476.

<sup>265</sup> Pagels (2003), 70; cf. 58, 70-72.

<sup>266</sup> Pagels (2003), 71.

<sup>267</sup> Pagels (2003) even reads John 20:29 in this manner: “Jesus warns the rest of the chastened disciples: ‘Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe’” (72). However, this is a misreading, since Jesus is referring to Thomas with the singular rather than the plural: ἑώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; (“You believed because you have seen me?”).

find clearly articulated in Luke’s resurrection narrative.<sup>268</sup> It is plausible that in 20:29 Jesus is contrasting their belief that he had risen only after seeing him with the belief of the Beloved Disciple who did not first need to see him. But this sort of evidence is far from clear that John’s Gospel was a response to a Thomas community.<sup>269</sup>

It is likewise noteworthy that, in John, Jesus’ other disciples are sometimes portrayed in a more negative manner than Thomas. Where are the claims that John is answering a Philip community (14:8-11)<sup>270</sup> or a community partial to Peter (18:10-11; 17-27; 21:15-23)<sup>271</sup> or a community started by the disciples (16:31-33)?<sup>272</sup> Hurtado notes that it is characteristic of John to feature a number of Jesus’ disciples who are mentioned by name, then asks whether “the representation of each figure in GJohn is intended to address some ecclesiastical issue?”<sup>273</sup> If we did not know better, it follows from John’s portrayal of Judas that John’s Gospel is a polemic against a Judas community that penned the *Gospel of Judas*.<sup>274</sup>

The second argument for an early dating of *Thomas* pertains to the logia order and narrative setting and is answered by noting that *Thomas* lacks coherence with and has even lost its pre-70 Jewish Palestinian setting. Instead, it is more coherent with late second-century Syrian tradition.<sup>275</sup> For example, Perkins notes Fitzmyer’s

<sup>268</sup> In Luke 24:10-11, the disciples do not believe the women’s report, and in 24:17-26, the Emmaus disciples are “sad” (17) and Jesus says they are “slow of heart to believe” (25). I do not think that those who doubted in Matt. 28:17 were of the same nature as Thomas. See section 4.3.2.6.

<sup>269</sup> It is unclear what Peter and the Beloved Disciple thought after verifying Mary’s report that the tomb was empty.

τότε οὖν εἰσηλθὲν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν·<sup>9</sup> οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι.

Then also the other disciple who came first to the tomb went inside the tomb and he saw and believed.<sup>9</sup> For they had not yet understood the Scripture that he must be raised from the dead.

What did the Beloved Disciple believe upon seeing that the tomb was empty? Most commentators hold that he believed Jesus had been raised. However, the verse that follows states that the two had not yet understood that the Scriptures taught that Jesus must be raised from the dead. The pluperfect (ᾔδεισαν) could imply that in a past now completed they had not understood, but now they do. But this is not at all necessary, since the pluperfect makes no comment pertaining to whether the results still exist at the time of speaking, one way or the other (Wallace [1996], 583; cf. 586). Moreover, after the two disciples had left for their homes (their emotional state not stated), Mary remains at the tomb weeping, still believing that Jesus’ corpse had been stolen (and apparently not encouraged if the Beloved Disciple believed Jesus had been raised). Perhaps the Beloved Disciple now believed Mary’s report that Jesus’ corpse was gone from the tomb rather than that he had been raised. If this was what the Evangelist was saying, the Beloved Disciple is on par with the others who did not believe until they saw Jesus for themselves.

<sup>270</sup> In John 6:5-7 one could postulate that Philip’s answer to Jesus indicates that he failed the test Jesus gave him.

<sup>271</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 479.

<sup>272</sup> It is of interest that in the *Epistle of the Apostles*, a letter that is most likely a response to Gnostic literature, it is Peter rather than Thomas who is first invited by the risen Jesus to place his hand and/or finger in the nail-prints of Jesus’ hands, after which Thomas is invited to put his finger in Jesus’ side. Finally, Andrew is asked by Jesus to verify that his feet are touching the ground (Coptic) or that his steps leave a footprint (Ethiopic) (11). See the English translations of the Coptic and Ethiopic texts in Elliott (2005), 562-63.

<sup>273</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 478-79.

<sup>274</sup> I am indebted to Rob Bowman for this thought.

<sup>275</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 76; Perkins (2007), 71.

commentary on Luke 12:16-21 in support: “He says of *Gos. Thom.* 63: ‘In this form of the story, however, the rich man is not treated as a fool, and it has lost the cutting edge of the Lucan parable, viz. God’s verdict.’”<sup>276</sup> The order of the logia in *Thomas* will be addressed below.

In answer to the third argument for a pre-Synoptic form of the logia in *Thomas*, a redactor may have created the more ambiguous sayings in *Thomas* by truncating and wording more cryptically the Synoptic material in order to conform to the quasi-Gnostic ideas found in *Thomas*, including secret knowledge. Moreover, shorter logia and pericopes that are less theologically adorned do not necessarily suggest an earlier dating. This point is illustrated in the various accounts of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to the Emmaus disciples. Ps-Mark 16:12-13 is much shorter and less theologically adorned than its parallel in Luke 24:13-35. Yet, it is almost certainly later. Perhaps it is based on an earlier source than what Luke had before him. But that is mere speculation. It could be that Ps-Mark shortened Luke’s narrative for purposes of economy. Even so, the point that shorter and less theologically adorned texts may reflect earlier tradition carries weight and should not be ignored.

A number of scholars have noted Gnostic tendencies in *Thomas*.<sup>277</sup> This weighs in favor of a date no earlier than the early second century, since it is difficult to establish that this form of Gnosticism existed in the first century.<sup>278</sup> Accordingly, given hints of Gnostic thought throughout *Thomas*, “it is risky to draw firm conclusions relating to priority on the basis of which form of the tradition is the shortest and appears abbreviated.”<sup>279</sup> One would have to assume *a priori* that *Thomas* contains earlier material and that would render an *ad hoc* component to the position that places *Thomas* on equal or better footing than the canonical Gospels. If *Thomas* has Gnostic overtones, we would have an expectation that it would not appeal to the Old Testament in support, since many Gnostics regarded the Old Testament God as an evil being.

In addition to answering typical arguments for the priority of *Thomas* over the canonical Gospels, a number of scholars have posited arguments suggesting that *Thomas* is indeed dependent on them. Evans notes that *Thomas* quotes or alludes to “more than half of the writings of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation). . . . The presence of so much New Testament material in *Thomas* argues for a date well into the second century, when Christians would have had access to more than just a few of the writings that eventually made up the New Testament.”<sup>280</sup> Evans then notes that *Thomas* contains material from the source material used by the Synoptics as well as John’s Gospel, listing 14 parallels between *Thomas* and *M*, five with *L*, and five with John. *Thomas* cannot be independent of the canonical Gospels if it contains so much of Matthew, Luke and

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<sup>276</sup> Perkins (2007), 71, quoting J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (Anchor Bible 28B; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 971.

<sup>277</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Christianities*, 2003), 60; C. A. Evans (2006), 67; Theissen and Merz (1998), 40; Witherington (*Jesus Quest*, 1995), 50.

<sup>278</sup> I agree with Pagels (2003) that the term “Gnosticism” is ambiguous and is often employed as a synonym for heretical teachings (33).

<sup>279</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 71.

<sup>280</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 68.

John.<sup>281</sup> But *Thomas* also shows familiarity with the redacted form of the Synoptics. For example, Jesus makes an awkward statement reported by Mark:

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα φανερωθῆ (Mark 4:22)

For nothing is hidden except that it may be revealed

Luke smoothes the statement:

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ὃ οὐ φανερόν γενήσεται (Luke 8:17)

For nothing is hidden which will not be revealed.

Thus, it is noteworthy that the early Greek fragment of *Thomas*' version (5-6) is a precise match with Luke's text.<sup>282</sup>

P.Oxy. 654.5: [οὐ γάρ ἐσ]τιν κρυπτόν ὃ οὐ φαν[ερὸν γενήσεται]

Although there is missing text in P.Oxy. 654.5, the important text is present. While Mark has ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα, Luke and *Thomas* render ὃ οὐ.<sup>283</sup>

Finally, Evans argues that *Thomas* shows familiarity with late traditions distinctive to Eastern, Syrian Christianity. For instance, the use of the name "Didymos Judas Thomas" in the introductory statement to *Thomas* is found in other works of Syrian origin and circulation: *Book of Thomas the Contender* (138.1-3; 142.7), *Acts of Thomas* (1, 11), and the Syriac version of John 14:22.<sup>284</sup> Theissen and Merz add that the author's name "Judas Didymus Thomas" appears only in Christian literature of Syrian origin.<sup>285</sup> However, it is noteworthy that only "Thomas" appears in the earlier Greek fragment.<sup>286</sup>

Moreover, in support of a Syriac origin (which also addresses the second argument in favor of the priority of *Thomas*) is Perrin's recent connection of *Thomas* with Tatian's *Diatessaron*.<sup>287</sup> Perrin argues that *Thomas* was initially composed in Syriac. He creates a vorlage of *Thomas* in Greek and Syriac then notes 269 "catchwords" in Coptic, 263 in Greek, but 502 in Syriac.<sup>288</sup> Perrin's Syriac vorlage links all the logia with the exception of three couplets (56-57, 88-89, 104-05).<sup>289</sup> For Perrin, this coheres well with other Syriac literature of the period such as the *Odes of Solomon*.

<sup>281</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 68-70.

<sup>282</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 70.

<sup>283</sup> C. A. Evans (2006) provides a number of additional examples (70). If Evans is correct, Koester (2006) is mistaken when claiming that *Thomas*' "sayings with parallels in the Synoptic Gospels show no signs of the redactional activities of the authors of these gospels and in several instances appear in a form that is doubtless more original than those preserved by the gospels of the New Testament canon" (157).

<sup>284</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 71-72.

<sup>285</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 38. Contra is Koester (2000) who argues that "Judas Didymus Thomas . . . points to an early Aramaic-speaking milieu" (157).

<sup>286</sup> See the parallel English translations of the Coptic and Greek texts in Elliott (2005), 135.

<sup>287</sup> Perrin (2002).

<sup>288</sup> Perrin (2002), 57-155.

<sup>289</sup> Perrin (2002), 171.



Not only do Thomas and the odist appear to enjoy puns, they use some of the identical words in order to achieve paronomasia.<sup>290</sup> If Perrin is correct, this explains the order of logia in *Thomas* that has long puzzled scholars and answers the second positive argument forwarded for an early *Thomas* with an unexpected force. The author of *Thomas* was more concerned with creating catchwords than following a particular order.<sup>291</sup>

Perrin then argues that it is most likely that the author relied on Syriac sources for the Synoptic tradition in *Thomas* and that the *Diatessaron* was not only “the first gospel record in Syriac,” but also “the only Syriac gospel in existence in the second century. As far as we know, there was no other resource to which Thomas could have turned.”<sup>292</sup> If Perrin is correct, *Thomas* was first composed in Syriac modifying canonical Gospel traditions in the *Diatessaron*. If it was composed at or near Edessa, a city known to be bilingual (Greek and Syriac), we might expect a Syriac document to be translated fairly quickly into Greek.<sup>293</sup> This explains a dating of the Oxyrhynchus Greek fragments to c. AD 200.

Evans summarizes his case for a late dating of *Thomas* as follows:

This is where all of the evidence takes us: (1) the association of the *Gospel of Thomas* with ‘Judas Thomas,’ (2) the arrangement and order of the sayings explained by hundreds of Syriac catchwords that link the sayings, and (3) the coherence of the readings in *Thomas*, which differ from the Greek New Testament Gospels, with the readings either in the *Diatessaron* or other Christian Syriac works from this period compellingly argue for a late-second-century Syrian origin of the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>294</sup>

It would be nice to see how Koester and Crossan would respond to these arguments. Unfortunately, they have ignored them. Granted, Evans’s work on the subject is very recent. But Perrin’s conclusions had been around for five years prior to Koester’s most recent treatment of *Thomas*, in which he fails even to mention Perrin’s research!<sup>295</sup> This is disappointing. The few reviewers of Perrin’s proposal have noted weaknesses. For example, when reconstructing catchwords in a Vorlage it would be expected that Perrin would use those terms that best support his proposal, a criticism to which Perrin admits being vulnerable.<sup>296</sup> Moreover, although Perrin’s default argument is plausible for *Thomas*’s dependence on the *Diatessaron*—that the latter was the only known Syriac Gospel source available to him—we simply do not know whether this was the case given that “we have absolutely no evidence of Syriac

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<sup>290</sup> Perrin (2002), 192; 158-61.

<sup>291</sup> Perrin (2002), 185.

<sup>292</sup> Perrin (2002), 183-84. Perrin asserts that “[d]espite some dissenting voices, the priority of the *Diatessaron* [over the Old Syriac Gospels] in the Syriac textual tradition has in recent decades been generally taken as granted” (20-21). See also C. A. Evans (2006), 76. Evans also argues that where *Thomas* disagrees with the canonical Gospels, it agrees with Syrian tradition. In support, he provides two examples that compare Greek Matthew and Greek Luke with *Thomas*, Syriac Matthew, and Syriac *Recognitions* and concludes that *Thomas* got his differences from the Syrian tradition (74-75).

<sup>293</sup> Perrin (2002), 27.

<sup>294</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 77.

<sup>295</sup> Koester (2007), 195-206.

<sup>296</sup> Shedinger (2003), 388.

literary texts prior to the *Book of the Laws of Countries* (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> – beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> century).<sup>297</sup>

Admittedly, Perrin’s proposal employs academic imagination beyond the contentions of Evans and he may be mistaken on a number of points. However, competing proposals that *Thomas* was composed in the first century are likewise based on academic reconstructions that are no less imaginative. *Thomas* specialists will need to address the issues raised by Perrin and Evans.<sup>298</sup>

As earlier noted, even some who prefer an early dating of *Thomas* often do not provide arguments that its teachings go back to the original apostles.<sup>299</sup> If significant differences can be identified between numerous teachings in *Thomas* and what can be identified as authentic apostolic teachings, why should equal weight be assigned to *Thomas* for our present investigation? If our interest is identifying what was taught about Jesus’ resurrection by groups who referred to themselves as Christians during the first three hundred years after Jesus, then we must give attention to *Thomas*. However, if our interest is identifying the teachings of the historical Jesus and his personal disciples who survived him, one should limit the weight assigned to *Thomas*.

Contrary to the optimism of some, much confidence in an early composition of *Thomas* does not appear to be warranted. The only agreement among scholars is that a few authentic agrapha absent from the canonical Gospels may be preserved in *Thomas*.<sup>300</sup> In light of the deadlock in this discussion, how valuable is *Thomas* to the historian’s investigation of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus? Since *Thomas* may present a view of resurrection involving disembodiment (37)<sup>301</sup> or enlightenment (51), it is germane to our discussion. However, those logia that may assist us in our investigation are not among the candidates for authentic and unique agrapha and it is difficult to attribute them to the *kerygma*. Accordingly, I assign *Thomas* a rating of *possible* pertaining to the presence of some unique apostolic testimony but *unlikely* in terms of providing useful data for our present investigation.

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<sup>297</sup> Poirier (2003), 5.

<sup>298</sup> Shedinger (2003): “Though most *Thomas* scholars will probably not find [Perrin’s argument that *Thomas* was originally composed in Syriac] convincing, the evidence Perrin presents should not be ignored. It deserves closer scrutiny and an informed response. Perrin explicitly lays down the gauntlet. Will *Thomas* scholars accept the challenge?” (391). As of June 27, 2008 I was able to locate the following interactions with Perrin’s 2002 book: Books reviews by J. Joosten in *Aramaic Studies* 2.1 (January 2004), 126-30; P-H Poirier in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.2 (July, 2003) accessed June 27, 2008 at <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol6No2/HV6N2PRPoirier.html>; R. F. Shedinger in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122.2 (Summer, 2003), 387-391; J. P. Williams, *European Journal of Theology* 13.2 (2004), 139-40. Further criticisms, discussions, and Perrin’s response may be found at the following: [http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/05/nicholas-perrin-thomas-other-gospel\\_23.html](http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/05/nicholas-perrin-thomas-other-gospel_23.html); <http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/06/p-j-williams-response-to-perrin.html>; <http://ntgateway.com/weblog/labels/Nicholas%20Perrin.html>; <http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/06/nicholas-perrin-responds.html>; [http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007_05_01_archive.html); <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol08/Perrin2003rev.html> (all accessed June 27, 2008).

<sup>299</sup> See chapter 1.2.1.

<sup>300</sup> Elliott (2005), 124. Possible authentic unique agrapha include *Gos. Thom.* 8, 77, 82.

<sup>301</sup> Crossan (1991) understands *Thomas* 71 as a reference to Jesus’ body and contends that it is the earliest form of this logion. However, he also contends that when the historical Jesus uttered these words he was referring to the temple (*Thomas*: “house”; John 2:19: “temple”).

### 3.2.6.2. Gospel of Peter

The *Gospel of Peter* is mentioned by Origen and Eusebius.<sup>302</sup> Eusebius reports that Serapion made reference to it while he was bishop of Antioch (AD 199-211).<sup>303</sup> Accordingly, we may establish a *terminus ad quem* of AD 211. Like the *Gospel of Thomas*, establishing a *terminus a quo* for *Peter* is very difficult.

Four Greek fragments containing 18 incomplete lines (*P. Oxy.* 2949, 4009) dated to the early third century and a small codex discovered at Akhmîm and dated to sometime between the seventh and ninth centuries are all that survive of the *Peter*, which is an incomplete text.<sup>304</sup> Most of our extant text is from the later Akhmîm, in which there is considerable variation from the earlier fragments.<sup>305</sup> Therefore, the much more complete and later text may not be an accurate reflection of the original *Peter*, limiting any value from the outset.<sup>306</sup>

We may first ask whether *Peter* is dependent on the canonical Gospels. Koester argues it is not.<sup>307</sup> He contends that the details of the passion account found in the canonical Gospels and in *Peter* “do not rest on historical memory, but were developed on the basis of allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The earliest stage and, at the same time, the best example of such scriptural interpretation is preserved in the *Epistle of Barnabas*.”<sup>308</sup> One example Koester offers is that of the scapegoat in Isaiah 50:6 with Zachariah 12:10. He makes the following observations:

- All three items in the Isaiah passage appear in *Peter* (scourging, striking, spitting) while Mark, Matthew, and John only include two.
- Mark and Matthew “substitute” the Roman term for scourging while *Peter* and John employ the Greek term in Isaiah (LXX).
- Only Isaiah and *Peter* mention the cheeks in respect to the strikes.
- *Sibylline Oracles* 1.373-74 reports of piercing the side with a reed. The terminology employed in this text is similar to what is found in *Peter*. Mark and Matthew misread the passion tradition and report that Jesus was struck with a reed and Matthew reports that the reed was placed in Jesus’ hand before taken from him in order to beat him with it.<sup>309</sup>

<sup>302</sup> Origen, *On Matthew* 10:17; Eusebius, *HE* 3.3.2; 6.12.

<sup>303</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 6.12.

<sup>304</sup> Elliott (2005), 150; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 442; Perkins (2007), 122. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 176-77.

<sup>305</sup> Elliott (2005), 150.

<sup>306</sup> Perkins (2007), 122, 124.

<sup>307</sup> Perkins (2005) likewise does not think *Peter* is dependent on the canonical Gospels but holds that its author probably knew Matthew’s Gospel (12:1-22). Meier (1991) maintains that *Peter* “betrays a knowledge of, at the very least, Matthew, probably Mark and Luke, and possibly John” (117). Meier appeals to the analyses of Vaganay and McCant in support and concludes that *Peter* “is a 2d-century pastiche of traditions from the canonical Gospels, recycled through the memory and lively imagination of Christians who have heard the Gospels read and preached upon many a time. It provides no special access to early independent tradition about the historical Jesus” (117-18). See Léon Vaganay, *L’Évangile de Pierre* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1930) and Jerry W. McCant, *The Gospel of Peter: The Docetic Question Re-examined* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation; Atlanta: Emory University, 1978).

<sup>308</sup> Koester (1990), 224; cf. 227.

<sup>309</sup> Koester (1990), 224-27, esp. 226-27.

But why must it have been Mark and Matthew who employed a “substitute” term? Is it not more plausible that it was *Peter* and John who employed a “substitute” term in order to conform to the Isaiah text after theological reflection?<sup>310</sup> Moreover, that only *Peter* and Isaiah mention the cheeks being struck indicates further reflections on Isaiah, whereas the Synoptics have not made this connection. The same may be said of *Peter*’s use of the *Sibylline Oracles*. It is obvious that this is the result of theological reflection on the part of *Peter*, whereas it is not in the canonical Gospels. Koester appears to work backward, starting with the conclusion he desires—*Peter* predates the Synoptics—then forces the facts to fit.

It must be noted that the resurrection narrative in *Peter* contains details much more fantastic than we find in the canonical Gospels. The guards at the tomb hear a loud voice from heaven, see the heavens opened and two men in great brightness come down from heaven to the tomb. The stone rolls itself away and both angels retrieve Jesus from inside the tomb. They emerge carrying Jesus and their heads go up into the sky whereas the head of Jesus goes far above theirs. Then Jesus’ cross is seen following them and speaks in answer to a heavenly voice.<sup>311</sup> While most scholars would argue that fantastic details indicate that a tradition has grown over time, Koester’s proposal has the canonical Gospels moving in the opposite direction.<sup>312</sup> Employing this type of thinking, Mark should be named the last of the canonical Gospels to be written! It may also be noted that Koester’s argument appears anachronistic, since the Synoptic Gospels were written prior to *Barnabas*.<sup>313</sup>

Crosan argues that the original passion narrative was written in the 40s, which he labels the “Cross Gospel.” This source reported that Jesus’ enemies crucified him, buried him, and experienced apparitions of him. The canonical Gospels were all dependent on the Cross Gospel, which was later modified to conform somewhat to the canonical Gospel traditions that had modified it. This second stratum of the Cross Gospel had Jesus’ friends burying him, discovering his empty tomb and experiencing apparitions of him. A third stratum resulted when the text was redacted in order to accommodate the original Cross Gospel and the canonical Gospel traditions.<sup>314</sup> It is the third stratum that we find in *Peter*. Thus, according to Crossan, remnants of the original passion narrative are more clearly seen in *Peter* than in any other Gospel.

Crosan’s proposal not only lacks evidence, it is immune to verification and is *ad hoc*. Since the only text of *Peter* available for examination hints of dependence on the canonical Gospels, Crossan must propose that our extant text of *Peter* is the third

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<sup>310</sup> Koester (1990) argues that *Peter* corresponds more closely to the early Christian use of Psalm 69 than do the canonical Gospels and is, thus, earlier (227-30). However, one may argue that this demonstrates greater theological reflections such as we would expect in later Church literature. Moreover, Perkins (2007) answers that the same observation can be employed to turn the argument upside down. As Jews challenged Christians, they shaped the passion and resurrection narratives in order to conform more closely to the Scriptures (121).

<sup>311</sup> *Gos.Pet.* 9.34-42.

<sup>312</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 84. Perkins (2007) has likewise noted anti-Semitic elements in *Peter* stronger than what others see in the canonical Gospels that suggests *Peter* was written later than the canonical Gospels.

<sup>313</sup> Even according to Koester (1990), *Barnabas* was written in the mid-90s or within a few decades afterward (16).

<sup>314</sup> Crossan (1995), 23-25, 223-224. See also Crossan (1988) and Crossan (1991), 385-87.

stratum of another Gospel that did not contain these features.<sup>315</sup> Moreover, it is difficult to see why the redactions proposed by Crossan took place where he suggests, since they bear out little if any benefit to his theory. Crossan has not won much of a following with his proposal of a *Cross Gospel*.

Elliott comments that “Nowadays it is generally concluded that this gospel is secondary to and dependent on the accounts of the passion in the canonical Gospels.”<sup>316</sup> He adds that few go to the “extreme and claim that this gospel represents an independent witness to the Passion of Jesus.”<sup>317</sup> I find myself in agreement with this conclusion and assign the *Gospel of Peter* a rating of *unlikely* in terms of it reflecting early apostolic traditions pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

### 3.2.6.3. Gospel of Judas

A manuscript of the *Gospel of Judas* was discovered in Egypt in the 1970s and unveiled by the National Geographic Society in 2006. It is dated to c. AD 300 and written in Coptic. Because its owner was unsuccessful in his efforts to sell it, the manuscript was placed in a safe deposit box in New York where it remained until recently.

The original *Gospel of Judas* was probably written around the middle of the second century, since Irenaeus reported that it was written by a group called the Cainites who made heroes out of biblical villains such as Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and Judas.<sup>318</sup> *Judas* was certainly penned by a Gnostic. Five names of Gnostic figures are specifically mentioned in the recently discovered manuscript. Jesus gives to Judas secret knowledge that is known by no other human (47-53). Disembodied postmortem existence is mentioned (43, 57). There seems to be wide agreement that the *Gospel of Judas* is a mid-second century text and there is no reason for believing that its contents reflect apostolic tradition.<sup>319</sup> Therefore, I assign it a rating of *unlikely*.

### 3.2.6.4. Revelation Dialogues

Most of the literature in this category is typically dated to the second half of the second century. Since there are no reasons to hold that independent testimony of the apostolic *kerygma* is preserved in these dialogues, they will only serve to inform us of the beliefs of particular communities in the late second century. I assign them a rating of *unlikely*.

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<sup>315</sup> A number of criticisms of Crossan’s hypothetical *Cross Gospel* have been offered. See Brown (1994), 2:1322 especially, but also his entire discussion pertaining to the *Gospel of Peter* (1317-48); C. Evans (2006), 82-85, Koester (1990), 219-20; Meier (1991), 116-18. Dunn (2003) finds so little to commend the *Cross Gospel* that he opines that “very little need be said” in reply (170).

<sup>316</sup> Elliott (2005), 151. Vermes (2008): “even a perfunctory glance at the text proves that it is dependent on the canonical Gospels so that its treatment here [in relation to the resurrection of Jesus] would be a pure waste of time” (158). However, Crossan (1995) opines that a “split consensus was there at the very beginning [of studies of *Peter*] and probably still is” (23).

<sup>317</sup> Elliott (2005), 150-51. Drobner (2007), thinks *Peter* drew upon the same sources as the canonical Gospels and partly assimilated the Synoptics (21).

<sup>318</sup> AH 1.31.1.

<sup>319</sup> See Simon Gathercole. *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).



#### **3.2.6.4.a. *Epistle of the Apostles (Epistula Apostolorum or Dialogue of the Savior)***

The *Epistle of the Apostles* opposes Gnostic teachings by using a genre commonly employed by the Gnostics: revelation dialogues. The letter narrates a dialogue between the risen Christ and his disciples. Here Jesus' full deity and bodily resurrection are among the doctrines taught.<sup>320</sup>

Opinions vary related to its date of composition. Theissen and Merz state that it was written "around 150."<sup>321</sup> Wright places it "around the middle of the second century, or perhaps somewhat earlier."<sup>322</sup> Koester opts for the second half of the second century.<sup>323</sup> Elliott comments that "the consensus of opinion places its composition in the third quarter of the second century."<sup>324</sup>

I am not aware of any claims that this letter contains early traditions independent of the canonical Gospels. Accordingly, it will not assist us in our historical investigation pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

#### **3.2.6.4.b. *Treatise on the Resurrection (Letter to Rheginus)***

Another letter belonging to the revelation dialogue genre is the *Treatise on the Resurrection*. According to Ehrman, "many scholars date it to the late second century."<sup>325</sup> Koester likewise dates it to the end of the second century but argues for an original form that goes back to the first century, because he identifies sayings of Jesus which have parallels in Matthew and John but mostly in *Thomas*.<sup>326</sup> *Treatise* provides a Gnostic interpretation of Jesus' sayings.<sup>327</sup> The resurrection of believers does not involve the revivification of the corpse, but it happens only to the spirit which goes to heaven. The material body is jettisoned upon death.

#### **3.2.6.4.c. *Apocryphon of James (Letter of Peter to James)***

This letter also belongs to the genre of revelation dialogue. Koester thinks that some of the material in this letter predates the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>328</sup> Most scholars, however, date its original composition to the third century.<sup>329</sup> Most of the text is a dialogue between Jesus, Peter, and James when Jesus appears to them 550 days (18 months) after his resurrection and is still waiting to ascend (2.16-24). Jesus' death and resurrection are taught (2.15-28; 5.30-35; 6.5-9), but the nature of Jesus' resurrection is not specified.

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<sup>320</sup> Drobner (2007), 27; Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 73; Elliott (2005), 555; Koester (2000), 243-44; Theissen and Merz (1998), 33n42. Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003) argues that it is a "Gospel" rather than a letter (73), while Elliott (2005) argues that it is an "apocalypse" (555).

<sup>321</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998): 33n42.

<sup>322</sup> Wright (2003), 499.

<sup>323</sup> Koester (2000), 243. This appears to have been a change from earlier in Koester (1990) where he dates it to the first half of the second century (174-75). Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003) places this genre in "the late second century and thereafter" (480) but thinks it "possible" that its earliest use "might be pushed back to the first half of the second century" (481).

<sup>324</sup> Elliott (2005), 556.

<sup>325</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 208. See also Theissen and Merz (1998), 42-43.

<sup>326</sup> Koester (1990), 23; Koester (2000), 159-60.

<sup>327</sup> Koester (2000), 158.

<sup>328</sup> Koester (2000), 162.

<sup>329</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures* 2003): early third century (191); Elliott (2005), 673.

### 3.2.6.5. Pseudo-Mark (Mark 16:9-20)

There is a virtually unanimous consensus today that Mark 16:9-20 was not part of Mark's original ending. Many scholars assign it a date of the second or third century and hold that it was penned by a scribe who wanted to soften Mark's painfully abrupt ending or for some other reason.<sup>330</sup>

Wright notes that the "longer ending" looks "as if it might even have originally been a separate account altogether, since it begins in *parallel* to Mark 16.1-2/Matthew 28.1/Luke 24.1/John 20.1, not in *sequence* with Mark 16.1-8."<sup>331</sup> He adds that this observation "opens fascinating possibilities" such as that it survived from a lost gospel.<sup>332</sup>

Moreover, although the consensus maintains that 16:9-20 was not part of Mark's original ending, the consensus opinion is weakening for the position that 16:8 is Mark's intended ending. We will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>333</sup> What if Mark's original ending has been lost? What may such an ending have said? Wright provides an answer that is interesting in light of our previous discussions on the non-canonical literature. He marvels over the unwillingness of those who detect several recensions of *Q*, a pre-redacted *Thomas*, a *Secret Gospel of Mark*, an earlier version of *Peter*, and a hypothetical *Cross Gospel*, to engage in the much more promising task of attempting to reconstruct Mark's original ending. Given the fashion of some biblical scholars for detecting lost material that is much earlier than the canonical traditions, it is astonishing that these scholars are not engaging in such an exercise with Mark's lost ending.<sup>334</sup>

Wright does not attempt to reconstruct Mark's lost ending. However, following the majority view of the relationships between the Synoptic Gospels, he makes the following suggestion:

[Since] Matthew has been following Mark reasonably closely up to this point, especially in developing 28.5b-8a out of Mark 16.6-8a, it is not impossible that he continued to do so, and that we have in Matthew 28.9-20 an outline at least of what Mark 16 might have gone on to say.<sup>335</sup>

Wright then notes numerous Matthean features that were most likely absent in Mark's lost ending. Notwithstanding, "the existing 'longer ending' may well not be too far, in outline, from what originally stood there, though in quite different language and with emphases for which Mark himself has not prepared us."<sup>336</sup>

While Wright's suggestions are interesting pertaining to the possibilities of the 'longer ending' being a report that survived from a lost Gospel and that Mark's lost ending may have looked a lot like what we find in Matthew, such speculations are too

<sup>330</sup> Aland and Aland (1989), 232; Dunn (2003), 826n7; Metzger (1994), 104; Wright (2003), 619.

<sup>331</sup> Wright (2003), 618.

<sup>332</sup> Wright (2003), 619.

<sup>333</sup> See chapter 4.3.2.3.

<sup>334</sup> Wright (2003), 624.

<sup>335</sup> Wright (2003), 623-24.

<sup>336</sup> Wright (2003), 624.

flimsy to assist us in our present historical investigation—as even Wright would freely admit. Moreover, they would only support the earlier and stronger existing reports present in the *kerygma*, Paul, and the canonical Gospels.

### 3.3. Conclusion

Paul and the oral traditions embedded throughout the New Testament literature provide our most promising material. Other sources, like the canonical Gospels, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, the Acts speeches, and the *Gospel of Thomas* may also at times be helpful. Many of the other sources just discussed may likewise assist us to varying degrees.

I must say something about what we do not have but would like. We do not have a letter that may be certified to have been written by Jesus or any of his original disciples. We do not have any material written by Paul (Saul) during his pre-Christian life describing why he was so opposed to the Christian sect. We do not have any material written by Jewish leaders during the time of Paul's ministry describing his conversion or his new found commitment to the crucified so-called Messiah and the Church that he founded. We do not have any official documents from either the Roman or Jewish governing bodies that mention the Christian sect, the content of the apostolic preaching, or report that Jesus had risen from the dead. These would all be of value to historians and would provide corroborating reports of the strongest kind.

However, what we do have is good. We have reports that Jesus had been raised from the dead from at least one eyewitness (Paul) and probably more (the Jerusalem apostles preserved in the *kerygma*). These reports are very early and provide multiple independent testimonies as well as testimony from one who had been hostile to the Christian message previous to his conversion experience. The canonical Gospels probably contain some traditions that go back to the original apostles, although these may be identified with varying degrees of certainty. To the extent one is convinced that Clement of Rome knew one or more of the apostles, his letter may yield valuable insights pertaining to the apostolic teachings. What do these sources yield us for our investigation pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus? We will discover the answer in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### The Historical Bedrock Pertaining to the Fate of Jesus

#### 4.1. Introductory Comments

Given the pitfall of horizons that await a haphazard historian, painting a historically responsible portrait of Jesus requires the use of historical facts that are regarded as virtually indisputable. These facts are ‘historical bedrock,’ since any legitimate hypothesis claiming to paint a fairly accurate portrait must be built upon it.<sup>1</sup> If a hypothesis fails to explain all of the historical bedrock, it is time to drag that hypothesis back to the drawing board or to relegate it to the trash bin.

In chapter one, we provided two criteria for identifying historical bedrock: the facts are strongly evidenced and contemporary scholars nearly unanimously regard them as historical facts. Historians commonly employ other facts of lesser strength, but all hypotheses posited to answer a historical question need at minimum to include the bedrock.<sup>2</sup>

Gary Habermas first adopted a similar approach as he contended that a strong case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus may be built upon only a few facts that are agreed upon by the vast majority of scholars writing on the subject, including rather skeptical ones. Habermas identified twelve historical facts that meet the above criteria. He then asked, “[W]hat if my list were challenged by some skeptical person? Or perhaps we are simply interested in discovering a reduced historical case that could still bear the weight of an investigation of Jesus’ resurrection. What would such a case look like?”<sup>3</sup> Habermas then reduces his list of twelve to six “minimal facts.”<sup>4</sup>

At present Habermas has an unpublished bibliography of academic literature written on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection between 1975 to the present in German, French, and English. He has told me that there are in the neighborhood of 2,500 sources. He has catalogued the positions of scholars on more than one hundred topics directly related to the resurrection of Jesus in an MSWord document that is roughly formatted and more than six hundred pages in length.<sup>5</sup> A point of interest related to Habermas’s research is that he has actually engaged in serious “bean counting.” Statements pertaining to a so-called “majority of scholars” are common and are usually based on educated hunches. These are not necessarily wrong, but they sometimes lead to conflicting assertions pertaining to where the majority sides. Consider the statement by Wright who describes himself as among the “recalcitrant minority” of scholars who regard Ephesians and Colossians as from Paul, while Witherington states that

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<sup>1</sup> Fredriksen (1999), 264.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1.2.3, letter e.

<sup>3</sup> Habermas (2003), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas (2003), 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> For the published results of some of Habermas’ research, see Habermas (2003), 3-51; Habermas (2005), 135-53; G. R. Habermas, “Mapping the Recent Trend toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions” in Stewart, ed. (2006), 78-92; Habermas (2004).

“Most scholars still believe that Paul wrote Colossians.”<sup>6</sup> Brown writes, “*At the present moment about 60 percent of critical scholarship holds that Paul did not write the letter [ital. his].*” He cites CLPDNW 171 as his source but adds three others studies, two of which found a majority favoring Pauline authorship of Colossians.<sup>7</sup> Even formal counts can produce conflicting results.

I wish to be clear that the “minimal facts” approach of Habermas and the nuanced one I will be taking are not to be confused with a “consensus” approach in which a fact is identified *because* a strong majority of scholars grant it. Habermas is also careful to consider *the arguments* provided by the strong majority of scholars who grant a particular fact. The strength of supporting arguments and their ability to answer counter-arguments are of primary value. Something does not become a “fact” because the majority of scholars believe it.<sup>8</sup> I am in agreement with Allison when he states, “I am always much less interested in counting noses than in reviewing arguments—and especially in a case such as [the resurrection of Jesus].”<sup>9</sup> Pannenberg offers a similar comment: “A single judgement of a sober historian easily outweighs a majority vote, in my opinion. Historical judgement must remain a matter of argument. A majority vote may express the dominant mood of a group, possibly its prejudices, but is not very helpful in judging claims to historical truth or authenticity.”<sup>10</sup>

Pannenberg makes a good point but he is too quick to dismiss majority opinion. While not always a reliable filter of conclusions that have been overly influenced by the horizons of historians, no filters are. In a similar manner, none of the criteria frequently employed for ascertaining the historicity of a saying or deed of Jesus can be said to be reliable all of the time. They are guidelines which often prove helpful but can never be applied in a wooden sense.

In our case, there is a collection of facts pertaining to the fate of Jesus that are agreed upon by a nearly unanimous consensus of scholars on the subject. These scholars span a very wide range of theological and philosophical convictions and include atheists, agnostics, Jews, and Christians who make their abode at both ends of the theological spectrum and everywhere in between. We therefore have the heterogeneity we desire in a consensus and this gives us confidence that our horizons will not lead us completely astray during this portion of our investigation.<sup>11</sup>

I would like to address two concerns about any approach that employs a consensus. Robert Miller notes how scholar “A” who is widely respected awards historicity to a particular deed of Jesus without providing adequate argumentation. Scholar “B” who is likewise a respected scholar grants the historicity of the same deed and cites scholar

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<sup>6</sup> Wright (2003), 236; Witherington (*Acts*, 1998), 58.

<sup>7</sup> R. Brown (*Intro.*, 1997), 610, 610n24.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007) writes, “While surveys, of course, do not mean that any particular position is correct, that this is the contemporary theological state provides at least some clues as to where recent scholars think the data point” (282).

<sup>9</sup> Allison (“Explaining,” 2005), 125.

<sup>10</sup> Pannenberg (1998), 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Bean counting is the approach of the Jesus Seminar when voting on the historicity of the sayings and deeds of Jesus. It differs from our approach in that the Jesus Seminar only takes a count from its small membership whereas the approach taken in this dissertation considers a much broader sampling of scholars (including those of the Jesus Seminar) and much greater heterogeneity is involved.



“A” in support. A third scholar “C” praises the thorough work of scholar “B.” Miller then asks, “Are these indications of an emerging consensus . . . How many consensuses in our field get started in just this way?”<sup>12</sup> Miller makes a good point. This is where Habermas’s large-scale research on where scholars opine on a subject will be of value.

The second concern relates to our collection of facts that make up the historical bedrock. Historical Jesus research is a broad field in which the number of discussions is legion. Therefore, we must be careful to remember that it is possible that some “facts” for which we may not give much attention may be used effectively in competing hypotheses. Stated differently, since we are narrowing our focus on the fate of Jesus, I may subconsciously fail to consider certain facts about Jesus because I do not see how they would fit into any of the hypotheses we will be considering. If I were more skeptical toward the idea that Jesus rose from the dead, I would be more motivated to form additional hypotheses that may include other facts that meet our criteria but which are not included in what will be our collection. However, we take comfort in the fact that many of those with whom we will be interacting are not handicapped by a similar bias and yet do not identify other facts for which a nearly unanimous majority approval exists.

## **4.2. The Historical Bedrock Pertaining to Jesus’ Life**

Before identifying the historical bedrock immediately relevant to our investigation, this is a good point to discuss a broader context of Jesus’ life in which the more immediate facts appear. There is a strong consensus today among scholars that Jesus thought of himself as an exorcist, miracle worker, and God’s eschatological agent. Many likewise maintain that he was convinced he would die an imminent and violent death and subsequently would be vindicated by God. These data strongly support the conclusion that the reports of Jesus’ resurrection place it in a significantly charged religious context. Accordingly, if the Resurrection hypothesis turns out to be the best explanation of the relevant historical bedrock, we are warranted in calling it a miracle.

### **4.2.1. Jesus the Miracle-Worker and Exorcist**

That Jesus performed feats that both he and his followers interpreted as miracles and exorcisms is a fact strongly evidenced and supported by the majority of scholars.<sup>13</sup> Graham Twelftree, perhaps the leading authority on the miracles and exorcisms of

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<sup>12</sup> R. J. Miller (1992), 9.

<sup>13</sup> C. A. Evans, “Authenticating the Activities of Jesus” in Chilton and Evans, eds. (*Activities*, 2002): “Scholarship has now moved past its preoccupation with demythologization. The miracle stories are now treated seriously and are widely accepted by Jesus scholars as deriving from Jesus’ ministry” (12); Sanders (1985) lists six “almost indisputable facts” about Jesus, the second of which is that he “was a Galilean preacher and healer” (11); Sanders (1993) states that there is an agreement among scholars that “Jesus performed miracles” (157). See also Meier (1994), 970; Theissen and Merz (1998), 281. Even rather skeptical scholars agree that Jesus was an exorcist and miracle-worker. Bultmann (1958) wrote, “There can be no doubt that Jesus did the kinds of deeds which were miracles to his mind and to the minds of his contemporaries” (124). Borg (1987) concedes that there are “very strong” reasons for concluding Jesus performed healings of a sort and that a supernatural cause cannot be ruled out (67-71); cf. Borg (2006), 56. Crossan (1991) concludes that “Jesus was both an exorcist and a healer” (332; cf. 311); Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998) lists among the “basic facts” about Jesus that he was a “charismatic healer and exorcist” (527). See also Ehrman (1999), 198.

Jesus, has argued in several works that the evidence that Jesus was a miracle worker is so strong that it is one of the best attested historical facts about Jesus.<sup>14</sup> For example, in Mark (3:22-30), the charge that Jesus was casting out demons by Satan appears to reflect polemic against Jesus. Why answer such a charge unless it was being made? It appears that the traditions of Jesus' exorcisms were known among those who were sympathetic and those who were in opposition to Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Extra-biblical reports indicate that Jesus had the reputation of being a miracle-worker. Although a disputed passage, at the end of the first century Josephus reports that Jesus was a "worker of amazing deeds" (παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής).<sup>16</sup> Josephus employs παραδόξων elsewhere to mean "miracle" or "strange."<sup>17</sup> In the middle of the second century Celsus accused Jesus of being a magician.<sup>18</sup> Still later, the Talmud reports that Jesus practiced sorcery.<sup>19</sup> It was also reported that Jewish exorcists were attempting to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, an indicator that Jesus had exorcized demons.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus' miracles are multiply attested, being found in every Gospel source (Mark, Q, M, L, John) and Josephus.<sup>21</sup> There are also multiple reports in each Gospel. Reports of Jesus' miracles are also present in multiple literary forms including narratives, summaries of his activities, and references to his miracles in logia attributed to him.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the reports are quite early when compared with most other miracle claims in antiquity. Mark reports the miracles of Jesus within forty years of his death, whereas the reports of miracles attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, Honi the Circle-drawer, and Hanina ben-Dosa are at least 125 years removed from the alleged events.<sup>23</sup> Meier concludes, "The miracle traditions about Jesus' public ministry are already so widely attested in various sources and literary forms by the end of the first Christian generation that total fabrication by the early church is, practically speaking, impossible."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>14</sup> G. H. Twelftree, "The History of Miracles in the History of Jesus" in McKnight and Osborne, eds. (2004): "There is now almost unanimous agreement among Jesus questers that the historical Jesus performed mighty works" (206); Twelftree (1999): "If we can be certain of anything about the historical Jesus it is that his contemporaries considered him to have performed wonders or miracles" (258); "in answer to the question 'Did Jesus perform miracles?' we have to reply with an unequivocal and resounding 'Yes!' We have seen that it is not a matter of so-called blind faith that enables us to say this. . . . The necessary conclusion, in light of our inquiry, is that *there is hardly any aspect of the life of the historical Jesus which is so well and widely attested as that he conducted unparalleled wonders*" (345, emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> Eve (2005), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Jos. Ant. 18:3.

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Twelftree (1999) for the following references: Jos. Ant. 2:91, 223, 285, 295, 345, 347; 3:1, 30, 38; 5:28, 125; 6:171, 290; 9:14, 58, 60, 182; 10:21, 214, 235, 266; 15:379; Jos. Ag. Ap. 2:114. See also Theissen and Merz (1998), 297. Moreover, παραδόξων does not seem to have been a conventional Christian term for miracle, occurring only once in the NT (Luke 5:26), and therefore is unlikely to be a later Christian interpolation in the text of Josephus. One would have expected a Christian interpolation to use the word "signs" or "wonders."

<sup>18</sup> In Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:38.

<sup>19</sup> *b Sanh.* 43a.

<sup>20</sup> Twelftree (1999) provides numerous references from the NT and later Jewish writings (411n60, 411n62).

<sup>21</sup> Meier (1994): "For if the criteria of historicity do not work in the case of the miracle tradition, where multiple attestation is so massive and coherence so impressive, there is no reason to expect them to work elsewhere" (630; cf. 619-22); see also Theissen and Merz (1998), 298-99.

<sup>22</sup> Meier (1994), 622; Theissen and Merz (1998), 299-304.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 2.5.4 above and Theissen and Merz (1998), 304-09.

<sup>24</sup> Meier (1994), 630. Tucker's solution (2005, 385, 388), namely that the miracles of Jesus were wholesale inventions and that this provides wider scope and is more fruitful than literal interpretations,

That Jesus had the reputation of a miracle-worker is corroborated by his critics who asserted that his power came from Satan and that they had colleagues who could perform exorcisms too.<sup>25</sup> This agrees with what we observed in the extra-biblical reports. The plausibility factor is quite high, since we know of others of the period who were regarded as exorcists or were purported to have performed one or more miracles, although the number of miracles and exorcisms attributed to them are far less than the number specifically attributed to Jesus in the canonical Gospels.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Jesus: God's Eschatological Agent

That Jesus viewed himself as God's eschatological agent—the figure through whom the kingdom of God was coming—is also widely recognized by biblical scholars and amply attested in the sources.<sup>27</sup> Jesus is reported to have said, “If, by the Spirit of God, I am casting out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20). He is also said to have told John's disciples that John could be assured Jesus was the Messiah since he was doing those things others believed the Messiah would do (Matt. 11:4-5; cf. Luke 7:22; 4Q521; Isa. 61:1). If Jesus actually uttered statements like these, then it would seem that he believed his status of being God's Messiah was confirmed by his miracles and that God's kingdom had come through him.<sup>28</sup>

The “kingdom of God” was a central part in the content of Jesus' preaching, although precisely what he meant by it continues to be disputed.<sup>29</sup> That the kingdom of God was at the core of Jesus' preaching is secure.<sup>30</sup> Meier notes that Jesus' preaching of the kingdom is found in Mark, Q, M, and indirectly in L and John, and appears in multiple literary forms: prayer, eschatological, beatitudes.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, that Jesus preached the arrival of the kingdom of God through him is consistent with the facts of Jesus' life and execution, such as his preaching about the coming judgment and destruction, especially relative to the temple.<sup>32</sup>

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might be warranted only in the absence of such evidence and, even then, only when such a solution creates fertile ground in cases of underdetermination.

<sup>25</sup> Mark 3:22; Matthew 12:27 (cf. Luke 11:19). See Dunn (2003), 670-671; Ehrman (1999), 197-200; Meier (1991), 617-45.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that these other “miracle-workers” were not known for performing many miracles as Jesus was. Twelftree (1999) notes that “in the period of two hundred years on each side of the life of the historical Jesus the number of miracle stories attached to any historical figure is astonishingly small” (247).

<sup>27</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998): “There is also a consensus that the ‘honorific titles’ which the historical Jesus possibly used to express his status must have come from Jewish tradition (or have been mediated through Jewish tradition). The titles ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Messiah’ (=Christ) in particular arise in connection with the historical Jesus . . . Finally, there is a consensus that Jesus had a sense of eschatological authority. He saw the dawn of a new world in his actions. Here he goes beyond the Jewish charismatics and prophets known to us before him” (512-13).

<sup>28</sup> Twelftree (1999), 247, 263, 346-47.

<sup>29</sup> Meier (1994), 289-506; Theissen and Merz (1998), 246-78.

<sup>30</sup> Meier (1994), 289-506. Theissen and Merz 246-74. Dunn (2003) notes that “[a]t the very least we overhear in the words of the remembered Jesus a claim for the divine significance of his mission, as the (not just an) eschatological emissary of God” (707; cf. 762).

<sup>31</sup> Meier (1994), 349. I think Jesus speaks of the kingdom directly in L (Luke 12:32). See also Ehrman (1999), 152-54.

<sup>32</sup> Sanders (1985), 222-41. See also Ehrman (1999), 154-60 and Theissen and Merz (1998), 264-78.

### 4.2.3. Jesus' Predictions of His Death and Resurrection: Just Outside of the Historical Bedrock

Scholars dispute whether Jesus predicted his imminent and violent death and subsequent imminent resurrection by God, as the Gospels describe him doing. However, there is surprisingly a preponderance of evidence in favor of the historicity of these predictions. It may first be noted that accounts of these predictions are early, being found in abundance in Mark's Gospel, which was written somewhere between roughly twenty-five to forty-five years after Jesus' death. Moreover, there is a potential Aramaic original in the passion prediction in Mark 9:31 where the Aramaic presents a play on words: the *Son of Man* is to be *handed over* to the *hands of men*.<sup>33</sup>

Second, the passion and resurrection predictions are multiply attested, as the following tables show.<sup>34</sup>

#### Jesus Predicting His Death and Resurrection: Mark, M, John, Q (possibly)

##### Mark

- Related to Peter's rebuke: Mark 8:31; Matt 16:21; Luke 9:22
- After Transfiguration: Mark 9:9; Matt 17:9
- Passing through Galilee: Mark 9:30-31; Matt 17:22-23
- Going up to Jerusalem: Mark 10:33-34; Matt 20:18-19
- Last Supper: Mark 14:18-28; Matt 26:21-32; Luke 22:15-20

##### M

- Sign of Jonah: Matt 12:38-40 (cf. Luke 11:29-30); 16:2-4 (cf. Luke 12:54-56)<sup>35</sup>

##### John

- Related to Destruction of Temple: John 2:18-22 (cf. Mark 14:58; Matt 26:62; Mark 15:29)

#### Jesus' Predicting His Death Only: Mark, L, John

##### Mark

- Ransom for Many: Mark 10:45
- Vineyard and Wicked Tenants: Mark 12:1-12; Matt 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19
- Garden: Mark 14:32-40; Matt 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46

##### L

- Prophet Cannot Die Outside of Jerusalem: Luke 13:32-33

<sup>33</sup> Dunn (2003), 801.

<sup>34</sup> Crossley (2005), 173; Habermas (2003), 92. According to McKnight (2005), there appears to be strong agreement that there are three primary passion predictions in the Synoptics. For a detailed comparison of these, see McKnight's chart (227).

<sup>35</sup> Jesus' resurrection is implied since without a resurrection we must ask what is the sign to which Jesus refers. Moreover, Matthew earlier portrayed Jesus saying that his resurrection is the sign of Jonah. Robinson, Hoffman, and Kloppenborg (2002) recognize the presence of these sayings in Q, although they exclude the "sign of Jonah" portion since it is absent in Luke: Q 11:16, 29-30 (109); Q 12:[54-56] (127).

## John

- Jesus Lifted Up: John 3:13-14; 8:28; 12:32-34

Even more importantly, the passion predictions appear in multiple literary forms, being found in logia involving parable (Mark 12:1-12) and simple didactic.

Third, the passion and resurrection predictions fulfill the criterion of embarrassment. In his garden prayer, Jesus “wants out” if possible (Mark 14:32-40; Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46) and there is the embarrassing portrayal of the disciples who do not understand Jesus’ passion predictions or simply did not believe him (Mark 8:31-33; 9:31-32; 14:27-31; Luke 24:11, 21).<sup>36</sup> Of special interest is that in the midst of these predictions the first leader of the church is twice portrayed in a negative light.<sup>37</sup> Fourth, with only a few exceptions, the passion and resurrection predictions lack signs of possible theologizing by the early church.<sup>38</sup> For example, there is no reflection on the significance of Jesus’ death, such as its atoning value.<sup>39</sup> Fifth, Jesus’ passion and resurrection predictions are often located within Jesus’ reference to himself as the “Son of Man.”<sup>40</sup> Given the criterion of dissimilarity, the “Son of Man” appears to have been an authentic self-designation by Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The “Son of Man” logia appear in every Gospel layer and in multiple literary forms.<sup>42</sup> However, the later church did not

<sup>36</sup> C. A. Evans (1999), 88; Habermas (2003), 92; Vermes (2008), 82.

<sup>37</sup> Maier (1997): “If the story of Holy Week were a pious invention of writers who wanted to portray a superhero, this scene would never have been included” (131).

<sup>38</sup> In Mark 10:45 Jesus’ death will serve as a ransom for many. At the Last Supper Jesus claims that his body and blood will be sacrificed on behalf of many and a new covenant will be instituted (Mark 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20). In John 3:13-14, Jesus will be crucified so that others may have eternal life. In Luke 13:32-33, the “goal” of which Jesus speaks may be his death for others, given Luke 22:19-20.

<sup>39</sup> McKnight (2005), 230; Theissen and Merz (1998), 429. C. A. Evans (1999), 88, and McKnight (2005), 232, note that the passion predictions likewise do not mention the Parousia and the coming of the Son of Man for judgment.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas (2003), 92. Schaberg (1985) argues that Jesus’ passion predictions where he refers to himself as the Son of Man in the Synoptics and the three Johannine predictions (3:13-14; 8:28; 12:31-34) are allusions to the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13.

<sup>41</sup> Although many scholars grant that Jesus claimed to be the “Son of Man,” further division exists pertaining to what Jesus meant by the term. Bock (1998): “The ‘Son of Man’ [in Mark 14:61-64] is an otherwise, unidentified representative head . . . who shares God’s authority, is a regal-like representative for the nation who is given judging authority and divine prerogative” (150; see 148-54); Dunn (2003) understands the term to mean “a man like me” in most of the occurrences while he grants “at least some reference to” the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 (760); Theissen and Merz (1998): “In our view the interpretation mentioned last is therefore the most probable one: Jesus spoke of both the present and the future Son of Man. He combined the expression ‘son of man’ from everyday language with the visionary-language tradition of a heavenly being ‘like a son of man’. . . . He is at the same time the present and the future ‘man’. This ‘double’ concept of Son of Man is analogous to the ‘double’ kingdom of God eschatology” (552). Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003) denies that Jesus made claims to being the Son of Man. Instead, it was the first “bilingual circles of Jesus’ followers to serve as his distinctive self-referential expression in conveying his sayings in Greek” (304). According to Hurtado, the purpose of this expression was “to identify and distinguish a person” and “[refer] to him emphatically as human descendant” (305). We might use an American idiom for Hurtado’s bilingual group who were saying of Jesus, “You da man!”

<sup>42</sup> Bock (1998) notes that the title “Son of Man” is applied to Jesus 82 times in the Gospels, 81 of which come from the lips of Jesus (John 12:34, in which Jesus’ critics quote his words back to him and ask who was the “Son of Man,” is the lone exception). Taking parallels into consideration, there are 51 logia of which 14 appear in Mark and 10 in Q. There are four occurrences in the NT outside of the Gospels: Acts 7:56; Heb. 2:6; Rev. 1:13; 14:14. (Also see Dunn [2003], 737.) The term is rare in the writings of the early church (225). Bock goes on to demonstrate that even the *apocalyptic Son of Man*



refer to Jesus as the “Son of Man.” Brown’s reply to those claiming that the “Son of Man” self-designation of Jesus was an invention of the church is insightful: “Why was this title so massively retrojected, being placed on Jesus’ lips on a scale far outdistancing the retrojection of ‘the Messiah,’ ‘the Son of God,’ and ‘the Lord’? And if this title was first fashioned by the early church, why has it left almost no traces in non-Gospel NT literature, something not true of the other titles?”<sup>43</sup> Sixth, the passion predictions fulfill the criterion of plausibility.<sup>44</sup> His prediction comes as no surprise within Jesus’ Jewish context, given the fact he had made enemies of prominent Jewish leaders, considered himself a prophet and would naturally share the fate of a prophet, given the Jewish traditions describing martyrdom and vindication by God (2 Macc. 7), and that John the Baptist had been recently executed for similar activities.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of the strong evidence in favor of historicity, there are three major arguments forwarded against the historicity of the passion and resurrection predictions. First, the passion predictions require that Jesus had predictive powers and these are unallowable within historical investigation. It is obvious that this objection is driven solely by horizon rather than the data. Concerning the Jesus Seminar’s conclusion that Jesus did not predict his death in a manner beyond what he would have perceived given his dangerous occupation, Brown opines:

A factor at the root of the issue was that most of the participants were unwilling to grant that Jesus spoke of his impending death by virtue of ‘super-ordinary’ powers (Borg, ‘Jesus Seminar’ 83-84). Obviously a great distance separates the mind-set of these interpreters from that of the evangelists. . . . Consequently in interpreting the place and development of Gospel passion predictions, an a priori rejection of extraordinary or miraculous foreknowledge is a handicap. This rejection also distorts the quest for history. Historicity should be determined not by what we think possible or likely, but by the antiquity and reliability of the evidence; and as far back as we can trace, Jesus was known and remembered as one who had extraordinary powers.<sup>46</sup>

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logia are multiply attested in Mark, Q, M, and L. (We may add John [5:27; 9:35-36; 12:23] and that these logia appear in multiple literary forms: parabolic, apocalyptic, didactic.) “If the criterion of multiple attestation means anything or has any useful purpose, then the idea that Jesus spoke of himself in these terms should not be doubted” (226). Theissen and Merz (1998): “It is certain that Jesus used the expression ‘son of man’. It derives from Aramaic and is attested in all the complexes of the Jesus tradition (Mark; Q; Matt.<sup>s</sup> cf. 10.23; 25.31ff./ Luke<sup>s</sup> cf. e.g. 18.8; John; Gospel of Thomas 86)” (548); Dunn (2003): The Son of Man phrase “*was remembered as a speech usage distinctive of Jesus because that is precisely what it was*. It was Jesus who, if we may put it so, introduced ‘the son of man’ phrase into the Jesus tradition. The evidence could hardly point more plainly to that conclusion” (738, emphasis in original; cf. 759).

<sup>43</sup> R. Brown (*An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 1994), 90.

<sup>44</sup> Please note that Jesus’ predictions that he would resurrect shortly after his death do not fulfill this criterion.

<sup>45</sup> R. Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 1994), 2:1486; Crossan (1991), 352; Crossley (2005), 173; Dunn (2003), 797, 805; C. A. Evans (1999), 94; McKnight (2005), 231; Theissen and Merz (1998), 429; Turner (2000), 16-17. McKnight (2005) asserts, “The logic is simple and unavoidable: if Jesus called his disciples to a willing martyrdom, for which there is plenty of evidence (Q 12:4–9; 14:27; 17:33), we can infer with the utmost probability that he, too, saw his own death approaching” (155). C. A. Evans (1999), however, cautions: “The rhetoric of such a summons may have been intended to underscore the dangers and difficulties that lay ahead; not necessarily the certainty of Jesus’ death, or of the death of any of his followers” (89).

<sup>46</sup> R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 2:1468.

Historians who reject the possibility of the miraculous can still grant the historicity of the passion predictions for the seven reasons stated above, while emphasizing the sixth reason: the plausibility of the predictions. Given Jesus' Jewish beliefs, he could have made the predictions of his death without requiring supernatural power. Even Jesus' prediction that he would be raised "after three days" or "on the third day" is not problematic if the phrase is interpreted, as it is by many, to mean "soon."<sup>47</sup>

The second objection is that the passion and resurrection predictions may be seen as an invention of the early church, "predictions after the fact" (*vaticinia ex eventu*) that attributed predictive powers to him in the process of inventing his claims to divinity. This is certainly possible. However, even if it can be reasonably argued that some of the predictions are the result of creations by the Evangelists, the conclusion that all of the predictions are creations seems to me quite a leap, given the six arguments presented above that suggest Jesus predicted his imminent and violent death and imminent resurrection. Moreover, historians must look for the most probable solution and this objection relies too heavily on *a priori* assumptions. In Dunn's treatment of the historicity of Jesus' Christological claim to be "the Son" in Mark 13:32, he notes the embarrassing nature of Jesus' claim not to know the time of his coming. Not only is this strange within a Gospel that paints a portrait of a divine Jesus, Dunn notes that since Jewish tradition maintained that several of the Patriarchs had foreseen the end of the world, this would render (from that perspective) Jesus inferior to them.<sup>48</sup> This embarrassment, of course, weighs in favor of the historicity of Jesus' claim to being God's Son. However, Dunn then cites Barrett who rejects its historicity or favors redaction: "The description of Jesus by the most honorific title available would be precisely the sort of compensation that tradition would introduce."<sup>49</sup> Dunn concludes, "In effect this observation removes Mark 13.32 from the catalogue of firm evidence that Jesus spoke of himself as God's son ('the Son') in his teaching."<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult to read Dunn and not develop a very high regard for his careful scholarship. When I first read his conclusion I had confidence that Barrett had provided support for his assertion, which Dunn neglected to mention. Upon reading Barrett, however, I discovered that he likewise neglected to provide any support. The problem is that Barrett and Dunn deny historicity based on the assumption that this saying of Jesus is later Christology retrojected onto the lips of the historical Jesus and in so doing deny the actual evidence that could overturn their assumption.<sup>51</sup> We should allow the evidence to guide our historical research rather than our *a priori* assumptions, even if those include our belief that Jesus made no claim to divinity.

The third objection asks why Jesus' followers failed to anticipate his resurrection if he had actually predicted his imminent and violent death as well as his subsequent imminent resurrection by God. Of the three objections, I regard this one as the weightiest. If not for the preponderance of evidence, this objection might very well

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<sup>47</sup> R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 2:1477; C. A. Evans (1999), 95-96; McKnight (2005), 233-35. See also section 4.3.2.1.c below.

<sup>48</sup> Dunn (2003), 723, 723n73.

<sup>49</sup> Dunn (2003), 723, citing Barrett (1967), 25-26.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn (2003), 723. Contra Meier (1994) who argues for the authenticity of Mark 13:32 (347; cf. Meier [1991], 169).

<sup>51</sup> Gerhardsson (1998) counters, "The opinion expressed by so many scholars, that the Christology of the N.T. is essentially a creation of the young Church, is an intelligent thesis, but historically most improbable" (325).

persuade me to reject the historicity of the passion predictions. Earlier I asserted that when weighing hypotheses, each hypothesis must be judged by how well it answers disconfirming arguments.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, we have come to a point where we must apply this principle.

Why was it that the disciples did not appear to understand or anticipate the resurrection of Jesus? I can think of a number of possible options: First, it was probably difficult for Jesus' disciples to grasp Jesus' passion and resurrection predictions given their beliefs about what the Messiah would do in terms of setting up an earthly kingdom when he came. A dying and rising Messiah was so foreign to their thoughts and hopes that they simply did not *hear* Jesus, thought he may be mistaken, or were in a state of denial while hoping that events would not turn out as he was predicting. In favor of this option are numerous references to the weak faith of the disciples (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25; 12:28; 17:6; 24:11, 25; John 4:48; 6:64; 14:8-11, 28-30).<sup>53</sup> A second possibility is that Jesus made the passion predictions early in his ministry, at which time he did not speak in terms of it being imminent, since it was at the beginning of his ministry. However, this does not eliminate the passion predictions close to the time of his death and, thus, does not answer the tension.<sup>54</sup>

A third possibility is that when Jesus spoke of his imminent death and imminent vindication via resurrection, his disciples and possibly Jesus himself thought of the general resurrection and that it would happen quickly. Jesus' resurrection would be simultaneous with and no different than their own. This option is promising, but must regard the historicity of Mark 14:28 as unlikely, since Jesus appears to be thinking that his resurrection would be unique.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, against this third option is our expectation that Jesus' disciples may have shown a bit of excitement over Jesus' imminent passion if they had understood this to mean that the general resurrection was just around the corner. And yet, there is not so much as a hint of this in the Gospels. Accordingly, this option does not carry much strength.

A fourth possibility is that Jesus never made the passion predictions because he did not think he was going to be martyred. Instead, Jesus hoped God would now usher in his kingdom through him. Jesus' cry on the cross that God had forsaken him may be seen as support. The passion predictions were quickly fabricated in order to cover up this embarrassment and keep the Christian sect going. This option is unattractive, since the Evangelists show no hesitation to include numerous embarrassing elements

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<sup>52</sup> See chapter 1.3.2.

<sup>53</sup> Although impossible to verify its historicity, Luke 9:45 reports that the disciples were kept from understanding the passion prediction. (Mark 9:31-32 says that they did not understand his passion prediction.) Of interest, however, is the fact that Luke does not omit the problem that the disciples appeared clueless about it. Elsewhere, Luke simply omits embarrassing tradition, such as Jesus' words in Mark 13:32 (Matt. 24:32-36; Luke 21:29-33).

<sup>54</sup> C. A. Evans (1999) maintains that the passion predictions were not made until after Jesus had entered Jerusalem and notes that Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and his actions in the temple indicate that he had no intention of dying up to that point (89). He adds that the mockery of Jesus by the Roman guards and the *titulus* are clues that "Jesus' royal intentions are plainly evident" (90). However, we may postulate that Jesus may have actually understood these events including his death as fulfilling prophecy and had increased his boldness as a result.

<sup>55</sup> Alsop (1975) asserts that both Mark 14:28 and 16:7 are redactions, since they "provide for Mk the essential theological seam between the passion narrative and the empty tomb story" (92).

such as the persistent thick-headedness of the twelve, Jesus' rejection by his own brothers, his lack of knowledge concerning the time of his return, his strong emotional hesitation in the garden, and the very cry of rejection made on the cross to which this objection appeals.<sup>56</sup> This is indicative of biographers who are attempting to report the good, the bad, and the ugly, and therefore weighs against wholesale inventions.

A fifth possibility is that the passion predictions of Jesus are poetic components invented for honoring Jesus. Even if one regards Jesus as an authentic miracle-worker, for example, it is possible that his nature miracles were the result of this type of invention. In noting a distinction between history and poetry, Lucian asserts that poets had "undiluted liberty" in story-telling. He adds that when poets tell of one who runs over water or overtop a cornfield, no one is begrudged.<sup>57</sup> Weighing against this option is that, if true, it seems improbable that the Evangelists would have cast Jesus and the future leaders of his church in such an embarrassing light. Why not portray Jesus making his passion predictions with his disciples responding, "Let us also go so that we may die with him" (John 11:16),<sup>58</sup> or paint a more positive picture of the garden scene as John does?

In summary, we have observed six arguments in favor of the historicity of the passion and resurrection predictions and three arguments for their nonhistoricity. We may summarize the arguments for historicity as follows. There can be no doubt that Jesus' passion and resurrection predictions were known very early in the church. They appear in Mark and may have an Aramaic original. They are multiply attested and appear in multiple literary forms. They appear in contexts that portray Jesus as well as the leadership he left in an embarrassing manner. They generally lack theologizing, report Jesus referring to himself in a manner believed historical, and are even expected within the context in which Jesus walked. With the exception of references such as Mark 14:28, Jesus could certainly be seen as making the passion predictions without requiring supernatural knowledge. Against historicity, to the extent that it could be demonstrated that deism or atheism is true, it would be probable that Jesus did not have supernatural knowledge. Moreover, to the extent that it could be demonstrated that the early church created the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, it would be probable that the church likewise invented the passion and resurrection predictions in order to exalt Jesus and/or promote Christianity. Finally, it is strange that Jesus' disciples act as though Jesus never made the passion predictions.

The six arguments for the historicity of the passion and resurrection predictions mount a strong case. Of the three arguments for nonhistoricity, it is my opinion that only the third carries weight. I have offered five possible explanations for the disciples' lack of anticipation of the resurrection of Jesus. None of them strikes me as having a significant advantage over the others, although the first seems strongest to me. As a result, it is my opinion that the strong case for the historicity of Jesus' predictions of

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<sup>56</sup> R. T. Fortna, "The Gospel of John and the Historical Jesus" in Scott, ed. (2008): "Despite the impression to the contrary in all the gospels, Jesus did not expect to be raised from death. To maintain that he did makes a sham of his fearful but courageous acceptance of the death sentence" (51). While this objection may carry some conviction pertaining to Jesus' cry of rejection while on the cross, it rings hollow in relation to his anxiety in the garden, his death sentence and the tortures that followed. Even if one were absolutely confident of being in heaven immediately upon death, anticipation of the lictor's work would be quite unnerving.

<sup>57</sup> Lucian, *How to Write History* 8. Lucian is referring to the god Erichthonius in Homer's *Iliad* 20.226.

<sup>58</sup> John does not cast Thomas saying this within the context of a passion prediction.

his passion and resurrection stands, since the only cogent argument against it can be answered without strain.

I conclude that the historical Jesus predicted his violent and imminent death and subsequent imminent resurrection.<sup>59</sup> However, we cannot establish that he made these predictions as a result of possessing supernatural knowledge. Accordingly, even if we were to include the passion predictions in our Jesus context, their value varies according to the strength of the resurrection hypothesis. For if the resurrection hypothesis is inferior to a competing hypothesis, there is little significance in Jesus' belief that he would die a martyr, at least not for our investigation of the resurrection of Jesus. However, if the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation for the data, supernatural knowledge on the part of Jesus becomes more plausible and the religious significance of the life of Jesus increases. As a result, if the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the data, it is more likely that it was a miracle rather than an anomaly. Therefore, we may bracket the question related to whether the passion predictions were made from Jesus' natural expectations or supernatural knowledge until we have weighed the hypotheses. Notwithstanding this discussion, the majority of scholars do not regard the passion predictions as historical.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, they fall outside of our historical bedrock and, therefore, I will not include them in the context of Jesus' life during our investigation.<sup>61</sup>

We conclude, therefore, that Jesus thought of himself as an exorcist, miracle worker, and God's eschatological agent. Indeed, there can be little doubt that Jesus awed crowds with deeds that many interpreted as miracles and exorcisms, while others appear to have interpreted them as demonic or magical. Moreover, Jesus thought of himself as having a special relationship with God who had chosen him to bring about his eschatological kingdom. These conclusions are generally regarded by scholars as historical bedrock upon which we can build a metanarrative of the life of Jesus. Our goal, however, is much more modest, seeking only to establish a context in which the data related to Jesus' resurrection appear.<sup>62</sup> If these "minimal facts" related to Jesus' opinion of and claims about himself are correct they provide a fascinating context that is indeed charged with religious significance, a context in which we might expect a god to act if he, she, or it chose to do so. If, in addition to our historical bedrock, we were to consider that Jesus predicted his imminent and violent death as well as his subsequent imminent vindication by God, a claim for which there is significant support, the context becomes super-charged. Let me hasten to add, however, that this neither confirms the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus nor does it provide any evidence for it. Our context is a necessary component, however, for distinguishing a miracle from an anomaly. Should the resurrection hypothesis be superior to its competitors, the context warrants historians to regard the event as a miracle.

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<sup>59</sup> For others who have arrived at a similar conclusion, see R. Brown (*Death*, 1994) 2:1468-91; Crossley (2005, 173): "quite probable"; Dunn (2003, 805): "There need be little doubt"; C. A. Evans, "Did Jesus Predict His Death and Resurrection" in Porter, Hayes, Tombs, eds. (*Resurrection*, 1999), 82-97; cf. C. A. Evans ("Assessing," 2006): "almost a certainty" (13); Wright (2003, 409): "highly likely."

<sup>60</sup> Waterman (2006) asserts, "The majority of scholars, therefore, see Jesus' prediction [of his resurrection] as a genuine primitive tradition free from the post-Easter proclamation of the early church" (196). However, his statement is without documentation and I suspect it is incorrect.

<sup>61</sup> I desire to be consistent with my method. See chapter 1.2.3, letter e.

<sup>62</sup> Davis (1993): "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the resurrection must be viewed in its religious context and not as an isolated wonder" (188).



Perhaps one may object that this context provides an expectation for a miracle, since it is already charged with superstition. Accordingly, we are right to expect more miracle stories and the reports of Jesus' resurrection come as no surprise. All are legendary. This is a thoughtful reply. It is certainly true that religiously charged contexts create an expectation for miracles and we may presume that people in these contexts will make more out of a circumstance than may actually be there. Healing services showcasing Ernest Angley and Benny Hinn are prime examples. During worship services in which Angley and Hinn preside, people speak in tongues, receive healings and are often "slain in the Spirit." Reports of phenomena during these services can quickly become embellished and evolve into urban legends.<sup>63</sup>

The observation that a context charged with religious significance creates an expectation for miracle demonstrates that naturalistic explanations such as delusion, hallucination, and legend can be quite reasonable in accounting for certain phenomena. It shows that a context can serve multiple purposes. And with that I am in agreement. Related to the resurrection of Jesus, we might argue that the context of Jesus as miracle-worker and eschatological agent created an expectation among his followers that resulted in their having delusions or hallucinations and in the rapid accumulation of urban legend, thus creating the resurrection narratives. I see no *a priori* reason for preferring a resurrection over this alternative. It is important, therefore, to weigh the hypotheses, which we will do in chapter five. If we discover that a naturalistic hypothesis is superior to the resurrection hypothesis, then it is most plausible that the context created the expectation for a miracle and the resurrection legend resulted. However, if the resurrection hypothesis is superior to naturalistic explanations, the context will serve to strengthen the hypothesis that the resurrection of Jesus was historical and that the event was a miracle. Moreover, it is important to remember that our commitment to using only the historical bedrock serves as a safeguard so that we do not confuse urban legend with fact.

### 4.3. The Historical Bedrock Pertaining to Jesus' Fate

To an extent, we will here be standing on the shoulders of Habermas who has, to my knowledge, engaged in the most comprehensive investigation of the facts pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. Although he has provided lists of varying lengths in the past, Habermas now identifies three minimal facts that are regarded as indisputable by almost all scholars writing on the subject:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.
3. Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.<sup>64</sup>

We will discuss these at length in order to see if we are warranted in regarding them as historical bedrock.

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<sup>63</sup> I am not suggesting that all of the phenomena during the services are self-induced, imaginary, or legendary, although I personally hold that many of them are.

<sup>64</sup> In a personal telephone conversation with Habermas on March 31, 2008.

### 4.3.1. Jesus' Death by Crucifixion

Crucifixion was a common form of execution employed by the Romans to punish members of the lower class, slaves, soldiers, the violently rebellious, and those accused of treason.<sup>65</sup> It was usually preceded by torturing the victim brutally. The Romans normally carried out flogging before crucifying a victim.<sup>66</sup> From the late first century BC through the end of the first century AD, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, Philo, and Josephus report of people being tormented with whips, fire, and all sorts of tortures before they were crucified.<sup>67</sup> In the second century, Lucian reports of a man who was whipped, his eyes put out, and his tongue cut off before being crucified.<sup>68</sup> The whipping itself, scourging, could be quite brutal. Although a subsequent crucifixion is not mentioned, in the middle of the second century, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* reports of people whose flesh were “so torn by whips” that their “veins and arteries” became visible.<sup>69</sup> Josephus tells of a man who, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, was whipped to the bone by one of Pilate’s successors in Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup> He also reports that a group was whipped until their intestines were exposed.<sup>71</sup> Having undergone this type of treatment prior to crucifixion, we can only imagine what the victim looked like while on the cross. In the first century, Seneca described crucified victims as having “battered and ineffective carcasses,” “maimed,” “misshapen,” “deformed,” “nailed,” and “drawing the breath of life amid long drawn out agony.”<sup>72</sup>

After being tortured, the victim condemned to the cross was often followed by crowds while being escorted outside the city walls where he was nailed or bound to a cross or tree.<sup>73</sup> Nailing appears to have been the preferred method.<sup>74</sup> Sometimes the victims were nailed in different positions.<sup>75</sup> Brutal treatment was occasionally dished out on victims on the cross.<sup>76</sup> In the last quarter of the first century, Martial describes a theatrical performance in graphic detail during which a condemned man was

<sup>65</sup> Sloyan (1995), 18–20. Also see Hengel (1977), 46-63.

<sup>66</sup> Hengel (1977), 29, 29n21.

<sup>67</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 5.51.3; Livy, *The History of Rome* 22.13.9; 28.37.3; Philo, *Flaccus* 65-85; Josephus, *War* 5:449, 451. I am here indebted to Hengel’s work for much of the information that follows.

<sup>68</sup> Lucian, *Piscator*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Mart. Pol.* 2.2.

<sup>70</sup> *Jos. War* 6:304.

<sup>71</sup> *Jos. War* 2:612.

<sup>72</sup> Seneca, *Epistles*, “To Lucilius” 101.

<sup>73</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> Hengel (1977, 31-32n25) provides the following list where nails were used in crucifixion: Philo, *De posteritate Caini* 61; *De somniss* 2.213; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe et Clitophon* 2.37.3; Plutarch, *Moralia* 499D; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* 28.41-46; Ps. Manetho, *Apotelesmatica* 4.199; 1.149; Seneca, *Dialogue 7 (De vita beata)* 19.3; Lukan, *De Bello Civili* 6.543-47; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.17.4; Galen, *De usu partium* 12.11; Artemidorus, *Onirocritica* 2.56; Lucian, *Prometheus* 1.2; *Dialogus deorum* 5(1).1. Hengel also lists Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* 4.23 which mentions binding to a cross specifically related to a particular instance that occurred in Egypt (32n26). To Hengel’s list we may add Josephus who writes of nailing to the cross (*War* 4:451) and Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44) who reports that Nero fastened Christians to crosses and then in the evening set them ablaze to provide light for his gardens. It is difficult to imagine ropes being used here, since fire would burn through them. Possible support might be evident in *Mart. Pol.* 13:3-14:1 where Polycarp asks not to be nailed to the stake for the sake of securing him.

<sup>75</sup> Seneca, *Dialogue* 6 (“To Marcia on Consulation”), 20.3; *Jos. War* 5:449-51.

<sup>76</sup> Seneca, *Dialogue* 6 (“To Marcia on Consulation”), 20.3; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

substituted for the actor at the appropriate moment and crucified in the theatre, after which a bear was loosed on him that tore him to pieces while alive on the cross.<sup>77</sup> Josephus reports a particularly brutal treatment where after being whipped severely with rods, some were crucified, and that while alive their wives and sons were killed and their now dead infant sons were hung around their necks.<sup>78</sup> One can easily understand why Cicero referred to crucifixion as “that most cruel and disgusting penalty,” “the worst extremes of tortures” and “the terror of the cross.”<sup>79</sup>

4.3.1.1. There are at least four reasons for believing that Jesus of Nazareth died as a result of being crucified. The first evidence is that Jesus’ death by crucifixion is multiply attested in a fair number of ancient sources, Christian and non-Christian alike. It is very probable that Josephus reported the event in his original version of *Antiquities* 18:3.<sup>80</sup> Tacitus, Lucian, and Mara bar Serapion are all certainly aware of the event.<sup>81</sup> Lucian adds that Jesus’ crucifixion took place in Palestine.<sup>82</sup> In Christian sources, Jesus’ execution is widely reported, with and without specifying the mode of crucifixion. All four canonical Gospels report Jesus’ death by crucifixion as do numerous other books and letters of the New Testament that refer to it regularly.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, there is no ancient evidence to the contrary.<sup>84</sup>

4.3.1.2. A second evidence for Jesus’ death by crucifixion is that the reports are early. Paul mentions Jesus’ death by crucifixion no later than AD 55 (1 Cor., Gal.) and said he preached the same to those in Corinth in AD 51 or within twenty-one years of

<sup>77</sup> Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum* 7.

<sup>78</sup> Jos. Ant. 12:256.

<sup>79</sup> Cicero, *Speech against Verres* 2.5.165, 168; *Pro Rabirio* 16. Josephus (*War* 7:203) referred to crucifixion as θανάτων τὸν οἴκτιστον (“the most pitiful of deaths”).

<sup>80</sup> See chapter 3.2.4.1.

<sup>81</sup> Tacitus does not specifically name crucifixion as the mode of Jesus’ execution but instead reports that Jesus suffered “the most extreme penalty.” Mara bar Serapion does not mention the mode of execution. Although of questionable historical value, the Talmud also reports the event but uses the term “hanged” (*b. Sanhedrin* 43a).

<sup>82</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 11.

<sup>83</sup> Mark 15:24-37; Matt. 27:35-50; Luke 23:33-46; John 19:16-37. Before the canonical Gospels were written, the death of Jesus is reported abundantly throughout the Pauline corpus and in all of Paul’s undisputed letters except Philemon (Rom. 1:4; 4:24; 5:6, 8; 10; 6:3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10; 7:4; 8:11 [bis], 34; 10:9; 11:26; 14:9, 15; 1 Cor. 8:11; 15:3, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Gal. 1:1; 2:21; Phil. 2:8; 3:10, 18; Col. 1:18, 20; 2:12, 14, 20; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14; 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:8, 11. Crucifixion of Christ [crucifixion, cross]: 1 Cor. 1:17, 18, 23; 2:2, 8; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 2:20; 3:1; 6:12, 14; Eph. 1:20; 2:16). We find Jesus’ death also attested in Hebrews and 1 Peter (Heb. 2:9, 14; 9:15-10:14; 12:2; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:3, 21; 2:24; 3:18). Both were certainly written in the first century and may pre-date the canonical Gospels (L. T. Johnson [1996], 151, 164). Jesus’ death is stated in the *kerygma*, although the manner of his death is usually absent. Jesus’ death may be alluded to in *Q* 14:27 and possibly *Q* 11:49-51 as indicated by the timing of “this generation” (Perkins [2007], 87; Smith [2003], 124). Jesus’ crucifixion is likewise abundantly mentioned in the non-canonical literature: Ign. *Eph.* 16:2; Ign. *Trall.* 9:1; Ign. *Rom.* 7:2; *Barn.* 7:9; 12:1; *Mart. Pol.* 17:2. The *Gospel of Peter* (10, 18) and the *Epistle of the Apostles* (9) report Jesus’ death by crucifixion. The *Gospel According to the Hebrews* mentions Jesus’ death by implication of his bodily resurrection. The *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Truth* likewise mention Jesus’ death. Jesus’ crucifixion—without mentioning whether he died—is mentioned in the *Gospel of the Savior* (91-92, 100-108). Jesus is crucified and dies in the *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* and *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, Gnostic writings dated to the third century. The *Gospel of Thomas* (65) and the *Gospel of Judas* (57) probably refer to the death of Jesus in *Thomas’s* version of Jesus’ parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants and *Judas’s* mentioning of Jesus’ betrayal resulting in a sacrifice of Jesus’ body. The fate of Jesus is neither mentioned nor alluded to in Egerton Papyrus 2, *Gospel of the Nazareans*, *Gospel of the Ebionites*, and *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

<sup>84</sup> R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 14.

Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>85</sup> It may be alluded to in *Q*, which could be around the same time. It appears numerous times in the oral formulas. Perhaps the earliest report of Jesus' death is found in the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. As noted in the previous chapter, virtually all scholars who have written on the subject hold that Paul here provides tradition about Jesus which he received from others. There is likewise widespread agreement that it was composed very early, reflected what was being taught by the Jerusalem apostles, and is the oldest extant tradition pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. It is really quite amazing to think that we are probably reading what was taught by the original disciples of Jesus.

4.3.1.3. A third evidence for Jesus' death by crucifixion is that the Passion narratives appear largely credible given their satisfying of the criterion of embarrassment and the plausibility of certain peripheral details. While a number of accounts existed of Jewish martyrs who all acted bravely under circumstances of extreme torture and execution, reports of Jesus' arrest and martyrdom show a weaker and more human Jesus, one which could cause embarrassment in contrast. We begin by surveying reports of martyrs in the ancient Jewish literature.<sup>86</sup>

4.3.1.3.a. Seven Brothers (*d.* second century BC). In 2 Maccabees 7, seven Jewish brothers are tortured and executed brutally for their defiance of the Seleucid king who had ordered them to break the Jewish Law and eat pork. In turn, each have the skin on their heads removed, their tongues cut out, their hands and feet severed, and finally are placed in a very large, hot pan and fried alive. Each faces the king who gives them an opportunity to eat pork and save himself. And each faces the consequences of defying the king with great boldness. The first brother proclaims that he is ready to die rather than transgress the Law. After being tortured, the second brother uses his last breath to tell the king that God will raise them up in spite of his actions against them. The third defiantly sticks out his tongue and hands and tells the king that he received them from God from whom he hopes to receive them back. After the fourth had been tortured as the others, he tells the king that he looks forward to resurrection and adds that there will be no resurrection for the king. After the fifth is tortured in the same manner, he tells the king that God will torment him and his offspring. The sixth tells the king that he and his brothers deserve the treatment they are receiving for sinning against God and that the king will not escape unpunished since he has contended with God. Finally, the seventh tells the king that he too will not obey him since he deserves to die because of his sins but will be with God, and that the king will not escape God's just punishment. He then is killed more brutally than all of the others. The courage and resolve of the seven brothers are remarkable. Even more remarkable are the second and fourth brothers who utter words of reproach *after* their tongues have been removed!

4.3.1.3.b. Eleazar (*d.* second century BC). In 4 Maccabees 6:1-30, Eleazar is whipped until his flesh is stripped and his sides pierced. In 6:15-21, Eleazar communicates that more painful than torture is the thought of his being deceptive, compromising his character, becoming a poor example for the young, and thought a coward and unmanly. He was then burned and stinking fluids poured down his nostrils. After he had been burned to the bone and was about to die, having maintained his full reasoning abilities throughout his ordeal he prays, informing God that although he

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<sup>85</sup> 1 Cor. 15:1-11.

<sup>86</sup> For a fuller survey, see Wire (2002), 279-373.

could have saved himself by disobeying His Law, he endured to the end. He asks God to allow his suffering and death to be regarded as substitutionary punishment for the Jews.

4.3.1.3.c. Stephen (*d.* first century AD). In Acts 6:8-7:60, when Stephen is dragged before the Jewish Council and falsely accused, his face looked like that of an angel's. When the high priest asks him to reply to his accusers, he delivers a homily that ends with a stern rebuke: Just as their fathers had killed the prophets who announced the coming of the Righteous One, they have actually killed the Righteous One. With their anger now more intense than ever, Stephen has a vision of the Righteous One, Jesus, at the right hand of God and tells them what he sees. Immediately, they drag him outside of Jerusalem and stone him. Just before death, Stephen prays and asks God not to hold this sin against them.

4.3.1.3.d. Rabbi Akiba (*d.* second century AD). Akiba lived in the second century and was tortured to death by Rome. During his tortures the appointed time comes and he begins to recite the Shema, that God is One and we are to love God with all of our heart, life, and means. One account reports that he then begins to laugh, for which the Roman ruler mocks him. Akiba answers that he has loved God with all of his heart and means but has not been tested with his life until that very moment. He realizes that he has now experienced even that and laughs. After these words, Rabbi Akiba died.<sup>87</sup> In another account, while under torture he begins reciting the Shema. When his students ask him whether his piety is necessary even under torture, he answers that he has always wondered when he would be given the opportunity to love God with all of his life and now that the moment has arrived, would he not do it? He continues reciting the Shema and dies after saying the word "One." At that moment of his death the sounds of the voice of God and his angels in heaven are heard.<sup>88</sup>

4.3.1.3.e. Rabbi Hanina ben Taradion (*d.* second century AD). Hanina is wrapped in the Torah scroll he had laid on his lap and is prepared to be burned in it. Sponges of wool are soaked in water and placed on his heart in order to prolong his suffering. He tells his onlooking daughter that the burning of the scroll doubles his humiliation. The executioner is so impacted by Hanina's piety at death that he offers to expedite his execution if he promises him a place with him in the world to come. Hanina agrees. The executioner turns up the flames and removes the sponges. Hanina dies quickly and the executioner himself jumps into the fire. The story ends with a heavenly voice informing those present that both have been welcomed into the world to come.<sup>89</sup>

4.3.1.3.f. Polycarp (*d.* second century AD).<sup>90</sup> At his arrest, Polycarp feeds his Roman captors and prays for two hours. When he is taken into the stadium to be executed, a voice from heaven heard only by the Christians present says, "Be strong, Polycarp, and act like a man."<sup>91</sup> Polycarp refuses the multiple demands of the proconsul to curse Christ and offer allegiance to Caesar. When threatened to be fed to wild animals and to be burned alive, he says, in effect, "Bring it on!" When Polycarp is

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<sup>87</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 9, 7/8 [14b].

<sup>88</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 61b.

<sup>89</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Abodah Zerah* 18a.

<sup>90</sup> *Mart. Pol.* 7:1-16:1.

<sup>91</sup> *Mart. Pol.* 9:1.



condemned to be burned, he asks the Romans not to nail him as a restraint, since God will enable him to stay on the pyre without moving. He then offers praise and thanks to God for considering him worthy of martyrdom. Again, only the Christians are then privy to seeing that the flames form an arch around Polycarp that does not consume him and they smell the scent of incense. When the Romans realize that his body is not being consumed by the flames, an executioner stabs and kills him upon which so much blood comes forth from Polycarp that it puts out the fire.

Speaking without tongues and emitting quantities of blood that extinguish a large fire appear to be embellishments of a historical core. We may speculate that these stories are meant to honor the martyr and to strengthen others who may soon find themselves in similar circumstances. The martyrs are strong, bold, and courageous in their final hour. They are pious to the very end.

4.3.1.3.g. Jesus (*d.* first century AD). When we come to the Passion narratives in the canonical Gospels, we find a number of traits shared with the other martyrdom stories. Like all of the others, once arrested, Jesus stands bold in his convictions. In all, there are moments of great composure during their painful ordeals. Jesus offers a prayer to God as do Eleazar, Stephen, Polycarp, and Rabbi Akiba. Even Jesus' enemies are impressed with his behavior under fire as are those witnessing the martyrdoms of the seven brothers, Eleazar, Polycarp, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Hanina ben Taradion.

However, the accounts of Jesus' martyrdom also differ significantly from the others. Whereas a number of the martyrdom reports seem constructed to strengthen others who may face similar situations, the Passion narratives of Jesus provide no such encouragement. Jesus anguishes over his impending treatment and wants to avoid it if at all possible (Mark 14:32-42; Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46). This would certainly not inspire those whom he had told to take up their own cross and follow him if they wanted to be his disciples (Mark 8:34; Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23). Rather than proclaiming during his ordeal that he will not forsake God or his Law, Jesus instead cries out asking why God has forsaken him (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46). Keener notes that "Given subsequent Christian Christology, the early church would hardly have invented Jesus' cry of despair in uttering a complaint about alienation from God, quoting Psalm 22:1."<sup>92</sup> Vermes agrees, concluding that "the Aramaic words *Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?* bear all the appearances of a genuine cry. Representing the consternation of a man of faith at the sudden realization that God would not come to his rescue, the exclamation is a piously inspired prayer of disbelief."<sup>93</sup> The words of the martyrs are often defiant: "Do whatever you want to me." "I will not forsake God's Law." "You will be punished by God." "I could have saved myself but did not for God's sake." "May my death be substitutionary." "Bring it on!" "Racks and stones may break my bones, but resurrection awaits me!" However, Mark and Matthew report that Jesus cried out with a loud voice and died (Mark 15:37; Matthew 27:50).<sup>94</sup> Reports by Luke and John are more like the others

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<sup>92</sup> Keener (1999), 682. See also Gundry (1993), 965-66. Feldman, "Introduction" in Feldman and Hata, eds. (1989) comments that these words are credible "precisely because they are so embarrassing" (42).

<sup>93</sup> Vermes (2000), 122.

<sup>94</sup> Matthew reports that Jesus cried out with a loud voice *again*, the former cry asking why he had been forsaken (27:46). Although Matthew does not report the content of his latter cry, we cannot know whether the cry was with or without specific words. It may also be noted that Jesus was defiant when

with Luke reporting Jesus as saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46) and John reporting his utterance, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Instead of saying “God will punish you” (seven brothers, Polycarp), Jesus says, “Father, forgive them.”<sup>95</sup>

We must keep in mind that only the reports of the seven brothers and Eleazar pre-date Jesus, while Stephen, Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Hanina ben Taradion, and Polycarp post-date him. However, given Roman rule in Jerusalem which brutally crushed any suspicion of rebellion, reports of the seven brothers and Eleazar are likely to have been widely known there. If so, many of the differences between Jesus in the Passion narratives and the seven brothers and Eleazar must have stood out immediately to the early readers and would most likely have been quite embarrassing for Christians. For this reason, we get a sense that in the canonical Gospels we are reading authentic reports of Jesus’ arrest and death, even if cleaning up or omission may have occurred to some of those embarrassing details by Luke and to all of them by John and even if some encomiastic elements were added.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, the embarrassing elements in the Passion narratives weigh in favor of the presence of historical kernels. These include, most importantly in our investigation, Jesus’ death by crucifixion.<sup>97</sup>

There are a number of details in the canonical Gospels pertaining to Jesus’ execution that possess plausibility, although these are in the peripherals. Although not strong evidence when considered in isolation, since even novels may often contain plausible details, the plausibility of numerous details in the reports possess weight when considered in light of the other evidences weighing in favor of historicity. Lucian reports of crowds following those on their way to being crucified and renders plausible Luke’s statement that a crowd of people followed Jesus on his way to being crucified.<sup>98</sup> John reports that because it was the day of preparation for the Passover, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to remove from their crosses the bodies of Jesus and of the two thieves crucified with him so that they would not remain there on the Sabbath. Pilate granted their request and ordered that their legs be broken in order to expedite death. When they came to break the legs of Jesus, the soldiers noticed that he was already dead and instead pierced his side with a spear, upon which blood and water came out.<sup>99</sup> These details have often been called into question.<sup>100</sup> However, they have more merit than is usually granted. Breaking the legs of crucified victims is also reported by Cicero and the *Gospel of Peter*.<sup>101</sup> In the latter, breaking the legs is forbidden so that the crucified victim would actually suffer longer.<sup>102</sup> The skeletal

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brought before the Jewish leaders, implying that he will judge those who are now judging him (Mark 14:61-64; Matt. 26:63-66; Luke 22:66-69), which is similar to the defiance we observe with the Jewish martyrs.

<sup>95</sup> Luke 23:34. Stephen does this as well (Acts 7:60).

<sup>96</sup> A possible candidate for encomium is John 18:4-6.

<sup>97</sup> We may also note with Johnson (1996) that “In none of the canonical Gospels is the scandal of the cross removed in favor of the divine glory” such as is seen in the Gnostic Gospels (150).

<sup>98</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 11.34; Luke 23:27.

<sup>99</sup> John 19:31-37.

<sup>100</sup> For example, see R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 1088-92; 1178-84 and Crossan (1994), 143-52.

<sup>101</sup> Cicero, *Orations: The Fourteen Orations against Marcus Antonius (Philippics)* 13.27. For a text, see the Perseus Project: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Cic.+Phil.+13.27> (accessed July 14, 2007); *Gos. Pet.* 4:14.

<sup>102</sup> The actual cause of death by crucifixion is disputed among medical professionals and is not an issue of importance in the present investigation. It is sufficient to conclude that the *crurifragium* was employed to expedite death, although it was not always used.

remains of a crucified victim named Yehohanan ben Hagakol were discovered in Jerusalem in 1968. Of interest is that one of his shins had been smashed, although it has also been theorized that this occurred when removing his corpse from the cross.<sup>103</sup>

The Romans often left crucified victims on their crosses for some time after they had died in order to become food for birds and dogs.<sup>104</sup> However, Josephus provides an interesting report that indicates Jerusalem was an exception. Two or three years prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, mercenaries for Rome killed some Jewish high priests and did not permit their burial. Josephus adds that until then the Jews had taken great care in their burial of the dead, burying the crucified prior to sunset: τοὺς ἐκ καταδίκης ἀνεσταυρωμένους πρὸ δύντος ἡλίου καθελεῖν τε καὶ θάπτειν.<sup>105</sup> Since a crucified victim could remain alive on the cross for a few days, some ambiguity is present pertaining to whether the day the crucified were removed from their crosses and buried was the same day they were initially crucified. It could be claimed that Deuteronomy 21:21-23, most likely appealed to by the Jewish leaders in the case of Jesus, indicates that the condemned were executed, removed from their crosses and buried on the same day, since it forbids leaving a corpse that has been hanged overnight. The *Gospel of Peter* supports this interpretation: “It was noon and darkness came over all of Judea. They were disturbed and upset that the sun may have already set while he was still alive; for their Scripture says that the sun must not set on the one who has been killed.”<sup>106</sup> However, in the context of Deuteronomy 21, authorities may have hanged the corpse after the condemned had been killed. It is difficult to decide with any confidence, since the *Gospel of Peter* is questionable in its historical value and many first-century Jews, including Josephus, could have interpreted Deuteronomy 21 differently than originally intended and, thus, be in agreement with the *Gospel of Peter*.

John’s Gospel may provide some insight. Given what was apparently a request from the Jewish leaders that the bodies of Jesus and those crucified with him be removed so that they would not remain on their crosses *during the Sabbath*, it is possible that the crucified mentioned by Josephus were normally left on their crosses until they died and that they were then buried on the day of death prior to sunset.<sup>107</sup> Even if one is inclined to reject the historicity of much of John’s passion narrative, we may still find that John presents information pertaining to procedures understood by his readers. One may reject the historicity of much reported in the *Gospel of Peter*. However, the statement giving the order not to break the legs of one of the malefactors in order that his torment would be extended implies that readers understood that the crurifragium was employed in order to expedite death. John and *Peter* may stand opposed to one another on the matter of why Jesus was removed on the day he was crucified, unless John was highlighting the fact that the Sabbath was approaching and that this was all the more reason why he had to be removed on that day prior to sunset. Josephus’ statement does tell us at minimum that the Roman government in Jerusalem prior to c. AD 68 permitted the crucified to receive a proper burial on the day of their death.

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<sup>103</sup> Tzaferis (1985).

<sup>104</sup> The following references are provided by Hengel (1977, 9, 54, 58n13): Pseudo-Manetho, *Apotelesmatica* 4.198ff; Juvenal, *Satires* 14.77ff; Horace, *Epistles* 1.16.46-48.

<sup>105</sup> *Jos. War* 4:317.

<sup>106</sup> *Gos. Pet.* 15; cf. 5. English translation by Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 32.

<sup>107</sup> *John* 19:31; cf. *Gos. Pet.* 5.

John reports that when the soldiers saw that Jesus was already dead, rather than break his legs, they pierced him in order to provide some “death insurance.” This too has plausibility, given Quintilian’s statement: *Cruces succiduntur, percussos sepeliri carnifex non vetat* (As for those who die on the cross, the executioner does not forbid the burying of those who have been pierced).<sup>108</sup>

John may have sought to make sense of some of the events that occurred at Jesus’ crucifixion by searching the scriptures. John asserts that events at Jesus’ crucifixion occurred in fulfillment of prophecy (John 19:24, 36-37; Ps. 22:18; 34:20; Zech 12:10). The soldiers’ dividing his clothing among themselves, breaking the legs of the victims, and piercing victims to ensure death were all plausible in Roman executions. None of the texts to which John appeals is originally speaking of Messiah. Segal argues that no messianic text renders the death or crucifixion of the Messiah “inevitable” and, thus, “it must have come from the historical experience of the events of Jesus’ life, not the other way around.”<sup>109</sup> Crossan may be correct that many of the details related to Jesus’ crucifixion are fictional and “prophecy historicized” rather than “history remembered.”<sup>110</sup> But it is at least equally as possible as Crossan’s “prophecy historicized” that we are reading “history prophesized.” In other words, the Evangelists knew of these things, and in the case of John’s Gospel, the Beloved Disciple may have been an eyewitness, and gained an understanding of them in the scriptures. It is easy to understand how the early Christians may have seen Jesus’ crucifixion in Psalm 22: (1) the possibly historical statement from Jesus while on the cross, citing Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?”<sup>111</sup> (2) dividing and casting lots for his garments,<sup>112</sup> (3) sneering at the victim, wagging their heads, and saying “let God deliver him,”<sup>113</sup> (4) intense thirst or dry mouth,<sup>114</sup> (5) being surrounded by dogs,<sup>115</sup> (6) a band of evil men surrounding him,<sup>116</sup> (7) piercing his hands and feet,<sup>117</sup> and (8) exposed bones.<sup>118</sup> If crucifixion normally involved at least a number of these eight details such as being impaled, mocked by onlookers, intense thirst, and exposed bones from the scourging, why should we be surprised if the Evangelists having read Psalm 22 believed that prophecy had been fulfilled in these things? Moreover, if Jesus had been impaled in his crucifixion, John had no need to invent the guard who pierced Jesus with a spear (John 19:34) in order

<sup>108</sup> Quintilian, *Declarationes Maiores* 6.9. It is questionable whether Quintilian penned this work. However, the authorship is not germane, since we are only interested in what the text says about crucifixion practices. An online text may be accessed at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/quintilian/quintilian.decl.mai6.shtml> (accessed July 14, 2007). The Latin term *percussos* means “to strike through and through, thrust through, pierce, transfix” (G. R. Crane, ed., “Perseus Word Study Tool,” The Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>).

<sup>109</sup> Segal (2004), 427-28.

<sup>110</sup> Crossan (1994), 145.

<sup>111</sup> Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46. See section 4.3.1.3.g above.

<sup>112</sup> Ps. 22:18; Mark 15:24; Matt. 27:35; John 19:23-24.

<sup>113</sup> Ps. 22:7-8; Mark 15:29-32, 35-36; Matt. 27:39-43; Luke 23:35-39.

<sup>114</sup> Ps. 22:15; John 19:28; cf. Mark 15:36-37; Matt. 27:47-48; Luke 23:36. Forensic pathologist Fred Zugibe, M.D. (1995) comments that intense scourging would have caused “trauma to the nerves, muscles and skin reducing the victim to an exhausted, wretched condition with shivering, severe sweating, frequent displays of seizure, and a craving for water” (118).

<sup>115</sup> Ps. 22:16. The “dogs” could refer to the animal or to Gentiles.

<sup>116</sup> Ps. 22:16. Referring to those who had crucified Jesus and those who had supported the action. Perhaps that Jesus was crucified between two thieves could have been noted by the Evangelists as a fulfillment of prophecy (Mark 15:27; Matt. 27:38; Luke 23:32-34; John 19:18).

<sup>117</sup> Ps. 22:16.

<sup>118</sup> Ps. 22:17; Jos. *War* 6:304.

to fulfill Zechariah 12:10, since his crucifixion would have been more than sufficient.<sup>119</sup>

One can rightly note that the crurifragium and piercing are mentioned only by John and, thus, lack multiple attestation. However, it is important to note that John is also the only Evangelist to mention the use of nails in Jesus' crucifixion, although as above noted this was apparently the usual mode of crucifixion.<sup>120</sup> The other three Evangelists, like most ancient authors, may not have been interested in reporting the details of crucifixion. Its horrors were ever before them and ancient writers for the most part did not want to discuss it.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, as noted above, given that Rome apparently allowed Jerusalem Jews to bury the crucified before sunset prior to the fall of Jerusalem and that it is very plausible that the crucified would not be allowed to remain on their crosses in Jerusalem during a Jewish holiday, the crurifragium becomes highly probable and expected. If the Beloved Disciple was present at Jesus' crucifixion, such details would have been burned into his mind. Accordingly, I see no reason to question the historicity of the crurifragium and piercing as mentioned by John.

4.3.1.4. A fourth evidence for Jesus' death by crucifixion is the very low probability of surviving crucifixion. As noted earlier, crucifixion and the torture that many times preceded it was a very brutal process. In fact, only one account exists in antiquity of a person surviving crucifixion. Josephus reported seeing three of his friends crucified. He quickly pleaded with his friend the Roman commander Titus who ordered that all three be removed immediately and provided the best medical care Rome had to offer. In spite of these actions, two of the three still died.<sup>122</sup> Thus, even if Jesus had been removed from his cross prematurely and medically assisted, his chances of survival were quite bleak. In addition, no evidence exists that Jesus was removed while alive or that he was provided any medical care whatsoever, much less Rome's best.

While open to possibilities, historians must be guided by probabilities. Given the strong evidence for Jesus' crucifixion, without good evidence to the contrary the historian must conclude that the process killed him. This is the conclusion shared by virtually all scholars who have studied the subject. McIntyre comments,

Even those scholars and critics who have been moved to depart from almost everything else within the historical content of Christ's presence on earth have found it impossible to think away the factuality of the death of Christ.<sup>123</sup>

McIntyre is quite correct. Atheist Lüdemann writes, "Jesus' death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable."<sup>124</sup> Crossan, who denies the authenticity of a large majority of the sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus in the canonical Gospels, comments that there is not the "slightest doubt about the *fact* of Jesus' crucifixion

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<sup>119</sup> We may also ask why Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea was never appealed to as a fulfillment of prophecy in Isa. 53:9, especially since a number of scholars do not regard the burial by Joseph as historical.

<sup>120</sup> John 20:25. Outside of the canonical Gospels, see *Gos. Pet.* 21. See also Luke 24:39 where it is likely that nails are implied. See note 74 above.

<sup>121</sup> Hengel (1997), 25, 38.

<sup>122</sup> *Jos. Life* 420-21.

<sup>123</sup> McIntyre (2001), 8.

<sup>124</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 50.



under Pontius Pilate”<sup>125</sup> and “That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”<sup>126</sup> For the Jewish scholar Vermes, “The passion of Jesus is part of history.”<sup>127</sup> The rather skeptical scholar Paula Fredriksen writes, “The single most solid fact about Jesus’ life is his death: he was executed by the Roman prefect Pilate, on or around Passover, in the manner Rome reserved particularly for political insurrectionists, namely, crucifixion.”<sup>128</sup>

In summary, the historical evidence is very strong that Jesus died by crucifixion. The event is multiply attested by a number of ancient sources, some of which are non-Christian and, thus, not biased toward a Christian interpretation of events. They appear in multiple literary forms, being found in annals, historiography, biography, letters, and tradition in the form of creeds, oral formulae, and hymns. Some of the reports are very early and can reasonably be traced to the Jerusalem apostles. The Passion narratives appear credible, since they fulfill the criterion of embarrassment and contain numerous plausible details. Finally, the probability of surviving crucifixion was very low.

4.3.1.5. Only a few have ventured to suggest that Jesus may not have died as a result of his crucifixion.<sup>129</sup> Their proposals have not received a following from either the academic or medical communities. Duncan Derrett asserts that Jesus may have survived crucifixion, since “it is a fact that crucified victims may be taken down alive” and “perfect recovery is common” when “a severely injured individual shows signs of death but is not brain-dead.”<sup>130</sup> Derrett does not discuss how this may have occurred in the case of Jesus. It is one thing to claim that a person who has been “severely injured” and is nearly dead as a result may be restored to full health given proper medical care and time. However, it is an entirely another thing to claim that a victim of severe torture and crucifixion may have been restored to full health, especially when there is no evidence that Jesus was removed from his cross alive or that he was provided any medical care whatsoever. Strauss’s critique is every bit as pertinent today as it was on the day he offered it.<sup>131</sup> He asked us to suppose that a man was removed from his cross half-dead, buried in a tomb, and somehow re-

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<sup>125</sup> Crossan (1991), 375; cf. 372.

<sup>126</sup> Crossan (1994), 145. See also Borg (2006), 271-72; R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008): “Jesus’ death by crucifixion is as certain as anything in history can be” (14).

<sup>127</sup> Vermes (2005), 9. Another Jewish scholar, Lapidé (2002), claims that Jesus’ death by crucifixion is “historically certain” (32).

<sup>128</sup> Fredriksen (1999), 8. Moderate to somewhat conservative scholars likewise grant Jesus’ death by crucifixion as historical. See R. Brown (*Death*, 1994): “most scholars accept the uniform testimony of the Gospels that Jesus died during the Judean prefecture of Pontius Pilate” (1373); Ehrman (2000): “One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate” (162; cf. [2008], 235, 261-62); Johnson (1996): “The support for the mode of his death, its agents, and perhaps its co-agents, is overwhelming: Jesus faced a trial before his death, was condemned, and was executed by crucifixion” (125); Sanders (1985) includes Jesus’ death by crucifixion outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities in his list of “almost indisputable facts . . . which can be known beyond doubt” (11).

<sup>129</sup> These include L. Crawford, “Non, Jésus n’est pas mort sur le Golgotha!” *Cahiers du Cercle Ernest Renan* [Paris] 33 (142, 1985), 17-29; 34 (143, 1986), 20-22, (144, 1986), 37-42; J. D. M. Derrett, “Financial Aspects of the Resurrection” in Price and Lowder, eds. (2005), 394, 399; Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies (1991); Thiering (1992), 115-20.

<sup>130</sup> Derrett in Price and Lowder, eds. (2005), 394, 399. Wedderburn (1999) is likewise open to the possibility that Jesus survived crucifixion (97).

<sup>131</sup> D. F. Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*. 2 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1:408-12. I am grateful to Gary Habermas for alerting me to this reference.

energized after a few days. Having awakened from his stupor and wanting out of the dark tomb, he places his nail-pierced hands on the very heavy stone blocking his entrance and pushes it out of the way. He then walks blocks on pierced and wounded feet in search of his disciples. Finally, he arrives at the place they are staying and knocks on the door, which Peter opens only to see a severely wounded and dehydrated Jesus who is hunched over and looks up at Peter and through his extreme pain grimaces and says, “I’m the first fruits of the general resurrection!” Such a Jesus would never have convinced his disciples that he was the risen prince of life. Alive? Barely. Resurrected? Never. Allison comments, “how a flagellated, half-dead victim of the hideous torture of crucifixion could impress others as triumphant over death is hard to envisage.”<sup>132</sup>

Two articles pertaining to the death of Jesus have been released in the professional medical literature. The first article appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and concluded that “interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”<sup>133</sup> However, the second appeared in the *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London (JRCPL)*.<sup>134</sup> Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies, a husband and wife team, make the following proposal:

At his crucifixion, Jesus was in shock and hypotensive, and lost consciousness because of diminished blood supply to the brain. His ashen skin and immobility were mistaken for death and there is no doubt that the bystanders believed he was dead. . . . Oxygen supply to the brain remained minimal, but above a critical level, until the circulation was restored when he was taken down from the Cross and laid on the ground. Chill during the eclipse of the sun helped to maintain the blood pressure. As Jesus showed signs of life he was not placed in a tomb (which may have been the intention to avoid burial rites on the Sabbath) but taken away and tended.<sup>135</sup>

Attempting to explain how Jesus’ followers came to believe he had been resurrected, they assert,

[T]he disciples and the women must have been under intense psychological pressure far beyond their capacity to cope with emotionally. Individual and corporate perceptions, but not visualizations, were to be expected. His followers underwent a transmarginal inhibition, a state of activity of the brain in which hysterical suggestibility (or alternatively counter-suggestibility) frequently occurs. Battle fatigue or brain-washing are analogous. . . . This hypothesis accepts the historical events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus but explains what happened in the light of modern knowledge.<sup>136</sup>

This proposal was quickly met with sharp criticism from a number of medical professionals whose objections were published in the volume that followed. Leinster, a Reader in Surgery at the University of Liverpool, noted the highly selective readings

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<sup>132</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 203-204.

<sup>133</sup> Edwards, Gabel, Hosmer (1986), 1463.

<sup>134</sup> Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies (1991).

<sup>135</sup> Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies (1991), 168.

<sup>136</sup> Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies (1991), 168.

of the couple.<sup>137</sup> For example, “the circumstantial details given suggest a real presence and not a psychological experience; hallucinations do not commonly prepare breakfast for those experiencing them.”<sup>138</sup> If the Lloyd Davies couple wants to trust details in the canonical Gospels, such as the occurrence of an eclipse, the details they do not mention certainly point to Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Leinster and Wright, a professor of rheumatology at the University of Leeds, both noted the likelihood of death by crucifixion given these details.<sup>139</sup>

Retired surgeon Fowler noted that “Their theory is logically flawed because if Jesus had been taken down from the cross and revived by friends then his followers would have seen him afterwards and would not have been hallucinating.”<sup>140</sup> David Barnardo of Queen Mary’s University Hospital in London wrote, “The authors quite rightly state that ‘faith does not require the abandonment of thought’ but in stretching credulity to the limit they appeal to this very thing! . . . Whilst faith does not require the abandonment of thought, a material explanation of these events requires more than a superficial review of physiological concepts.”<sup>141</sup>

Another scholar who recently proposed an apparent death theory is Barbara Thiering. Jesus, his disciples, and the New Testament writers employed a peshar method whereby they imbedded hidden meanings within a text.<sup>142</sup> The general reader will not see these but “skilled experts,” which Thiering believes herself to be, may solve the mystery.<sup>143</sup> The benefit is that an actual history could be concealed if needed.<sup>144</sup> An example of how Thiering employs her method is found in Jesus’ turning water into wine. She says that only celibates at Qumran whom had entered “full monastic life” could receive communion (i.e., wine) while others (e.g., married, handicapped, Gentiles, women, slaves, etc.) received water through baptism. What John is telling his readers is that everyone is now free to take communion.<sup>145</sup>

When we come to the reports of Jesus’ death, “[a] drink was brought, of ‘vinegar’, wine that had been spoiled. . . . It was snake poison, taking a number of hours to act. But its first effect, together with that of the trauma he had suffered, was to render him unconscious. . . . Jesus did not die on the cross. He recovered from the effects of the poison, was helped to escape from the tomb by friends, and stayed with them until he reached Rome, where he was present in AD 64. [According to Thiering, this help came after Jesus was laid in the tomb with “a container holding one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, a very large quantity. The juice of the aloe plant acts as a purgative, and when given in large quantities acts quickly. Myrrh is a soothing ingredient, acting on mucous membrane. The medicines only had to be administered

<sup>137</sup> Comment by S. J. Leinster; Reader in Surgery; University of Liverpool in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 268.

<sup>138</sup> Comment by S. J. Leinster in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 269.

<sup>139</sup> Comment by S. J. Leinster in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 268-69; comment by V. Wright in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 269.

<sup>140</sup> Comment by A. W. Fowler in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 270.

<sup>141</sup> Comment by David Barnardo in “Letters,” *JRCPL* (1991), 270, 271.

<sup>142</sup> According to Thiering, Jesus “may well have been involved in the making of the fourth gospel, which, as its peshar shows, was written before AD 37” (128).

<sup>143</sup> Thiering (1992), 21.

<sup>144</sup> Thiering (1992), 22.

<sup>145</sup> Thiering (1992), 24.

to effect the expulsion of the poison.”<sup>146</sup>] This is not conjecture, but comes from a reading of the text by the peshet method. . . . [She notes the *Gospel of Philip* in which Jesus did not first die then rise up but instead rose first then died.] Some of the other newly discovered Gnostic books reflect the well-known docetic tradition that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but another died in his place. Although this belief obviously derives its strength from the idea that Jesus was not of mortal flesh, so could not suffer, it could hardly have flourished in Gnostic circles if there had been solid and certain evidence that he had really died.”<sup>147</sup>

What about Paul? According to Thiering, in March AD 40 Paul was attending a Jewish service around noon where none other than Jesus was teaching. Paul (then Saul) was hostile toward Jesus at that time. So, Jesus walked up to him and said, “You are persecuting me.” After a short exchange of words, Jesus brought Paul up front for him to hear his sermon after which he was a different man and changed his loyalty from the Hebrews to the Hellenists. His teachings on the resurrection of Jesus found later in his letters was “part of the accepted teaching for the less advanced members.”<sup>148</sup>

As we read Thiering’s peshet we get the sense that this is an example of someone seeing whatever she wants, even when the plain sense of the text is nowhere within her sight.<sup>149</sup> While this degree of imagination should alert Thiering’s readers to proceed cautiously with raised antennae, it does not follow that her hypothesis is false. It is when we begin to search her hypothesis for her evidence and check it against the known facts that the thin ice on which it is built begins to crack. Thiering provides no evidence that the drink given to Jesus while on the cross contained snake poison or that such poison could have had the effect she claims.<sup>150</sup> We may also ask why modern hospitals and physicians are not administering large quantities of aloe juice and myrrh if they have the amazing abilities claimed by Thiering to purge snake poison and heal ghastly wounds such as those resulting from scourging and crucifixion. Thiering explains that Paul reserved his teachings on bodily resurrection for the “less advanced members.”<sup>151</sup> However, if my exegesis of the Pauline passages below is correct, Paul believed that bodily resurrection is the desired and final result for all believers, including himself.<sup>152</sup>

We must also wonder why these teachings did not survive if this was the official teaching of Jesus and his apostles to the advanced members. Thiering hints that we may find their insider teachings on resurrection in the Gnostic writings, which claim

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<sup>146</sup> Thiering (1992), 120.

<sup>147</sup> Thiering (1992), 115-18. Her peshet method is described on 20-25.

<sup>148</sup> Thiering (1992), 139.

<sup>149</sup> Braaten (1999) notes that the “naturalistic view of history” has motivated some theologians to “freely invent interpretations that run counter to the plain sense of what is written” (147-48). Braaten’s comments could have been made with Thiering in mind when in support of her peshet she writes, “In the gospels, there are a great many miracles, which the modern mind finds incredible . . .” (22). See also Crossan (2003): “There is an ancient and venerable principle of biblical exegesis which states that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a camel in disguise.” See also Hengel and Schwemer (1997), 119, 147.

<sup>150</sup> Although she cites *Gos. Pet. 5* and *Barn. 7:3*, neither supports her assertion that the cocktail given Jesus contained poison.

<sup>151</sup> Thiering (1992), 139.

<sup>152</sup> See section 4.3.3.9 below.

that another died in Jesus' place and that resurrection precedes death. However, we observed in the previous chapter that these writings probably postdate the canonical Gospels, some by quite a bit, and with the lone exception of *Thomas* it is dubious that they contain authentic teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Moreover, her argument that the belief that Jesus survived his crucifixion "could hardly have flourished in Gnostic circles if there had been solid and certain evidence that he had really died" is not convincing. Thiering herself notes that this belief "obviously derives its strength" from the Docetists who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh.<sup>153</sup> This provides sufficient cause for the origin of the belief that Jesus did not die on the cross. Furthermore, we could turn her argument around: The belief that Jesus died by crucifixion could hardly have flourished in Christian circles if there had been solid and certain evidence that he had actually survived. This too would be unconvincing.

Thiering's pesher hypothesis appears to be based on irresponsible historical method and unrestrained results. As has been said many times for well over one hundred years, we have another theory murdered by a brutal gang of facts.<sup>154</sup> It failed to convince scholars and has brought about some rather negative responses. Evans writes, "I am not aware of a single competent scholar on the planet who agrees with Thiering's conclusions."<sup>155</sup> He adds, "Most scholars have ignored Barbara Thiering's work because it is so subjective and idiosyncratic."<sup>156</sup>

We have looked carefully at the data pertaining to Jesus' death by crucifixion and have observed that there are very strong reasons for granting the historicity of this event and that it is granted by the overwhelming majority of scholars.<sup>157</sup> We have also observed that only a few have ventured to question this fact and that their arguments are very weak.<sup>158</sup> Thus, Jesus' death by crucifixion qualifies as our first minimal fact.

#### 4.3.2. Appearances to the Disciples

Shortly after Jesus' death, his disciples asserted that Jesus had returned to life and appeared to some of his disciples. We will examine these claims beginning with the earliest: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

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<sup>153</sup> Thiering (1992), 117.

<sup>154</sup> The origin of this saying is unknown. It has been attributed to Benjamin Franklin, T. H. Huxley, and Francois La Rochefoucauld. However, a similar comment by Huxley may be behind it. See Keyes (2006), 219.

<sup>155</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 207.

<sup>156</sup> C. A. Evans (2006), 268n2. See also Johnson (1996): "Thiering's 'history' is the purest poppycock, a product of fevered imagination rather than careful analysis. The way she works with the data defies every canon of sober historical research, and operates outside all the rules of textual analysis" (30-31). Meeks (2006) refers to Thiering's hypothesis as "far-fetched" (45), while Vermes (2008) refers to it as one of a number of "modern musings [that] need not retain us," given an "absence of real ancient evidence" in support (146).

<sup>157</sup> We have not discussed the date of Jesus' crucifixion. Scholars are divided between AD 30 and 33 with a slight majority preferring the former. Since nothing in our present investigation depends on this date, I will not discuss it in this paper and will adopt the more standard dating of AD 30. For a discussion on the date of Jesus' death, see R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 2:1350-78.

<sup>158</sup> Wright (2003) asserts that the apparent death theory has "nothing to recommend it" and that even skeptical scholars who are committed to denying the resurrection of Jesus do not appeal to it (709).



### 4.3.2.1. Appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

#### 4.3.2.1.a. Length of the Tradition. At minimum, most scholars grant 15:3b-5a:<sup>159</sup>

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς  
καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη  
καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς  
καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ

That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures  
And that he was buried  
And that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures  
And that he appeared to Peter

Differences of opinion exist over whether “for our sins” and “according to the scriptures” in the first line belonged to the original tradition and the same can be said of “on the third day” and “according to the scriptures” in the third line.<sup>160</sup> Differences of opinion exist over whether 15:5b-7 is part of the same tradition or that Paul has combined two or more traditions. 15:5b-7 reads

εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα·  
ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ [ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες  
μένουσιν  
ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν·]  
ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ  
εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν·

then to the Twelve  
then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time [from whom  
most remain until now, but some have fallen asleep]  
then he appeared to James  
then to all the apostles

I have added brackets to Paul’s parenthetical statement that most of the more than five hundred to whom Jesus appeared remain alive at his time of writing in c. AD 55. Finally, Paul adds in 15:8 that Jesus appeared to him too:

ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη καί μοι. (And last of all as to one untimely born he appeared to me.)

<sup>159</sup> Hayes (1997) ends the tradition at 15:5 (257); MacGregor (2006) says through 15:5 (226).

<sup>160</sup> What texts might the early Christians have had in mind? Wright states that “Paul does not mean that there are one or two biblical prophecies which, taken by themselves, point in this direction. He refers to the entire scriptural narrative, stretching forward as it does towards the climax of God’s purpose for Israel, and characterized throughout by the powerful grace which brings hope out of disaster and life out of death” (Wright [2005], 224; cf. his longer treatment in Wright [1992], 241-43). However, a plausible case can be made that the early Christians had specific Scriptural texts in mind. In Acts, Luke also claims that Christ died and rose from the dead in accordance with the Scriptures (3:18; 17:2-3; 26:22-23) and he cites a number of passages in support (Ps. 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-32; Ps. 118:22 in Acts 4:10-11; Ps. 2:1-2 in Acts 4:25-28; Isa. 53:7ff. in Acts 8:32-35; Isa. 55:3 and Ps. 16:10 in Acts 13:33-37).

Most scholars hold that Paul's appearance does not belong to the original tradition. Regardless of what side one falls on these disputed matters, the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus reported in this tradition are very early and probably go back to the Jerusalem leadership and certainly to Paul regarding his own experience. To be careful then in our conclusions pertaining to this text, the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances to Peter, the Twelve, to a large group of more than five hundred, to James, to all of the apostles, and to Paul are reported.

**4.3.2.1.b. Two especially controversial appearances.** Two appearances reported in this tradition have especially raised questions: the appearance to the more than five hundred at one time and the appearance to James. These appearances are not clearly reported outside of this text, especially by any of the canonical Gospels.<sup>161</sup> However, it is important to observe that the appearance to so many at one time and the appearance to James who became a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church are reported in the earliest tradition. Had these appeared only in the canonical Gospels, they might be more suspect as free invention since they would be absent from the earliest sources. However, here the opposite happens to be true: they appear in the earliest reports but not in the later resurrection narratives. Moreover, Paul's parenthetical phrase that most of the more than five hundred to whom Jesus appeared at a single event is quite interesting, since according to Paul, most of them were still alive and could be questioned by those having doubts.<sup>162</sup> It is also noteworthy that the multiple appearances in the tradition are listed in a chronological order and, for Paul, ground the appearances in history.<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, these appearances cannot be quickly dismissed.

Commenting on the findings of the Jesus Seminar, Funk wrote,

the Fellows were dubious about the inclusion of the appearances to James, the brother of Jesus, to the "twelve" as a group, and to the five hundred believers at the same time . . . Part of the skepticism regarding these reports owes to the fact that the names assigned to the twelve vary from this to list, so we cannot establish a firm membership for the twelve . . . The claim on behalf of James seems to be an attempt to put James on an equal footing with Peter (and perhaps Paul). An appearance to a large crowd, like the five hundred mentioned by Paul, suggests a visionary worship experience, such as the Pentecost experience described in the second chapter of Acts, where the apostles are filled with the spirit and speak in tongues.<sup>164</sup>

The lists of disciples appear in the canonical Gospels that were written a decade or more after Paul. Why must discrepancies in narratives written later imply problems

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<sup>161</sup> An appearance to James is reported in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* 5 by Jerome in *Illustrious Men* 2. See Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 16, fragment 5. We will discuss this appearance more below. See section 4.3.4.1.c.

<sup>162</sup> Barnett (1994), 7; Lüdemann (2004), 41; cf. Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 152. Contra is Catchpole (2002), 152.

<sup>163</sup> Barnett (1999), 183; Bryskog (2002), 227; Carnley (1987), 228; Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 33-34; Witherington (2006), 174; Wright (2003), 326. There is good reason for holding that the tradition reports the appearances in a chronological order. See section 4.3.2.2 below.

<sup>164</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 454-55. They offer no support for their claim that James is here listed in order to legitimize his authority and that the appearance to the more than five hundred at one time "suggests a visionary worship experience."

with an earlier report? Moreover, there is no indication that the earlier list in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 was intended to be a list of all the disciples. Rather, it is quite clearly a list of those to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection and indicates that, while Jesus appeared to all of his disciples, not every disciple received an individual appearance. There are further reasons to doubt that the list in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 was meant to be complete or exhaustive. The appearance to the women is not included, even though as we will see below this appearance is often granted by even quite skeptical scholars.<sup>165</sup>

There appear to be close similarities between the four-line formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and other passages such as Mark 15:37-16:7 and Acts 13:28-31 where the same sequence is stated: Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared.<sup>166</sup> Allison provides a chart detailing sequential parallels between the four canonical Gospels and the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff., namely Jesus' death, burial, resurrection on the third day, appearances to individuals, and appearances to the eleven or twelve disciples.<sup>167</sup> He concludes, "Amid all the diversity, we seem to have variations upon a common pattern. Paul is perhaps not so far removed from the gospel traditions as sometimes implied."<sup>168</sup> Thus, a general outline of the sequence of events may be said to be multiply attested.

Furthermore, it may likewise be noted that most of the appearances listed in the tradition are multiply attested. The appearance to Peter in 1 Corinthians 15:5 may be alluded to in Mark 16:7 and is specifically mentioned in Luke 24:34 though not narrated.<sup>169</sup> In fact, Luke agrees with the tradition in placing the appearance to Peter chronologically prior to the group appearance to the disciples.<sup>170</sup> "The fact that the name Peter is used in Luke 24:12 while Simon is used in 24:34 again points to different sources or traditions."<sup>171</sup> The appearance to the Twelve in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is clearly narrated by Luke and John.<sup>172</sup> Allison provides another chart of this appearance in Matthew, Ps-Mark (16:9-20), Luke, and John showing similar setting, appearance, response, commissioning, and promise of assistance.<sup>173</sup>

Some scholars think that the appearance to the more than five hundred is the appearance in Galilee mentioned in Matthew 28:16-18.<sup>174</sup> Although Matthew does not specify how many were present, the text does not clearly state that such a large

<sup>165</sup> See Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 454; Lüdemann (2004), 36.

<sup>166</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 233n133; Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 165; Theissen and Merz (1998), 496.

<sup>167</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) lists the following on 239: Death (Matt. 27:45-54; Mark 15:33-39; Luke 23:44-48; John 19:28-30; 1 Cor. 15:3); Burial (Matt. 27:56-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-55; John 19:38-42; 1 Cor. 15:4a); Resurrection on third day (Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:4b); Appearance to individuals (Matt. 28:9-10; Mark 16:7 (?); Luke 24:13-35; John 20:11-18; 1 Cor. 15:5a, 7a, 8); Appearance to 11 or 12 disciples (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:36-51; John 20:19-22; 1 Cor. 15:5b, 7b).

<sup>168</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 239; cf. 235.

<sup>169</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 240; Catchpole (2002), 155; Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 182; Dunn (2003), 862-63.

<sup>170</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 240.

<sup>171</sup> Engelbrecht (1989), 242. Catchpole (2002) notes that the historicity of Peter's experience is "seldom doubted" while interpretations of his experience are not uniform (155).

<sup>172</sup> Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-20.

<sup>173</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 245.

<sup>174</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 57-63; Wright (2003), 325.

number were present. We may have an indicator that Matthew knew of others there who did not belong to the close group of Jesus' disciples. Matthew 28:17 reads καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν (and seeing him they worshipped but some doubted). The οἱ δὲ may indicate that those doubting are other than the disciples of Jesus. We will discuss this *doubting* below.<sup>175</sup> Another candidate is Luke 24:33-53/Acts 1:6-11, although there is nothing in the text that makes this clear. Accordingly, "possible" is as far as we can go.

As noted above, the appearance to James is not mentioned elsewhere except in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which is not regarded by most scholars as being credible. Its presence in this tradition and nowhere else indicates that tradition is present that is independent of the canonical Gospels.<sup>176</sup> The same may be said of the appearance to the more than five hundred. The appearance to all of the apostles may also be reported in Luke 24:33-53 and Acts 1:6-11.<sup>177</sup> The appearance to Paul is reported by Luke (Acts 9, 22, 26) and elsewhere by Paul (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8).

Even many of the events themselves reported in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 are multiply attested. Jesus' death is reported in 1 Corinthians 15:3 and all of the sources mentioned in the previous section. Jesus' burial is reported in 1 Corinthians 15:4 and all of the canonical Gospels. Jesus' resurrection and appearances are reported in the tradition of 1 Corinthians 15:4-7 and in multiple sources as explained above.

In summary, the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. is quite early, very probably based on eyewitness testimony, and is multiply attested in terms of a general outline of the sequence of events. Also, many of the events themselves are multiply attested. We may not know why the Evangelists did not narrate the appearances to James and to the group of more than five hundred. We can only speculate. Since this was part of the tradition that was being passed along by the apostles, claiming that the Evangelists were unaware of these appearances is a tough pill to swallow. Perhaps the canonical Gospels only narrate the appearances that occurred until Jesus' ascension. We know Paul's occurred afterward and the appearance to James may have as well. For reasons unknown to us, the Evangelists did not include them in their narratives. However, this does not eliminate the fact that these appearances are present in the earliest known material on the resurrection of Jesus and can be traced to the Jerusalem apostles.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>175</sup> See section 4.3.2.6.

<sup>176</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 496.

<sup>177</sup> Wenham (1995) notes that Paul may have been aware of a narrative where the risen Jesus appeared to and commissioned his disciples to present the gospel to the nations (i.e., Gentiles). In Rom. 1:3-5, Paul writes that he and others had received grace and apostleship from the risen Lord unto the obedience of faith to all the nations for his name's sake (δι' οὗ ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολήν εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστει εἰς πάντα τοὺς ἔθνεσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ). These words are reminiscent of what we find in the Synoptics. In Matt. 28:19, the risen Lord commissions the apostles to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). In Luke 24:44-49, the risen Lord commissions his disciples to preach repentance unto the forgiveness of sins to all nations in his name (κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). In all three texts, the gospel is to be preached to the nations in Jesus' name or for his name's sake. See Wenham (1995, 368n99) who acknowledges Idicheria Ninan for the idea.

<sup>178</sup> Lapidé (2002), 99.

**4.3.2.1.c. The three-day motif.** The tradition that Jesus ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (was raised on the third day) appears in a number of forms and has raised questions pertaining to its meaning. We may first ask where the three-day motif may have originated. It has been suggested that the three-day motif has Hosea 6:2 in mind.<sup>179</sup>

ὕγιασει ἡμᾶς μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ἀναστησόμεθα καὶ ζήσόμεθα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ

He will restore us [to health] after two days. On the third day we will be raised and live in His sight.

It is doubtful that Paul regarded the third-day motif as a metaphor for spiritual survival upon bodily death, since the time-lag places the event in history and would be unnecessary if the early Christians had meant that Jesus had ascended to heaven.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, as Wedderburn notes, “curiously nowhere is this text [Hosea 6:1-2] expressly quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus’ resurrection. The text that *is* expressly quoted in this connection is Jonah 2.1”; and Hosea 6:1-2 refers to the general resurrection as the first person plural is used throughout.<sup>181</sup>

It is far from clear that the three-day motif was borrowed from pagan religions. Mettinger notes that “the expression in *Inanna’s Descent* does not refer to the span of time between death and resurrection but rather to the time that passes before Ninshubur incites Enki to take action.”<sup>182</sup> He also cites the Adonis rituals in Lucian’s *De Dea Syria* 6 (second century A.D.) as “a possible case of a three-day cycle.”<sup>183</sup> However, given Lucian’s time of writing, there is a real possibility that the three-day motif in the resurrection of Adonis was borrowed from Christianity.<sup>184</sup> Mettinger suggests that there is one piece of evidence that may take the Adonis account to pre-Christian times (Amarna Letters, EA No. 84, c. mid-fourteenth century B.C.), but stresses the “tentative nature” of it due to its “fragmentary nature.”<sup>185</sup> For Mettinger, the question whether the pre-Christian Near East knew of a three-day motif in reference to a resurrection must remain open:

We would be wise to admit the possibility that this was the case, but this is still far from being an established fact. . . . The notion that the resurrection [of Jesus] occurred ‘on the third day’ is difficult to derive from a fixed pre-Christian concept of a *triduum*. As we have seen, the evidence for such a concept is still too scanty for any conclusions.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Wright (2003), 322. See also Vermes (2008): It is “likely that the expression [“on the third day”] was chosen because it was a typical Old Testament formula marking seven significant biblical events occurring ‘on the third day.’ [Gen 22:4; Hos 6:2]. . . . One should also take into account that, according to rabbinic reckoning, part of a day or night counted as a full day or night (yShabbath 2a; bPesahim 4a)” (81).

<sup>180</sup> J. Wenham (1984), 53; Wright (2003), 322.

<sup>181</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 50-51.

<sup>182</sup> Mettinger (2001), 214-15.

<sup>183</sup> Mettinger (2001), 215; cf. 131-37.

<sup>184</sup> Mettinger (2001), 136. Keener (2003) also considers this possibility: “While the third day is used for resurrection in the later ritual for Attis and perhaps for Adonis, these may be based on Christian precedents” (2:1174).

<sup>185</sup> Mettinger (2001), 137, 140.

<sup>186</sup> Mettinger (2001), 215, 221.



We may then ask what is the meaning of the three-day motif. Observing its meaning in the New Testament, especially pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, is most promising:

- “After three days” (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας): Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34
- “After three days” (μετὰ ἡμέρας τρεῖς): Luke 2:46; Acts 28:17. Neither of these references refer to Jesus’ resurrection and can be understood in a non-literal sense.
- “Three days and three nights” (τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας): Matt. 12:40
- “In three days” (ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις): John 2:19, 20
- “On the third day” (τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ): Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40
- “The third day” (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ): 1 Cor. 15:4; Luke 18:33; John 2:1 (This latter reference does not pertain to the resurrection of Jesus.)
- “Today and tomorrow and on the third day” (σήμερον καὶ αὔριον καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ): Luke 13:32. Of interest here is that today is the first day, tomorrow is the second, and the following day is the third. Given Luke’s interest in chronology (Luke 1:3), it is entirely possible that Jesus’ Jerusalem entry was on the third day from when he made this statement. A description of three phases in his ministry likewise seems possible. See also Acts 27:19 (τῇ τρίτῃ) where “on the third day” must be understood in a literal sense of three days.
- “This is the third day” [since the crucifixion occurred] (τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν): Luke 24:21
- “On the third day” (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ): 1 Cor. 15:4

Focusing on how each author employed the three-day motif, we observe the following:

- Paul—or the tradition he shares—employs only “on the third day” (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ).
- Mark employs only “after three days” (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας) and does so three times.
- Matthew employs “after three days” (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας) once, “three days and three nights” (τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας) once, and “on the third day” (τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ) four times.
- Luke employs “on the third day” (τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ) four times, “on the third day” (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ) once, and “after three days” (μετὰ ἡμέρας τρεῖς) twice, although neither instance of the third reading is related to the resurrection of Jesus. Also interesting is “today and tomorrow and on the third day” (σήμερον καὶ αὔριον καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ) and “on the third” (τῇ τρίτῃ), the former referring either to a literal three days or three phases of ministry while the latter refers to a literal three days (although neither refers to the resurrection of Jesus).
- John employs “in three days” (ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις) and “on the third day” (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ), although the latter does not refer to the resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, we note the Jewish understanding of Jesus’ resurrection predictions as presented in the canonical Gospels:

- Throughout the course of three days (διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν): Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58
- In three days (ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις): Matt. 27:40; Mark 15:29
- It is curious that in Matt. 26:61 and 27:40 the Jewish accusers understand Jesus' predictions to relate to the rebuilding of the temple, whereas in 27:63 the Jewish leaders understand his predictions to relate to his own body. It is possible that Jesus had a number of ways of predicting his vindication or resurrection and that the instance misunderstood by his accusers (Matt. 26:61; 27:40 and stated more clearly in John 2:18-22) was not the one the Jewish leaders had in mind in 27:63.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is of interest that Matthew and Luke synonymously employ phrases that are contradictory when taken in a literal sense. For example, Matthew describes Jesus' resurrection as coming "on the third day," "after three days," and after "three days and three nights."<sup>187</sup> Luke similarly employs "on the third day" and "after three days." This suggests that the three-day motif related to the time of Jesus' resurrection was a figure of speech meaning a short period of time.<sup>188</sup> There are a number of similar idioms in North America. My teenaged children may complain about a house chore that will take them "forever" to complete when it actually takes them just two hours. An auto mechanic promises to get to my car in "just a minute." But this is understood to mean a short period of time just as the idiom, "I'll be there in a second." That the three-day motif is a figure of speech referring to a short period of time is confirmed by Matthew 27:63-64 where the Jewish leaders approach Pilate and recall Jesus' predictions that he would be raised to life "after three days" (μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας). As a result, they request that a guard be placed in front of the tomb "until the third day" (ἕως τῆς τρίτης ἡμέρας). This is an odd request taken literally. For the Jewish leaders are requesting that the guard remain at the tomb only during the period prior to the time when Jesus had predicted he would rise, rendering the service of the guards of minimal value. Stated another way, if Jesus predicted that he would be raised to life sometime after three days had passed as the Jewish leaders were claiming, why would they request that Jesus' tomb be guarded only "until the third day" while leaving it unguarded at the very time they should have been most concerned about body theft? If, however, we understand the three-day motif assigned to Jesus' resurrection as a figure of speech, the tensions vanish.

Still further support for a non-literal understanding of the third-day motif may be found in Esther 4:16 and 5:1, where Esther asks others to fast with her for three days, night and day (שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם; ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τρεῖς νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν), after which she will approach the king. It is then reported that she went in to see the king on the third day (בְּיָוֶם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי; ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ).<sup>189</sup> Perhaps Esther went to the king late on the third day. Perhaps she went to him on the third day while still fasting, knowing that her request would involve a process during which she still desired prayer. Certainty eludes us. However, if Esther's phrase "for three days, night and day" was

<sup>187</sup> Davis (2006), 51.

<sup>188</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 232; Bruce (1977), 93; Dunn (2003), 823. Mettinger (2001) asserts that the motif was also an "Akkadian expression in the context of medical prognosis to refer to a quick recovery from illness" (214).

<sup>189</sup> See also 1 Sam. 30:12-13 for a possible example of a three-day motif taken in a non-literal sense.

not to be understood literally as seventy-two hours, then the similar phrase in Jonah may not carry such a requirement (שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וְשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת; τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας). If this holds, neither is a literal interpretation of the sign of Jonah’s “three days and three nights” in Matthew 12:40 required.

Whatever influence one may think Hosea 6:1-2 or pagan religions may have had on the third-day motif related to the resurrection of Jesus, in my judgment the evidence seems clear that the early Christians, including Paul, the earlier tradition he cites, and all four of the canonical Gospels employ it to refer to a short period of time.<sup>190</sup> Since this tradition very probably reflects the teaching of the Jerusalem apostles, it is very likely that the original teaching pertaining to the time of Jesus’ resurrection was that it occurred very soon after his death by crucifixion, a teaching consistent with the resurrection narratives.<sup>191</sup>

**4.3.2.1.d. The tradition and the nature of the appearances.** Citing the three accounts of Paul’s conversion experience in Acts (9, 22, 26), Stephen’s vision (Acts 7:54-60), and Paul’s statements pertaining to resurrection bodies in 1 Corinthians (15:40, 42), the Jesus Seminar interprets the resurrection appearances as Christophanies that “did not involve the resuscitation of a corpse.”<sup>192</sup>

There are, however, a few factors that spoil this conclusion. First, the appearances to Stephen and Paul are post-ascension appearances, which may account for why Jesus was seen in the sky or in the heavens rather than on land.<sup>193</sup> Second, the same Luke

<sup>190</sup> It is not clear whether the phrases ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς and τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς were part of the original tradition or were later added. But this is what Paul taught the church in Corinth and he states that the other apostles were teaching the same (1 Cor. 15:11). Given our observations that Paul was not inclined to fiddle with the tradition, there is good reason for believing these phrases that are questioned were in agreement with the teachings of the Jerusalem apostles. Moreover, as Bruce (1977) writes, “The statement that it was ‘on the third day’ that Christ rose is based not on any Old Testament scripture but on historical fact. Such an expression as ‘after three days’ (not to speak of ‘three days and three nights’), used in predictions of the resurrection before the event (e.g. in Mark 8:31), might have the general sense of ‘in a short time’; but after the event we regularly find it dated ‘on the third day’, because it was actually on the third day that the tomb was found empty and Jesus first appeared in resurrection to Peter and others” (93).

<sup>191</sup> Although late and of limited weight, it is worth noting with Vermes (2008, 154) that the later rabbinic literature reported that the soul would hover near the corpse for three days hoping to return to it (GenR 100:7; yYeb 15c; Sem 8). If we understand these texts as claiming that bodily decomposition begins on the fourth day following death, the early Christian interpretation of Ps. 16:10 (LXX; see Acts 2:25-31) is that Jesus was raised prior to the fourth day. It may even be that Ps. 16:10 was one of the main texts the early church had in mind in affirming that Christ’s resurrection on the third day was “according to the Scriptures.” If so, this evidence might be taken to point toward a more literal understanding of the third-day motif.

<sup>192</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 461, also 458-62. They add, “It is difficult to distinguish Stephen’s vision of Jesus from other resurrection appearances” (460).

<sup>193</sup> Barnett (1999), 183. We may also note a difference between Stephen’s vision and Paul’s experience in Acts. Apparently, the bystanders had no external perceptions of what Stephen described. However, in all three accounts in Acts, Paul’s traveling companions shared some of the perceptions experienced by Paul such as the light and the voice. Moreover, D. Wenham (1995) writes, “The fact that Paul includes himself in the list of witnesses to the resurrection does not prove that he regarded his experience as identical in character to that of the earlier witnesses. But even if he did, this does not necessarily mean that he saw the earlier experiences as visionary. The opposite inference is arguably more probable, namely, that he did not see his own experience as simply a vision but as something more ‘objective’ and ‘physical’ than the visions that he later experienced and did not categorize as

who reports the appearances to Stephen and Paul is likewise very clear that he interprets the appearances to the disciples as disclosing a literal resurrection of Jesus' corpse. In Luke 24, Jesus' tomb is empty on Easter morning and the grave clothes that had wrapped his body now contain nothing. Jesus has "flesh and bones" and eats. At his ascension in Acts, Jesus is taken up from among his disciples and is lifted up into the clouds (1:9-11). He ate and drank with his disciples before his ascension (10:39-41), and his body is said not to have decayed as king David's did but was instead raised up (2:30-32; 13:35-37). It is difficult to state more clearly than Luke has done that Jesus' resurrection involved raising his corpse. Accordingly, those who appeal to Acts in support of an understanding of Jesus' resurrection that did not involve his corpse must do so quite selectively, interpreting some of Luke's narratives in a manner that has him lucidly contradicting himself. Such a move is unnecessary and unattractive when Luke may be interpreted in a manner where he is entirely consistent with himself without any forcing whatsoever. Moreover, we will see below in our observations pertaining to 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul understands resurrection as an event that happens to the corpse.<sup>194</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar are very much mistaken in their interpretation of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in Luke, Acts, and Paul.

That Funk and the Jesus Seminar are mistaken in these interpretations does not require that a differing interpretation is accurate. It only warrants the conclusion that the Jesus Seminar has not argued effectively for their understanding of the nature of the appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. We must inquire into the meaning of ὤφθη (appeared).

ὤφθη is the aorist passive indicative third person singular of ὁράω. There are 29 occurrences of ὁράω in its various forms in Paul, 16 of which clearly refer to physical sight, while only one refers to a heavenly-type vision.<sup>195</sup> For the other 12 occurrences, the term means "Behold" (Rom. 11:22; Gal. 5:2), "understand" (Rom. 15:21; Gal. 2:7, 14), "make efforts" (1 Thess. 5:15), and others that for the present cannot be assigned a firm category (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5, 6, 7, 8; 1 Tim. 3:16). In Luke/Acts, there are 147 occurrences.<sup>196</sup> Of these, 107 clearly refer to physical sight, while 10 refer to a resurrection appearance, 11 to a vision, five to experience, eight to perceive/understand, and six to various other meanings.<sup>197</sup>

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resurrection appearances" (369; in 369n94 Wenham adds, "See especially Craig, 'Bodily Resurrection'").

<sup>194</sup> See section 4.3.3.9.b.

<sup>195</sup> Physical sight: Rom. 1:11; 1 Cor. 2:9; 8:10; 16:7; Gal. 1:19; 6:11; Phil. 1:27, 30; 2:28; 4:9; Col. 2:1; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:6, 10; 1 Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:4. "Heavenly visions": Col. 2:18.

<sup>196</sup> Luke 1:11, 12, 22; 2:15, 17, 20, 26 (2x), 30, 48; 3:6; 5:2, 8, 12, 20, 26; 7:13, 22, 25, 26, 39; 8:20, 28, 34, 35, 36, 47; 9:9, 27, 31, 32, 36, 49, 54; 10:24 (2x), 31, 32, 33; 11:38; 12:15, 54; 13:12, 28, 35; 14:18; 15:20; 16:23; 17:14, 15, 22 (2x); 18:15, 24, 43; 19:3, 4, 7, 37, 41; 20:14; 21:1, 2, 20, 27, 29, 31; 22:43, 49, 56, 58; 23:8 (3x), 47, 49; 24:23, 24, 34, 39 (2x); Acts 2:3, 17, 27, 31; 3:3, 9, 12; 4:20; 6:15; 7:2, 24, 26, 30, 31, 34 (2x), 35, 44, 55; 8:18, 23, 39; 9:12, 17, 27, 35, 40; 10:3, 17; 11:5, 6, 13, 23; 12:3, 16; 13:12, 31, 35, 36, 37, 41, 45; 14:9, 11; 15:6; 16:9, 10, 19, 27, 40; 18:15; 19:21; 20:25; 21:32; 22:14, 15, 18; 26:13, 16 (3x); 28:4, 15, 20, 26, 27.

<sup>197</sup> Physical sight: Luke 1:11, 12; 2:15, 17, 20, 26 (bis), 30, 48; 3:6; 5:2, 8, 12, 20, 26; 7:13, 22, 25, 26, 39; 8:20, 28, 34, 35, 36, 47; 9:9, 27, 31, 32, 36, 49; 10:24 (2x), 31, 32, 33; 11:38; 12:54; 13:12, 28, 35; 14:18; 15:20; 16:23; 17:14, 15; 18:15, 24, 43; 19:3, 4, 7, 37, 41; 20:14; 21:1, 2, 20, 27, 31; 22:43, 56, 58; 23:8 (3x), 47, 49; 24:23, 24, 39 (2x); Acts 3:3, 9, 12; 4:20; 6:15; 7:2, 24, 26, 30, 31, 34 (2x), 35, 44, 55; 8:18, 39; 9:35, 40; 12:16; 13:12, 35, 36, 37, 45; 14:9, 11; 16:27, 40; 19:21; 20:25; 21:32; 28:4, 15, 20; Resurrection Appearance: Luke 24:34; Acts 9:17, 27; 13:31; 22:14, 15; 26:13, 16 (3x); Seeing a

As a noun, the related ὄραμα appears only twelve times in the New Testament and forty-eight times in the LXX.<sup>198</sup> In the New Testament, all but Matthew 17:9 appear in Acts. Luke employs ὄραμα to describe a vision outside of space-time experienced by Peter while in a trance (Acts 10:9–17; 11:5). For Luke, this type of vision was neither unreal nor subjective, since Peter, who had experienced visions from God, sometimes found it difficult to distinguish a vision from an event in space-time. On at least one occasion he confused them (12:9). Used by Paul, or Luke’s depiction of his conversion experience, ὄραμα does not refer to an experience that is entirely private to an individual, since his traveling companions likewise saw the light and heard the words (9:17 where the participle ὁφθεῖς is employed). In Matthew 17:9, Jesus describes his transfiguration as a ὄραμα. This is not like Peter’s dream-like experience, since Peter, James, and John participated in the experience while awake. Moreover, Peter’s offer to build tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah is curious. Were Moses and Elijah so physical that they would require shelter or are the tabernacles meant to serve as shrines? Peter’s intention is difficult to know with any certainty.

The closely related ὄρασις is found on four occasions in the New Testament and 131 times in the LXX.<sup>199</sup> In the New Testament, it refers to a vision distinguished from a dream (Acts 2:17; Rev. 9:17) and having the likeness of something (Rev. 4:3 [2x]). The term certainly can mean something experienced with the physical eyes. For examples, see Genesis 1:9 (LXX) which speaks of the dry land appearing and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 43:2 which speaks of the sun appearing.

A term employed for “vision” is ὄπτασία, which appears only five times in the New Testament (Luke 1:22; 24:23; Acts 1:3; 26:19; 2 Cor. 12:1). Luke employs ὄπτασία to describe Zacharias’s experience of the angel (Luke 1:22), the women seeing the angels at the empty tomb (Luke 24:23), the risen Jesus presenting himself alive to his disciples over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3), and Paul’s description of his experience of the risen Jesus (Acts 26:19). In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul employs ὄπτασία to describe his experience of being caught up into heaven, adding that he does not know whether he experienced this event while in or out of his body. Thus, for Paul, his experience could have been in a normal, physical sense. In Luke 1:22, the angel is standing to the right of the altar of incense near Zacharias and in 24:23 (cf.

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vision: Luke 1:22; Acts 2:17; 9:12; 10:3, 17; 11:5, 6, 13; 16:9, 10; 22:18; Experience: Luke 2:26 (semel); 17:22 (2x); Acts 2:27, 31; Perceive/Understand: Luke 9:54; 22:49; Acts 8:23; 11:23; 12:3; 16:19; 28:26, 27; Be cautious: Luke 12:15; Look into: Acts 15:6; Take care of: Acts 18:15; Behold: Luke 21:29; Acts 13:41; indeterminate: Acts 2:3.

<sup>198</sup> Gen. 15:1; 46:2; Exod. 3:3; Num. 12:6; Deut. 4:34; 26:8; 28:34, 67; Eccl. 6:9; Job 7:14; Sir. 43:1; Isa. 21:1f, 11; 23:1; 30:10; Jer. 39:21; Dan. 1:17; 2:1, 7, 19, 26, 28, 36, 45; 4:28; 7:1 (2x), 7, 13, 15; 8:2, 13, 15, 17, 26 (2x); 8:27; 9:24 (2x); 10:1 (2x); Dat. 2:19, 23; 4:13; 7:2, 13; 8:2; Matt. 17:9; Acts 7:31; 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; 18:9.

<sup>199</sup> Gen. 2:9; 24:62; 25:11; 31:49; 40:5; Lev. 13:12; Num. 24:4, 16; Jda. 13:6 (2x); 1 Sam. 3:1, 15; 16:12; 2 Sam. 7:17; 1 Chr. 17:15, 17; 2 Chr. 9:29; Tob. 12:19; Tbs. 12:19; 1 Macc. 13:27; 3 Macc. 5:33; Ps. 88:20; Eccl. 11:9; Job 37:18; Wis. 15:15; Sir. 11:2; 19:29; 25:17; 34:3; 40:6; 41:22; 46:15; 48:22; 49:8; Pss. Sol. 6:3; Hos. 12:11; Mic. 3:6; Joel 2:4; 3:1; Obad. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; 2:5; Hab. 2:2, 3; Zech. 10:2; 13:4; Isa. 1:1; 13:1; 19:1; 30:6; 66:24; Jer. 14:14; 23:16; Lam. 2:9; Ep. Jer. 1:36; Ezek. 1:1, 4, 5, 13, 22, 26, 27 (3x), 28 (2x); 3:23; 7:26; 8:2, 3, 4; 11:24; 12:22, 23, 24, 27; 13:7; 21:34; 23:16; 40:2, 3 (2x); 41:21; 43:3 (4x), 10; Dan. 3:92; 4:10, 11, 19, 20, 23; 5:6; 8:1, 15, 16 (2x); 10:6, 7 (2x), 14, 16, 18; Dat. 1:17; 2:28, 31; 3:92; 4:5, 9; 7:1, 15, 20; 8:1, 13, 15 (2x), 16, 17, 19, 26 (2x), 27; 9:21, 24; 10:6 (2x), 14, 18; 11:14; Acts 2:17; Rev. 4:3 (2x); 9:17.



24:4) it is two angels standing near the women inside of Jesus' tomb. Unlike Peter's vision (ὄραμα) in Acts 10:9-17, the angelic appearances to Zacharias and the women are reported as occurring in space-time. We will settle for concluding that Luke's use of ὄπτασία is inconclusive in reference to the resurrection appearances. Every one of these occurrences may be used either for natural sight of something in space-time or visionary sight where only those permitted are able to see.

We have observed the language of vision in the New Testament and can now make some conclusions. Two terms are generally employed: ὁράω/ὄραμα and ὄπτασία. Both are very frequently employed as language of sight, although this is by no means without its exceptions. Even when employed as sight, this sight does not necessarily involve our mortal eyes, although on many occasions it certainly does. Unfortunately, word studies alone are inconclusive in determining whether Paul or Luke meant for us to understand that the experiences of the risen Jesus by Paul and the others listed in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 were physical events in space-time. Both terms are used by Luke to describe an experience that may or may not have occurred in space-time. Paul more often than not employs ὁράω to refer to physical sight. However, since we are considering pre-Pauline tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, Pauline usage carries little or no weight.

Context can often provide clues for the particular meaning being employed at that moment. Let us consider the occurrences referring to Jesus' resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5, 6, 7, 8; Luke 24:34; Acts 1:3; 9:17, 27; 13:31; 22:14, 15; 26:13, 16 [3x], 19). Luke presents the resurrection of Jesus as something that happened to his corpse. As noted above, in Luke 24 Jesus' tomb is empty on Easter morning and his grave clothes are now empty as well. Jesus has "flesh and bones" and eats. At his ascension in Acts, Jesus is taken up from among his disciples and into the clouds (1:9-11). After his resurrection Jesus ate and drank with his disciples (10:39-41) and his body is said not to have decayed as king David's had but instead was raised up (2:30-32; 13:35-37). Since Luke reports that Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days (Acts 1:3) and the appearance to Peter is not narrated, it is conceivable that this and possibly other appearances not mentioned by Luke were of a nature outside of space-time. However, as we have seen, Luke clearly presents Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred to his corpse, and he employs ὄφθη/ὄραμα more frequently in the sense of physical sight. It therefore seems more probable that Luke thinks of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in the sense of ordinary sight than that he is thinking of an ethereal Jesus or one that is outside of space-time. The same may be said of Paul. As we will observe, Paul understands resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 as an event that happens to a corpse.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, if Paul understood resurrection as the revivification and transformation of a corpse, when he reports that Jesus appeared to others after his resurrection it seems most likely that he is thinking of a physical appearance of the resurrected Jesus in space-time.

**4.3.2.1.e. Paul and the empty tomb.** Since Paul did not mention an empty tomb in the tradition, we may ask whether he was aware of it. A number of scholars have asserted that he was not.<sup>201</sup> This is important since if the empty tomb tradition was

<sup>200</sup> See section 4.3.3.9.b.

<sup>201</sup> Carnley (1987), 45, 53; Segal (2004), 447. Borg (2006, 279) and Vermes (2008, 120) are uncertain. Lüdemann (1995), 46.

invented after Paul's letters, then it is possible that Jesus' resurrection may originally have been thought of as being ethereal in nature.

A number of other scholars have answered that the assertion that Paul did not know of an empty tomb is mistaken. Hayes comments that, since we are reading tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, Paul's failure to mention an empty tomb "shows nothing except that such stories were not a part of the traditional *kērygma*. It certainly does not mean that Paul or any other early Christian could have conceived of a 'resurrection from the dead' in which the body remained in the tomb."<sup>202</sup> Gundry answers that there was no need for the tradition to mention an empty tomb, since the tradition provided a list of events (i.e., death, burial, resurrection, appearances) and was not an attempt at narrative.<sup>203</sup> A number of scholars argue that the sequence of death—burial—resurrection—appearances shows a continuity and implies a bodily resurrection.<sup>204</sup> Habermas says that we may interpret the tradition as saying that what goes down in burial comes up in resurrection.<sup>205</sup> Wright comments,

The fact that the empty tomb itself, so prominent in the gospel accounts, does not appear to be specifically mentioned in this passage, is not significant; the mention here of 'buried then raised' no more needs to be amplified in that way than one would need to amplify the statement 'I walked down the street' with the qualification 'on my feet'.<sup>206</sup>

While this is certainly possible, it is not conclusive that this is the original meaning of the tradition. However, we may ask, why even mention Jesus' burial if his resurrection was not bodily? If the burial is omitted, the tradition would appear as follows:

Christ died for our sins  
And that he was raised on the third day . . .  
And that he appeared to Peter . . .

One suggested answer to this question is that Jesus' burial was mentioned to confirm his death just as the appearances were mentioned to confirm he was alive again. This would explain the role of the inclusion of Jesus' burial in the tradition without requiring a bodily resurrection.

Bracketing the discussion over whether there was a single meaning of "resurrection" within Second-Temple Judaism, what if death and resurrection did not require the revivification of the corpse in the minds of first-century Jews? Wright may very well be correct that "resurrection" almost certainly referred to a corpse that is revivified and transformed.<sup>207</sup> But since the meaning of the term altered at some point to include disembodied existence and I must set some limits on this research project, I will focus on what is present in the *earliest* Christian literature that may tell us what

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<sup>202</sup> Hayes (1997), 256.

<sup>203</sup> Gundry in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 118.

<sup>204</sup> R. Brown (1997), 535; Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 57; Habermas (2003), 23; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 200, 476n152; Keener (1999), 713; Theissen and Merz (1998), 499; Wright (2003), 321.

<sup>205</sup> Habermas's comments in Ankerberg, ed. (2005), 26.

<sup>206</sup> Wright (2003), 321.

<sup>207</sup> Wright (2003), 32-583.

the *earliest* known Christians thought about what had happened to Jesus and, thus, whether they would have defined “resurrection” as an event that happens to a corpse. If they did, Wright is correct that it would be quite redundant to add the empty tomb within the tradition, since including it would take away from the logic and, especially, the symmetry in its present form.<sup>208</sup>

Christ died for our sins  
And that he was buried  
And that he was raised on the third day  
And that the tomb was empty  
And that he appeared to Peter . . .

Even if Paul understood resurrection as an action that occurs to a corpse this does not require that those forming the tradition to which Paul appealed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 thought in similar terms.<sup>209</sup> Some have argued that in the list provided in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul is claiming that the nature of his experience was the same as those experienced by the original disciples of Jesus.<sup>210</sup> These scholars interpret Paul’s experience as visionary in the sense of an event that did not occur in space-time or that possessed extra-mental qualities in this world. This is speculation, of course, since there is nothing in the text requiring such an interpretation. Indeed, a number of scholars have commented that Paul is equating the validity of his experience to be on par with those of the others.<sup>211</sup>

Let us consider the possibility that the original claims pertaining to Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances entailed experiences outside of space-time or of an ethereal nature and that Paul subsequently altered these reports to reflect the revivification and transformation of Jesus’ corpse. Such a scenario seems highly unlikely, given Paul’s view and treatment of early tradition. Moreover, those who knew what was being taught about the resurrection by Peter, James, or any of the other apostles would have seen right through Paul, if he was falsely claiming that his view of resurrection agreed with theirs. What is historically secure is that Paul knew the Jerusalem apostles and their teachings, that he claimed to preach the same thing as they about Jesus’ resurrection, that Paul taught that Jesus’ corpse had been raised, that the tradition Paul cites in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 very probably reflected the Jerusalem “tradition,” that he was firm in his belief that such “tradition” must be adhered to strictly, and that he believed he had no authority to alter or add content to the “tradition.”<sup>212</sup> The implication that the Jerusalem apostles were teaching the resurrection of Jesus’ corpse is so strong that those making assertions to the contrary carry a heavy burden of proof. Placing on one side of the scale a few possibility peas, that is, a few highly ambiguous texts interpreted to the contrary, is no match for the brick of secure evidence from numerous Pauline texts on the other. The tip of the scale that follows is not a gentle one.

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<sup>208</sup> Waterman (2006), 203-04.

<sup>209</sup> MacGregor (2006) argues that “Paul’s interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians is simply irrelevant to the original understanding of Jesus’ resurrection” (230).

<sup>210</sup> Borg (2006), 277; cf. Borg in Borg and Wright (1998), 132; Craffert (2002), 91; Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 61; Moiser (1990), 17.

<sup>211</sup> Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 181; Crossan (1994), 169; Gundry in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 116.

<sup>212</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d. I add, however, that this conviction may have pertained to the content of tradition and not necessarily its form.

Moreover, if my interpretation of Paul's texts below is correct and if Paul's conversion experience was anything like that portrayed in Acts 9, 22, and 26, we may ask why he would wish to alter a non-corporeal meaning behind the tradition to one that is corporeal since the non-corporeal experience may have added credibility to his own conversion experience in the eyes of others.

Therefore, two statements are warranted pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection appearances from the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. First, one cannot secure bodily resurrection or an empty tomb if the tradition is considered in isolation.<sup>213</sup> But given Paul's view and use of tradition, it is highly probable that his own teaching on bodily resurrection was in alignment with the Jerusalem apostles from whom the tradition very likely originated. Second, although there is no mention of an empty tomb, it is improper to conclude that the empty tomb was a later invention and that neither Paul nor those who formed the tradition knew of it.<sup>214</sup>

In summary, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, we find very early tradition about the resurrection of Jesus, the contents of which can be traced with a high degree of probability to the Jerusalem apostles. Accordingly, we can claim to have in our possession eyewitness testimony. This testimony tells us that Jesus died, was buried, was raised from the dead, and that he appeared to individuals and to groups. The chronological order of the appearances is Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred on one occasion, to James, to all of the apostles, then last of all to Paul. This tradition provides no strong hints pertaining to the nature of the appearances. But we are warranted in inferring that bodily resurrection is what was in mind and that this was the single voice of the original apostles.

As we observed in the previous chapter, there are a number of early formulas preserved in the New Testament and the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 may be said to belong to this very early tradition. While the content of these other formulas do not differ from the tradition preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, they add nothing to it and, in fact, contain fewer details.

It is also important to note that what I will establish through Paul's letters—specifically that he believed Jesus had been raised bodily and had appeared to a number of them—is entirely consistent with what we read in the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels.<sup>215</sup> This does not mean that the narratives are

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<sup>213</sup> R. Brown (1973): "goes beyond the evidence" (84); Hoover in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000): "Support for the historicity of the empty-tomb story cannot be found in Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15" (130); Waterman (2006): "the wishful thinking of some scholars" (198). However, R. Brown (1973, 84n142) and Waterman (2006, 197) maintain that Paul probably knew of the empty tomb. So does Lüdemann (2004), 70.

<sup>214</sup> Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 71.

<sup>215</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 238; Carnley (1987), 224. For Paul see section 4.3.3.9 below. Jesus' bodily resurrection is likewise taught in *Gospel According to the Hebrews* (fragment 5 in Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003], 16); *Gospel of Peter* 35-40, 55-56. In the *Gospel of Mary* the living Jesus speaks to his disciples apparently after his death then departs from them. However, it is not clear in what state Jesus was when he spoke with them (Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003], 36-37). There are numerous references in the non-canonical literature that appear to teach disembodied post-mortem existence. See *Gospel of Thomas* 37 (c. second-cent. AD), *Gospel of Truth* (c. second-cent. AD) (Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003], 46-47), *Gospel of Philip* (c. third-cent. AD) 11, 21, 23 (Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003], 39, 40-41); *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* (c. third-cent. AD) (Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003], 80-81), *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (c. third-cent. AD) (Ehrman [*Lost Scriptures*, 2003],

precisely what the early Christians claimed and that no embellishments or inventions are present. The conventions of *bioi* allowed for biographers to exercise literary freedom and ancient biographers took advantage of this liberty to varying degrees. Accordingly, the modern historian can only hope to create a very basic outline of what occurred. However, the outline is very helpful in our investigation. We have established that the disciples of Jesus claimed he had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. Given this conclusion, there are some related issues for which this would be an appropriate place for discussion.

#### 4.3.2.2. Appearances as Legitimizing Support for the Authority of the Recipients

In 1963, Ulrich Wilckens first proposed that the list of appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 provides support for the authority of the recipients.<sup>216</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar additionally argued that “a rivalry among leaders in the early Jesus movement” is evidenced by the varying reports of the recipients of the first post-resurrection appearance. “Paul and Luke award first place to Peter; Matthew and John 20 award the initial appearance to Mary of Magdala; the Gospel of the Hebrews gives the nod to James, the brother of Jesus. . . . These competing claims suggest not so much historical reports as a rivalry among leaders in the early Jesus movement.”<sup>217</sup> Painter comments that this tension resulted “because the primacy of appearance became the ground for the claim of authority within the Jerusalem church.”<sup>218</sup>

It is not apparent to me that a rivalry among leaders is present or that the first appearance was employed as a rhetorical device for granting authority. I see no indication that the legitimizing of church authority is present in the reports of Matthew and John pertaining to the women recipients of the first appearance. In fact, if the earliest Christian writers were legitimizing the authority of specific apostles, we would not expect to find what we do. In Matthew and John it is clear that Peter is the primary disciple given authority by Jesus.<sup>219</sup> Yet in neither is he the recipient of the

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84-85). That the disciples were claiming Jesus rose from the dead is also reported in *1 Clement* 42:3. That Jesus rose from the dead is reported in Pol. *Phil.* 1:2; 2:1-2; 9:2; 12:2. Tacitus reports that after the death of Jesus, Christianity was “suppressed for the moment” before it broke out again in Judea where it started, then spread to Rome (*Ann.* 15.44). While this report does not mention the resurrection of Jesus, the circumstances are consistent with the canonical Gospels and Acts where the disciples were fearful and in hiding until Jesus had appeared to them, whereby they began proclaiming his resurrection boldly fifty days later at Pentecost in fulfillment of his commission to make disciples in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the furthest lands on earth (Acts 1:8). Paul sent greetings to the church in Philippi from fellow believers who are part of Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22), perhaps indicating that the gospel had reached Rome and some within Caesar’s family had become believers.

<sup>216</sup> Wilckens (1963), 64-71.

<sup>217</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 454. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 206-07; cf. 277; Moiser (1990), 17. Although these contend that the appearances were meant to legitimize the authority of the individual, they do not mention that the leaders were in competition.

<sup>218</sup> J. Painter, “Who Was James? Footprints as a Means of Identification” in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 31. See also Smith (2003), 135. Vermes (2008): “By asserting that he, too, was granted an appearance of the risen Jesus, Paul intended to insinuate his equality to Peter and James” (120). It is important to note that, for Vermes, the experiences occurred and were not merely rhetorical devices invented to legitimize the authority of certain individuals. Lüdemann (2002) likewise grants that Paul had an experience which “put him on equal footing” with Peter and James (171).

<sup>219</sup> Matt.16:18-19. In John 20:2-3, Mary rushes from the empty tomb to inform Peter and the Beloved Disciple. In 21:15-17, Jesus gives primary authority to Peter. Even in Acts, Peter by far plays a more prominent role than any other disciple throughout the first twelve chapters, his name appearing more than 50 times. He preached the sermon on Pentecost (2:14ff.) and led thousands to faith in Christ (2:41;



first appearance. Instead, it is the women.<sup>220</sup> If Luke’s desire was to support the authority of Peter with the first appearance, why is he ambiguous pertaining to who received it? Luke does not report the appearance to the women. So, why not narrate the appearance to Peter that he only mentions in passing instead of the appearance to the Emmaus disciples?<sup>221</sup> Since James became the leader of the Jerusalem church in Luke’s sequel Acts, why not name him as one of the Emmaus disciples? Indeed, why not make James and Peter the two Emmaus disciples with one of the two being the primary spokesman instead of Cleopas who appears only here in the New Testament?<sup>222</sup> Peter, James and John, always in that order in the canonical Gospels, were listed as those being in an inner circle of Jesus (Mark 5:37 [cf. Luke 8:51]; Mark 9:2 [cf. Matt. 17:1; Luke 9:28]; Mark 14:33).<sup>223</sup> Paul mentions James, Peter, and John (in that order) as those regarded as “pillars” in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). Perhaps this order reflects what we find in Acts 15:13-21.<sup>224</sup>

While Mary Magdalene receives the first appearance in John—in Matthew the first appearance is to two Marys (28:1, 8-10)—there is no clear indication that there is a battle for authority going on between Peter and Mary. And even if such a debate is alluded to in the *Gospel of Thomas* (114) and the late second-century *Gospel of Mary*, it is not good evidence that this debate was going on in the first-century church.<sup>225</sup> Catchpole notes that the Emmaus disciples “are not commissioned to do anything of note, and they are not expected to be anyone of note: they and their story do not belong to the setting in which appearances of the risen Jesus are exploited for the purpose of personal ecclesiastical validation.”<sup>226</sup>

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* mentioned by Funk and the Jesus Seminar is not a reliable source as we observed in the previous chapter. Even if its author preferred James and assigned him the first appearance, this provides limited support, if any, that similar preferences are occurring in the earlier sources. Accordingly, it is of little value to our present investigation.

That the tradition preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 provides a chronological sequence likewise weighs against the proposal that the list was intended to legitimize the authority of the list’s members. Bracketing 1 Corinthians 15:6-7, in the New Testament and especially in Paul, the term ἐπειτα (“then”) is most commonly employed in a chronological sense (1 Thess. 4:17; Gal. 1:18, 21; 2:1; 1 Cor. 15:23, 46; Heb. 7:27 [cf. Lev 9:7]; James 4:14; Luke 16:7; John 11:7), although it can also denote something or someone that is next in position (1 Cor. 12:28; Heb. 7:2; James 3:17). The same may be said of εἶτα (then) which is also most commonly employed

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3:11ff.; 4:4). Peter’s name appears first in every list of the Twelve (Mark 3:16-19; Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13). See Hendriksen (1973), 648.

<sup>220</sup> Bauckham (2002), 280. Bauckham also states that the appearance to the women in Matthew is not only chronologically prior to the appearance to the male disciples but is also “indispensable” to it, since the men must rely on the women’s report in order to see Jesus (278).

<sup>221</sup> Bauckham (2002), 280; Dunn (2003), 862-3.

<sup>222</sup> Luke 24:18.

<sup>223</sup> Of interest in Mark 14:33 is when Jesus finds Peter, James and John asleep. His scold is directed toward Peter. This is most understandable if Peter is the leader of the three.

<sup>224</sup> That it is James who talks after all have presented their case (15:13) as well as his statement διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω (“Therefore, I judge”; 15:19) indicates that James is the final authority in Jerusalem at the time.

<sup>225</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 252. See also Bauckham (2002), 280n52.

<sup>226</sup> Catchpole (2002), 77.

in a chronological sense (1 Cor. 15:24; James 1:15; Mark 4:17, 28; 8:25; Luke 8:12; John 13:5; 19:27; 20:27; 1 Tim. 2:13; 3:10), although it appears once in a transitional sense (Heb. 12:9). After stating the tradition, Paul adds that he himself was a recipient of a resurrection appearance and that this event was the ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων (last of all) of the appearances (1 Cor. 15:8). In summary, the multiple use of “then . . . then . . . then . . . then” followed by “last of all” indicates a chronological sequence ending with the appearance to Paul.<sup>227</sup>

Of course, it seems plausible that, in 1 Corinthians 15:5 and 7, εἶτα could be used in a weak transitional sense as though providing continuity in a narrative that includes the appearances without interest in an order. However, this tradition is not a narrative and καί would have been a better term in that instance. Moreover, in Luke 24:34 the chronological order of the appearances—to Peter first then to the Twelve—provides another testimony of a chronological sequence of the appearances, at least to Peter and to the Twelve (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5). In 15:8 Paul adds that Jesus appeared to him ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων (last of all). It seems that Paul is referring to a chronological order where he is the last to receive an appearance. However, his statement that follows could also be interpreted to support a positional order of the appearances: Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων ὃς οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος, διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (For I myself am the least of the apostles and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God). In this case, we may posit that Paul appears last on the list because that is where he stands positionally in importance. If this is correct, the “pecking order” is as follows: Peter, the Twelve, a group of over five hundred, James, all of the apostles (i.e., the extended group that included Barnabas and others), Paul. But this is problematic. For while this order seems plausible with some members on the list, it does not with others. One can easily understand why Peter would be first, since he appears to have been the first church leader, and why Paul is last, since he persecuted the Church. One can also understand why the Twelve might precede James who was not a disciple of Jesus prior to his crucifixion and why James might precede the larger group of apostles who perhaps converted after him. However, it is difficult to see how the appearance to the more than five hundred at one time would have been intended to bestow authority upon them. There is no hint of an authoritative group of more than five hundred.<sup>228</sup> And how may it be said that they enjoyed a position of greater authority in the church than James and the rest the larger group of apostles? Moreover, even if we understand this text as a conglomerate of competing traditions—Peter and the Twelve/James and the apostles—one must strain to explain why the group of more than five hundred precedes Paul.<sup>229</sup> On the other hand, the list

<sup>227</sup> Wenham (1995), 367n87. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 260.

<sup>228</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 117. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 237; Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 35; Dunn (“How are the Dead Raised,” 2002), 108-09. Bauckham (2002) thinks it possible that the individual appearances listed served to legitimize the authority of Peter, James, the twelve, and all of the apostles, while the appearance to the more than five hundred was added by Paul because of its usefulness (308). However, he adds that he regards that as very unlikely (see 279-80).

<sup>229</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001) sees here competing traditions between Peter and James (30). Replying to the view that competing authorities are seen in a race to the tomb between Peter and John, Craig (*Assessing*, 1989) says not only is there no evidence that any church group made any mention of such a competition, but also that “the Beloved Disciple should outrun Peter seems unremarkable, especially if he is younger; to hesitate before the open door of a tomb where a man had recently been buried would be the natural reaction of any of us. But true to his character, Peter brashly enters without hesitation” (237-39).

fits very well given a chronological order. Accordingly, interpreting the list of appearances in a chronological manner is more plausible than interpreting it in a manner of positional importance.

The proposal that two competing traditions are present, one supporting Peter's leadership and the other supporting that of James, is problematic; it does not address the data supporting the fact that they experienced something that led them to believe Jesus was still alive and had appeared to them. Wedderburn asserts that the competing traditions proposal is "insufficient reason to doubt the tradition, for, as we have seen, it seems that James and other members of Jesus' family did not believe in him during his ministry (Mark 3.21 and also John 7.5), but James clearly played a leading role in the early church in Jerusalem (cf. above all Gal. 1.19; 2.9)." He adds that "Paul gives no hint that he had any cause to doubt James's claim, however much it might have been convenient to do so at certain points in his career (cf. Gal. 2.12!)." <sup>230</sup>

Accordingly, there is nothing that compels me to see a rhetorical device giving authority to the recipient of the first appearance or any subsequent appearances for that matter. <sup>231</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3. Mark and Resurrection Appearances

The majority scholarly opinion at the moment is that Mark is the earliest of the four Gospels and originally ended at 16:8, leaving his readers without any narrative of a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. <sup>232</sup> If Mark ended his Gospel here, we would like to know why and whether it is likely that he knew of the appearances.

<sup>230</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 116.

<sup>231</sup> Bauckham (2002) states that "First Corinthians 15:5 is far too slender a basis on which to build such a theory against the evidence of the Gospels" (308). Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) opines that the legitimating of leadership proposal "strikes me as overdone" (285). However, he comments that even if the authority of Peter was not legitimized by his being the first recipient of an appearance, "the memory that Jesus appeared first to Peter helped cement his authority" and that a "desire to safeguard the apostle's status might, then, have been enough to demote Mary's role in the rise of Easter faith" (251). He adds that it may likewise be the case that the appearances to Peter, the Twelve, and James may have been singled out over the broader "all of the apostles," since they were well-known (237).

<sup>232</sup> R. Brown (1973), 123; Dunn (2003), 826n7; France (2002), 685; Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 467; Heil (1991), 357; Hoover in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 135; Keener (2003), 2:1194-95; Osiek (1997), 104; Waterman (2006), 37. There is, however, what appears to be a growing number of scholars who argue that either Mark never completed his Gospel or his ending was lost. Most of these are significant scholars. See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 241; Croy (2003) who provides a list of 87 scholars who reject the idea that Mark 16:8 was his intended ending (174-77); Davis (2006), 54; C. A. Evans (2001), comment on Mark 16:8 (Logos Libronix); France (2002), "The Empty Tomb (Mark 16:1-8), Textual Notes" comment on Mark 16:8 (Logos Libronix); Gundry (1993), 1009-21; Metzger and Ehrman (2005), 325-26; Segal (2004), 450; Witherington (2001), 411; Wright ("Early Traditions," 1998), 136; cf. (2003), 623. Also see Waterman (2006) who mentions six advocates of a lost original ending since 1980 most of whom "are becoming very influential on this topic" (75-82): G. Osborne, R. Gundry, C. A. Evans, B. Witherington, N.T. Wright, and R. Swinburne. For arguments for a lost ending, see Gundry (1993) who provides twelve arguments (1009-1021), Metzger and Ehrman (2005), 325-26, and Witherington (2001), 411, 415, 415n14, 416, 417. Some hold that Mark's ending may be preserved in Matthew 28 and even Luke 24 (see Carnley [1987], 236; Witherington [2001], 416); Wright ("Early Traditions," 1998): "I am sure, however, that [Mark's lost ending] told stories not unlike those in Matthew, Luke, and John, though no doubt in Mark's own way: stories about a risen Jesus appearing and disappearing, teaching and commissioning, and finally being seen in that way no more. If so many others within the scholarly world have the right to invent new early Christian texts,

The final statement in Mark's resurrection narrative has baffled many:

καὶ ἐξελθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ.

And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and amazement had taken hold of them. And they said nothing to no one, for they were afraid.

Why is it that the women appear to disobey the angel's command to communicate such a vital truth to Jesus' disciples and why would Mark end his Gospel in this manner? We may only speculate and the reasons provided are legion. It has been suggested that an androcentric bias, namely the problem of female witnesses, led Mark to want the men to be the first witnesses of the risen Jesus or simply not complicate matters by listing the women as witnesses.<sup>233</sup> Perhaps this is why the appearance to the women is also absent in Luke's narrative and in the tradition preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.<sup>234</sup> It has also been suggested that their silence is an apologetic move on Mark's part to explain why the discovery of the empty tomb was unknown to others for a number of years after the purported resurrection of Jesus.<sup>235</sup> Crossley asserts the silence suggests there were no reliable witnesses to the empty tomb.<sup>236</sup> Others have suggested that their silence is an indication of the women's unbelief.<sup>237</sup> Fisher understands it as a narrative device meant to stir the reader's imagination.<sup>238</sup> Dunn explains the silence as Mark wanting his readers to know that *they* are the witnesses and that they should therefore go tell what they know happened to Jesus.<sup>239</sup> Crossan argues that Mark avoided awarding any apparitions to the

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why should not I do so as well, just this once?" (136-37). J. Wenham (1984) is one of the very few scholars who believe Mark's original ending was 16:9-20 (46). Of interest is Waterman's (2006) findings that the number of scholars maintaining that Mark's intended ending is 16:8 *and* is Mark's creation has been on the decrease (82) and that there is a trend to accepting the position that 16:8 was not Mark's intended ending (83).

<sup>233</sup> Bryskog (2002), 197; cf. 82; Dunn (2003), 830; Osiek (1997) attributes the omission of the women to the male apostles' desire to "shield the women of his group from such public scrutiny and the risk of scorn" (113); cf. 115. Contra is Witherington (2001) who disputes this interpretation, adding that Mark "has just portrayed the women disciples in a more positive light than the male ones in Mark 15" (417).

<sup>234</sup> Lüdemann (2004) attributes the omission of the women in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 as being due to the "misogyny" of Paul (36). However, Bauckham comments that, since Paul referred to a woman named Junias as an apostle (Rom. 16:7), the appearance to the women may be included in 1 Corinthians 15:7: "then [he appeared] to all the apostles." While possible, if the appearances are listed chronologically, the appearance to the women is either omitted or covertly combined with the appearance to all the apostles in 15:7 in order to avoid the problem of women witnesses or it is unknown.

<sup>235</sup> Theissen and Merz (1998), 501, who also suggest that the reason the women were silent was to avoid being accused of grave robbery, 502; Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 57-58; cf. (2005), 192. Fisher (1999) attempts to answer this charge saying that this silence that may even have been for years was "understandable, as they were in a state of shock. Eventually they reported their story" (74). This seems very implausible to me. Why would they wait years if the male disciples were proclaiming the resurrection shortly after Jesus' death?

<sup>236</sup> Crossley (2005), 177.

<sup>237</sup> However, Bauckham (2002) notes that the unbelief reported in the resurrection narratives is not confined to the women. In Matthew's Galilee appearance, the disciples see Jesus and some doubt (28:17). In Luke, the disciples are even "unbelieving" when Jesus appears to them in a room (24:37-41). In John, Thomas refuses to believe until he sees Jesus (20:24-25). In Mark's longer ending, the Emmaus disciples are not believed by the main group of disciples (269; cf. 288).

<sup>238</sup> Fisher (1999), 72.

<sup>239</sup> Dunn (2003), 833.

disciples since they had been discredited.<sup>240</sup> Sheehan thinks that Mark is communicating that seeking evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is to go down the wrong path, since he sees one's faith as the main issue.<sup>241</sup> Bauckham suggests two possibilities: "(1) Mark wanted to preserve the mystery of the risen one; (2) Mark does not want his readers to forget that "suffering and the possibility of failure in discipleship in the face of suffering are still a reality."<sup>242</sup> Others have suggested that the women must have told the story to someone, since Mark knows it.<sup>243</sup>

What I find weightier than those just mentioned is a phrase amazingly similar to the puzzling οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν (they said nothing to no one) earlier in Mark 1:44. Having healed a leper, Jesus sternly warns him:

ὄρα μηδενὶ μηδὲν εἶπης, ἀλλὰ ὑπάγε σεαυτὸν δεῖξον τῷ ἱερεὶ καὶ προσένεγκε περὶ τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ σου ἃ προσέταξεν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς.

See that you say nothing to no one. But go show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.<sup>244</sup>

The message seems to be that he is to go show himself to the priest without stopping along the way to share the news of his healing with anyone. In a similar way, the women leave the tomb and run quickly to tell the disciples as commanded without stopping along the way to tell anyone.<sup>245</sup> While I like this explanation, it is not without its challenges. The reason provided for the womens' silence is because they were afraid (ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ), not because of an urgency to get the message to the disciples. However, the use of the terms elsewhere in Mark may provide clarity.

Φοβέομαι (fear), which ends 16:8, appears in eleven other occasions in Mark.<sup>246</sup> In just over half of these, it refers to a type of fear that accompanies an encounter with divinity.<sup>247</sup> We may also note that in the only other use of ἔκστασις in Mark (5:42),

<sup>240</sup> Crossan, "Appendix: Bodily-Resurrection Faith" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.

<sup>241</sup> Sheehan (1986), 44. He adds that the women simply did not believe the angel and we need not either. See also Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 311, 311n138.

<sup>242</sup> Bauckham (2002), 286-87. Kendall (1988) examines the works of ten scholars for their explanations pertaining to why Mark's women are silent upon leaving an empty tomb. The scholars he examines are von Campenhausen, Fuller, Allen, Lightfoot, Pesch, Nineham, Marxsen, Boomershine, Bartholomew, and Mann. He concludes that, although a plurality certainly exists, they agree on three points: (1) the silence should be compared to the Messianic Secret where people did precisely the opposite of what they were told; (2) "apologetic reasons are at work to explain why empty tomb stories emerged after the appearance stories"; (3) "Mark wished to show the actual reaction of fear on the part of the community in the face of divine revelation and the consequences of preaching the resurrection" (96).

<sup>243</sup> Bauckham (2002), 289; Dunn (2003), 832-33n26; Wright (2005), 224.

<sup>244</sup> See Lev. 13.

<sup>245</sup> Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 130; Bauckham (2002), 289; Hendriksen (1975), comments on Mark 16:8; Bauckham (2002) also suggests that, as Paul reported hearing things he could not repeat (2 Cor. 12:4), the women understand the angel's word as an "apocalyptic secret" that they may only reveal to the male disciples for the moment and that "[t]here is no suggestion in any of the Gospels that any of the disciples, women or men, communicate the news of the resurrection outside the circle of the disciples until the risen Lord explicitly commissions them to do so. I am inclined to think this the most convincing explanation of the women's silence in Mark 16:8" (290).

<sup>246</sup> 4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 6:20, 50; 9:32; 10:32; 11:18, 32; 12:12.

<sup>247</sup> 4:41; 5:15, 33; 6:20, 50; 10:32. In the remaining, it refers to the fear of man (5:36, 9:32; 11:18, 32; 12:12). See Bauckham (2002), 290; France (2002), 682.



Jesus raises from the dead the daughter of the synagogue official Jairus, and those present (i.e., Jairus, his wife, Peter, James, John) are ἐκστάσει μεγάλη (greatly amazed). Intense joy is certainly present.<sup>248</sup> Another term, τρόμος (trembling), appears only in Mark 16:8. However, Paul uses it four times, all of which seem to speak of a respect for the subject that motivates one to be on her best behavior.<sup>249</sup> Given these common uses of the terms elsewhere, it is by no means a stretch to understand Mark as saying the following:

And the women left fleeing from the tomb. For as a result of seeing the angel and hearing the news of the risen Lord, the motivation to be on their best behavior and amazement had gripped them, and they said nothing to any one on their way to tell the disciples the news. For they had a reverential fear as a result of the revelation that kept them laser focused on their assigned task.

Accordingly, it is my opinion that the reason provided by Mark for the women's silence is not at all problematic when considering Mark's use of a similar phrase in 1:44.

Even if the women did immediately inform the male disciples of the angelic appearance to them, we are still left without a narrative of an appearance of the risen Jesus. Does this imply that Mark was unaware of any appearance traditions prior to the time in which he wrote his Gospel? We must keep in mind that if Mark was writing between AD 65 and 70 as most scholars believe, oral traditions about Jesus' resurrection that included the appearances were already in circulation and had been for some time. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians a decade or more before Mark penned his Gospel and the tradition embedded in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. is at least a few years earlier. Since it is highly probable that the appearance traditions in this text go back to the Jerusalem apostles, it seems a bit of a strain to hold that Mark knew nothing of the appearances.<sup>250</sup>

Moreover, although Mark may have ended his Gospel at 16:8 without any appearances, his readers probably suspected them.<sup>251</sup> Mark mentions Jesus' resurrection a number of times throughout his Gospel (8:31-38; 9:9, 31; 10:34; 12:10-11, 18-27, 35-37; 13:26-27; 14:28, 58, 62; 16:6), and twice says that Jesus will meet his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection (14:28, 16:6).<sup>252</sup> Thus, the lack of an appearance of the risen Jesus is not enough to postulate that Mark did not know of one or more of them. This is especially true given 14:28 where Jesus predicts the very thing the angel announces.

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<sup>248</sup> It is of interest here that in what immediately follows Jesus commands the girl's parents not to tell anyone about what he had just done (5:43).

<sup>249</sup> 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12. The latter three have μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου.

<sup>250</sup> Carnley (1987), 216. France (2002): "It is one thing to emphasise and exploit paradoxical elements within the story of Jesus' ministry and passion, as we have seen Mark doing again and again, but quite another to conclude his gospel with a note which appears to undermine not only his own message but also the received tradition of the church within which he was writing" (683).

<sup>251</sup> R. Brown (1973), 123; Keener (2003), 2:1194-95.

<sup>252</sup> Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 130; Borg and Crossan (2006), 196; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003), 311n138.

Furthermore, Keener notes that

ancient writers could predict events never recounted in their narratives but that the reader would understand to be fulfilled in the story world; the Greek East's favorite work, the *Iliad*, could predict, without recounting, the fall of Troy, which was already known to the *Iliad*'s tradition and which it reinforced through both subtle allusions and explicit statements in the story. The book ends with Hector's burial, but because the book emphasized that Hector was Troy's last adequate defender, this conclusion certainly implies the tragic demise of Troy. The *Odyssey* predicts but does not narrate Odysseus's final trial, but in view of the other fulfillments in the story, the reader or hearer is not left with discomfort. The *Argonautica* will not directly address Medea's unpleasant slaying of Pelias yet hints at that tradition. Likewise, that Mark probably ends without resurrection appearances (Mark 16:8) hardly means that Mark wanted his readers to doubt that they occurred (cf. Mark 14:28)!<sup>253</sup>

We may never know with certainty whether Mark intended to end his Gospel at 16:8. If he did, we may also never know why he chose to do so. What I have attempted to show in this section is that the contention that Mark was unaware of any appearances is quite weak. It is very probable that reports of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were coming from the Jerusalem apostles and would have been known to virtually all of the early Christians. The post-resurrection appearances are predicted by Jesus on numerous occasions in Mark, and the angel affirms that Jesus has risen and that he will appear to his disciples as soon as they arrive in Galilee. Finally, writings known to many in Mark's day, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, predict events only later to assume their occurrence without narration.

#### 4.3.2.4. Women as Eyewitnesses

All four canonical Gospels report that the women saw one or two angels at Jesus' tomb who told them Jesus had been resurrected. In two of these accounts (Matthew and John), Jesus appears to the women after their angelic encounter. Are there reasons for historians to conclude that one or more women had an experience that they interpreted as an encounter with the risen Jesus?

The main argument posited for the historicity of the appearance to the women, and the empty tomb for that matter, is that the early Christians would not have invented the story, since the low view of women in first-century Mediterranean society would raise problems of credibility. Bauckham provides evidence that in the Greco-Roman world educated men regarded women as "gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy and excessive in religious practices" (Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.511-91; Plutarch, *De Pyth.* 25 [*Mor.* 407C]; Fronto *apud* Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8-9;

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<sup>253</sup> Keener (2003), 2:1194-95. See also Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 129-30; Bauckham (2002), 294. Alsop (1975) proposes that both Mark 14:28 and 16:7 are "redactional and provide for Mk the essential theological seam between the passion narrative and the empty tomb story" (92). While this is possible, it seems unlikely to me. For if Paul and the early Christians understood that Jesus had been raised bodily as I have earlier proposed, then various hypothetical redactional layers that separated the empty tomb from the appearances are not needed. Lüdemann (2004) notes that "the tradition that Peter and the disciples will see Jesus is backed by the report in 1 Cor. 15:5. This means that the historical kernel of Mark 16:1-8 is an appearance of the 'Risen One' to Peter and the other disciples" (88).

Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 34.28; Celsus *apud* Origen, *C. Cels.* 3.55; 2 Tim. 3:6-7; Strabo, *Geog.* 1.2.8).<sup>254</sup> A number of Jewish sources indicating the low view of women in Jewish culture may likewise be cited, although those from the Talmud are admittedly later (Jos. *Ant.* 4.8.15; t. Ber. 7:18; Sotah 19a; Kiddushin 82b;<sup>255</sup> Rosh Hashannah 1.8<sup>256</sup>).<sup>257</sup> We may also note Luke 24:11.

Precisely because of the low view of women in antiquity, many see the appearance to the women, and to Mary Magdalene especially, as historical given the criterion of embarrassment. It seems unlikely that the Evangelists, especially Mark, would either invent or adjust existing testimonies to make the women the first witnesses of the risen Jesus if that is not what was remembered in the earliest traditions.<sup>258</sup> Why fabricate a report of Jesus' resurrection that already would have been difficult for many to believe and compound that difficulty by adding women as the first witnesses?<sup>259</sup> If Matthew originated the story of the appearance to the women disciples, it seems far more likely that he would have depicted men as being the first to see the risen Jesus, especially if Mark did not provide such an appearance in his Gospel. Why not list the Sanhedrist Joseph of Arimathea and avoid the female issue

<sup>254</sup> Bauckham (2002), 270-71. That women were esteemed less than men is suggested in Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Augustus, 44. Also see 1 Tim 4:7 where old women are mentioned in a manner lacking respect.

<sup>255</sup> In this text, perfume-makers and tanners (i.e., leather workers) are contrasted. The former is highly regarded, while the latter is not. The analogy of male and female children seems to be an attempt to clarify the point: The former is highly regarded, while the latter is not. This makes sense, especially if contemporary writers confirm that tanners were not considered among those esteemed. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen quotes the second-century critic of Jesus, Celsus, as saying, "We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character, not venturing to utter a word in the presence of their elders and wiser masters" (3.55). According to Celsus, workers in wool and leather were considered to be of questionable character. Given that exceptions could be cited, as a general rule, it appears that females were esteemed as lowly as tanners were. Origen recorded other remarks by Celsus concerning women: "Speaking next of the statements in the Gospels, that after His resurrection He showed the marks of His punishment, and how His hands had been pierced, he asks, 'Who beheld this?' And discrediting the narrative of Mary Magdalene, who is related to have seen him, he replies, 'A half-frantic woman, as you state.' And because she is not the only one who is recorded to have seen the Savior after His resurrection, but others also are mentioned, this Jew of Celsus culminates these statements also in adding, 'And some one else of those engaged in the same system of deception'" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2.59); "Only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women, and children, of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts" (ibid., 3.49); cf. ibid., 3.55.

<sup>256</sup> According to this statement, the value of a woman's testimony was equal to that of a thief.

<sup>257</sup> See also Byrskog (2002), 73-82.

<sup>258</sup> Bauckham (2002), 259. Setzer (1997) notes, "The fact that it is Mary Magdalene who fills these roles in John, combined with the unanimity of the Synoptics and the *Gospel of Peter* concerning her place in the empty-tomb tradition, suggests that it is a firmly fixed tradition that John cannot violate" (262). Setzer adds that the clear reports of women as witnesses in Mark and Matthew are not as clear in Luke and John, indicating that these "later Gospel authors or the traditions they received were not entirely at ease" with them (268). This indicates that the report(s) of women witnesses was early and subsequently 'cleaned up' though not eliminated by the later Evangelists. (We may also note that in *Gospel of Peter* the women are eyewitnesses of the empty tomb and the appearance of Jesus with everyone else who is present for the resurrection event.) While this observation may be somewhat true of Luke who does not report an appearance of Jesus to the women, the women are the first to receive a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in John, and Luke reports the women as recipients of revelation from the angels.

<sup>259</sup> The resurrection narratives were mocked by Celsus in the second century precisely because of the appearance to the women (Origen, *Contra Celsus* 2.55).

altogether?<sup>260</sup> Thus, as Bauckham assesses, the reason for the report's lack of credibility in the first century is a reason for its credibility in the twenty-first: "Since these narratives do not seem well designed to carry conviction at the time, they are likely to be historical, that is, believable by people with a historically critical mind-set today."<sup>261</sup> Accordingly, the most plausible explanation for the inclusion of women witnesses in the resurrection narratives is that the remembrance of the tradition was so strong and widespread that it had to be included.<sup>262</sup>

Further support for the embarrassing nature of the appearance to the women is evident in how other New Testament texts handle the women witnesses. The women witnesses, including Mary Magdalene, are omitted from the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, which predates the Markan narrative, and from the kerygmatic summaries in Acts, the latter of which certainly postdate the resurrection narratives in the Synoptics, although they may have an origin much earlier.<sup>263</sup>

The criterion of embarrassment applied to the women's testimony can be pressed only so far. Women could testify in some cases and a higher view of women is found in Jewish writings, although these are in the Talmud which is later and may not reflect first-century Jewish thought.<sup>264</sup> However, should there have been a need to fabricate appearances, it is doubtful that women would have been the recipients in such a prominent manner because of the "general reluctance in ancient Mediterranean society" to regard women as credible witnesses.<sup>265</sup> Accordingly, what can be stated with certainty is that a woman's testimony would have been less preferable to a man's, whether or not it may have been allowable. And the more important the testimony, the less likely a woman's word would have been taken at face value.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Gundry (1993): "the distrust in women's testimony, especially in Jewish culture, bespeaks an early date. And quite apart from the question of date, fabrication is likely to have supplied culturally more credible witnesses to the emptiness of the tomb" (995; cf. 1002 in which he also notes the exclusively male list in 1 Cor. 15); Theissen and Merz (1998), 501.

<sup>261</sup> Bauckham (2002), 259. He contends that the women witnesses are an unlikely invention and lists twelve scholars in support, adding that "serious attempts to refute this argument are surprisingly rare" (258n2). To Bauckham's list we may add Fisher (1999), 72; Maier (1997), 184; Montefiore (2005), 113.

<sup>262</sup> Bauckham (2002), 259; Dunn (2003), 843; Osiek (1997), 116; Setzer (1997), 262.

<sup>263</sup> Bauckham (2002), 307; Byrskog (2002), 196; J. Wenham (1984), 53. Bauckham (2002) adds that John employs Peter and the beloved disciple as the official witnesses of the empty tomb, since the women could not serve in that role because they did not observe Jesus' burial by Joseph and could not identify the correct tomb (283). However, neither John nor the Synoptics list Peter or the beloved disciple as eyewitnesses of Jesus' burial by Joseph. Instead, these go to the empty tomb based on the women's report and also find it empty (20:3-10). Moreover, even in John, Mary is the first recipient of an appearance of the risen Jesus.

<sup>264</sup> Ketubot 2:6-7; Niddah 45. Bauckham (2002) adds that the low value placed on a woman's testimony may not have been present "in the early Christian communities in which these stories of women were first told and transmitted" (260). However, this does not appear to be the case given the report in Luke 24:11 that the disciples first regarded the women's report of the angels' revelation as λῆρος (nonsense). Catchpole (2002) opines, "The instinct that caused Luke to superimpose a checking visit to the tomb by Peter because the adequacy of the women is doubted is exactly the instinct that would have kept the women out of any story created *ex nihilo*—and yet they are here! . . . The pre-Gospel tradition of the women's discovery of the emptiness of the known tomb of Jesus therefore seems to rest on a sound foundation" (150).

<sup>265</sup> Osiek (1997), 112-13 (esp. 113); Bauckham (2002), 270; Byrskog (2002), 193-94; Habermas ("Resurrection Research," 2005), 141; Theissen and Merz (1998), 501; Witherington (2001), 401.

<sup>266</sup> Bauckham (2002) also notes that a more serious problem with the role of women as witnesses in the resurrection narratives involves "something even dearer to patriarchal religious assumptions: the

“Christ is risen” is certainly an important testimony. That the mission given to the women was to inform the men rather than the world reflects a status below that of the male disciples. Even so, that the women are the first recipients of that revelation is profound for us, since it is unlikely an invention by Mark. If it had appeared in a pre-Markan tradition that had no relation to the apostolic testimony, it most likely would have been corrected either by Mark or a subsequent Evangelist who could claim eyewitness testimony in support as we find directly in Luke and alluded to in John. Since there is strong evidence elsewhere that the original disciples sincerely believed the risen Jesus had appeared to them, it seems unlikely that these disciples would have invented narratives about appearances to those who had never received them.

Crossley argues that the embarrassment argument is not “as strong as is sometimes thought. What we should not forget is that women had been given a notably significant role in Jesus’ ministry which may have made their testimony more acceptable for some.”<sup>267</sup> But this misses the point. Not only does it say nothing that directly addresses the problem of women witnesses, one could counter-argue that it is this very component of the involvement of women in the ministry of Jesus that lends credibility to the accounts. Furthermore, while their involvement may have made their testimony more acceptable to some, overall it would have done more harm than good.

Another challenge to the embarrassment factor is that if the male disciples had already fled Jerusalem for Galilee, they could not have been around to witness the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. Accordingly, no matter how distasteful an appearance to women may have been, it was the only option available to a narrator inventing the report. Moreover, since the surviving tradition is that only the women were those present at Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, they would have been the only ones capable of providing eyewitness testimony, despite their competency challenges.<sup>268</sup> I see two

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priority of men in God’s dealings with the world. In these stories women are given priority by God as recipients of revelation and thereby the role of mediators of that revelation to men” (275). In support, Bauckham observes how Josephus minimizes the role of women in receiving revelation from God: “Whereas in Genesis Rebekah inquires of the Lord about her unborn children and receives a prophetic oracle about them (Gen 25:22-23), in Josephus it is her husband Isaac who prays and receives the prophecy from God (*Ant.* 1:257). Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities* provides two additional examples of how women were viewed as not those who would receive divine revelations (9:10; 42:1-5)” (271-74). While Bauckham’s comparison of the report in Genesis and Josephus is compelling, those listed for Pseudo-Philo are not as strong. In the former, a daughter (Maria) has a dream that the child to be born of her parents (Moses) will be a son who will perform miracles and deliver his people. When she shares the dream with her parents they do not believe her. While this probably hints at an androcentric bias, we must keep in mind that the opposite occurs when Joseph dreams that his brothers and parents will bow down to him. When he shares the dream with his brothers and father, his father rebukes Joseph (Gen. 37:3-10). In the latter reference in Pseudo-Philo, a woman is blamed for her barrenness while her husband is blameless. Whether this actually reflects an androcentric bias is not clear to me, since the reverse can likewise be cited where the male is the one carrying blame: Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam. 25:2ff.), Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5ff.). Moreover, while acknowledging that women would not have been thought by Jewish men to be candidates for the reception of divine revelation, Byrskog (2002) notes that this carries limitations in our present discussion, since the revelation given to the women at the empty tomb by the angel(s) was not the type assigned to the men directly by the risen Lord in Matt. 28:16-20, Luke 24:36-49, and Acts 1:8. Instead, the angel tells them to inform the male disciples. Thus, while the women—and especially Mary—were not to be ignored, they were not prominent as witnesses of the risen Jesus or the empty tomb (82). The male disciples remained in leadership.

<sup>267</sup> Crossley (2005), 184.

<sup>268</sup> Carnley (1987), 60.



problems with this thesis. There are no reports that the disciples fled from Jerusalem for Galilee whereas its being the Sabbath is reason to believe they had stayed put.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, even if the disciples had all fled Jerusalem, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus may have been better candidates than women for discovering the empty tomb.

There are a few additional considerations that lend credibility to the appearance to the women. We may first note that the appearance to the women appears to be multiply-attested (Matthew 28:1, 8-10; John 20:11-18; Ps-Mark 16:9-11) and is thus quite early.<sup>270</sup> However, Pseudo-Mark is very probably late and John could have rewritten Matthew's account. But the latter seems unlikely. Allison argues that the two share few words and that the Johannine account does not contain any clear theme or interest noticeable in Matthew.<sup>271</sup> Of course, it is possible that John took the core of the narrative and rewrote it. Thus, the claim of multiple attestation could be firmer.

Furthermore, it does not appear that the resurrection narratives were meant to stir up confidence in church leadership. In all four canonical Gospels, none of Jesus' disciples were expecting him to rise from the dead even though he had predicted it on several occasions. And even after Jesus' resurrection is reported to them, they are incredulous (Luke 24:11). Thus, there is a double-embarrassment factor present, since the women serve as both witnesses and as the recipients of divine revelation while the men are presented as thick-headed. These are not the kind of reports one invents in order to boost confidence in Church leadership.

Another counter-argument to the embarrassment factor is that it is natural that the women are the witnesses of the appearances and the empty tomb since they were the witnesses of Jesus' burial. This is not apparent to me. There was no known need to fabricate an appearance to the women. A fabricated report may have had Joseph and/or Nicodemus lead the male disciples to the tomb, discover it empty, and be the recipients of an appearance. Or why not have the women discover the empty tomb and inform the male disciples as we find in John but then have the men be the recipients of the angelic announcement and initial appearance of Jesus, had the story been a complete fabrication? Moreover, an invented story of the resurrection could have recorded the appearance to the men while they were waiting at the tomb for the women to show up or after the women did their part in dressing the corpse. The women need only have played a secondary role.

Perhaps we could nuance the argument to claiming that the women naturally would be the first to see the risen Jesus, since it was their responsibility to anoint the body. However, this does not square with the Gospels' testimony that Joseph of Arimathea and/or Nicodemus prepared the body for burial with a substantial amount of spices prior to the women's visit (Mark 15:42-47; Matt. 27:57-61; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-40).

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<sup>269</sup> Bauckham (2002), 258n2; Wedderburn (1999), 58-60.

<sup>270</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 247. Many scholars maintain that the tradition is very old pertaining to the appearance to Mary if not the other women too. See Allison [*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005], 249; Lüdemann (2004), 87.

<sup>271</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 247-48.

In the end, the embarrassment factor weighs quite heavily in favor of the historicity of the appearance to the women and counterarguments simply carry too little weight.

#### 4.3.2.5. Appearance to the Emmaus Disciples

A large number of scholars have contended that the appearance to the Emmaus disciples is an invention, perhaps Lukan, symbolic of the Eucharist in the early church.<sup>272</sup> There are reasons for disputing this conclusion.<sup>273</sup> Alsup counters that “the assumed lines of contact with the words of institution and the practice of the church in its eucharistic fellowship with the resurrected One are simply missing.” He adds that even more difficult is the fact that at the very moment when meal fellowship with Jesus could take place, Jesus disappears.<sup>274</sup> Waterman argues that since the Emmaus disciples were not with the Twelve at the Last Supper, the Emmaus meal could not remind them of it.<sup>275</sup> Catchpole argues that there is nothing to suggest that when Jesus broke the bread and handed it to the Emmaus disciples they interpreted him as saying, “This is my body.” He concludes that their recognition of Jesus is not brought on by a Eucharistic motif.<sup>276</sup>

These counterarguments are not conclusive in my opinion. One could answer Alsup that the Emmaus disciples showed that others could partake of the Eucharist even though they were not present at the Last Supper. In answer to Waterman, Luke may have Jesus disappear when the Emmaus disciples recognize him because he wants his present readers to know that they can recognize Jesus in the Eucharist although they cannot see him with their physical eyes. Even these answers cannot be proven. The entire dialogue on the Eucharistic meaning behind the narrative involves speculation, although I find Catchpole’s counterargument difficult to dismiss.<sup>277</sup> While historical reconstruction often involves speculation, we want to base our investigation of whether Jesus rose from the dead on much firmer ground. A verdict of “possible” is all that is warranted for the Eucharistic interpretation. But we may say as much in regard to the historicity of the appearance reported in this narrative.

Funk and the Jesus Seminar suggest that the original Emmaus appearance may have been an angelophany.<sup>278</sup> Catchpole argues for a pre-Lukan version of the narrative and sees a parallel in the angel Raphael with Tobiah in Tobit, noting fifteen areas of

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<sup>272</sup> Alsup (1975): “It is widely accepted in NT research that we have here, in fact, the Eucharistic setting of the early church with all of the ramifications of the institution of the Lord’s Supper on the night of Jesus’ betrayal not only redactionally, but also traditionally” (197). Also see Crossan (1991), 399-401; (1995), 205-06.

<sup>273</sup> See Alsup (1975), 197. Some see the story as pre-Lukan (Catchpole [2002], 88-102; Dunn [2003], 848-49). Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) is undecided (254).

<sup>274</sup> Alsup (1975), 197.

<sup>275</sup> Waterman (2006), 25n58.

<sup>276</sup> Catchpole (2002), 76. This is only the fourth of four arguments he provides on 75-76.

<sup>277</sup> It is also worth noting that the story is found in a much shorter version without any hints of the Eucharist in Ps-Mark 16:12-13.

<sup>278</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 481-82. In support they cite reports of angels and deities appearing in Gen. 18:1-15; 19:1-11; Heb. 13:2, and *Metamorphoses* 8. They also think that Emmaus and Cleopas may have been Lukan inventions (482). However, it is doubtful that the three persons in Gen. 18 were all angels. In Gen. 17:1, it is YHWH himself who appears to Abram and in Gen. 18:1 it is YHWH who again appears to Abram, although in the latter, YHWH appears with two others who are presumably angels.

parallel thoughts.<sup>279</sup> Some are more striking than others. Consider the following four, which seem to me the most striking of the bunch:

The traveling companion possesses vital information about the solution to the problem, but even in affirming it authoritatively [the deity of the traveler] is not recognized.<sup>280</sup>

The solution to the problem is found within the Mosaic writings.<sup>281</sup>

Each stage of the journey ends with the provision of hospitality and a celebratory meal.<sup>282</sup>

An outpouring of emotion greets the solution of the problem.<sup>283</sup>

While similarities cannot be denied, there are a number of differences to which Catchpole gives no attention. It is an angel who appears to Tobiah, whereas it is the Lord himself who appears to the Emmaus disciples, and there is no indication that Jesus was ever regarded as an angel by his early followers. The angel is sent in response to the prayers of Tobiah—who prays for death—and those of the daughter of Raguel—who prays for a husband.<sup>284</sup> The appearance to the Emmaus disciples is not in response to any prayer. They grieve over the death of the one who is walking with them. Tobiah seeks a traveling companion and finds the angel Raphael, whereas Jesus approached the Emmaus disciples and sought to travel with them.<sup>285</sup> Moreover, while stories circulated among the early Christians that angels had sometimes been among the pious without their awareness, the high Christology present at such an early stage restrained them from confusing Jesus with an angel (Heb. 13:2).<sup>286</sup> Although Catchpole thinks that Tobit provides a “remarkably clear analogy and parallel,”<sup>287</sup> this seems overly hopeful. It is possible that an analogy is present. But we cannot affirm it with any degree of certainty.

While many have argued that Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to the Emmaus disciples may have been invented to describe the early Church practice of the Eucharist, we may say that this is possible but that there is nothing to commend this interpretation over an actual appearance. That the appearance is a modified angelophany has even less to commend it. It is possible that the appearance is multiply-attested in Ps-Mark 16:12-13, a passage that is far shorter and without any theological overtones. However, Ps-Mark may have reduced Luke’s narrative in the interest of economy. Moreover, while it is possible that Ps-Mark preserves an earlier tradition, this is pure speculation and is not the type of evidence we want to employ if we wish to conduct responsible historical work. This leaves us with only one firm source that reports the Emmaus appearance. The historicity of Luke’s Emmaus narrative must be judged as indeterminate. However, an interpretation that suggests

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<sup>279</sup> Catchpole (2002), 69, 70ff. However, he adds that this was not Luke’s view (69).

<sup>280</sup> Catchpole (2002), 72.

<sup>281</sup> Catchpole (2002), 72.

<sup>282</sup> Catchpole (2002), 73.

<sup>283</sup> Catchpole (2002), 73.

<sup>284</sup> Tobit 3:1-17.

<sup>285</sup> Tobit 5:1-6; Luke 24:14-15.

<sup>286</sup> See Boa and Bowman, Jr. (2007), 94-95.

<sup>287</sup> Catchpole (2002), 70.

that this appearance tradition was not meant to be understood as a historical appearance is on less firm ground.

#### 4.3.2.6. Those Who “Doubted” in Matthew 28:17-18

καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν. καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς.

And seeing him, they worshipped, but some doubted. And coming Jesus spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”

This report is puzzling. If the risen Jesus is before their very eyes, why do some experience doubt? Was there ambiguity in the experience? Was it visionary in nature in terms of being a heavenly experience rather than a concrete appearance of a physical Jesus in space-time? Dunn asks whether this means that “not all were so persuaded of what they saw and experienced” or whether there was “some confused perception.”<sup>288</sup> Walsh & Keesmaat are not troubled, explaining that these doubted in the presence of the risen Jesus. The reason for their doubt is that they “were still expecting a nationalistic restoration! . . . It was not that they doubted that this was in fact the risen one. Their question was: what’s going on here?”<sup>289</sup>

I have serious doubts about any interpretation that understands Matthew as providing a hint that the appearances were either ethereal or of a vision of Jesus in the heavens or outside of space-time. We must remember that only a few verses earlier Matthew reports that the tomb was empty. Jesus’ body has been raised and he appeared in space-time so that the women could hold onto his feet.

There are a number of plausible explanations for their doubting.<sup>290</sup> Perhaps those who doubted were not members of Jesus’ disciples. The οἱ δὲ can point to a group outside of the disciples who were present.<sup>291</sup> Jesus had been crucified on Friday and his resurrection was reported on Sunday. The walk from Jerusalem to Galilee would have taken a few days. This could have placed Jesus’ disciples in Galilee on Tuesday or Wednesday. Since we would imagine that they would have been anxious to get to

<sup>288</sup> Dunn (2003), 854, 858.

<sup>289</sup> Walsh & Keesmaat (1992), 194-95. They likewise contend that they doubted because they experienced cognitive dissonance (193-200).

<sup>290</sup> Of course, others have been offered than are presented in this chapter. Welker (1994) asserts that their doubt concerned not whether they saw something, but the status of the person they saw. In their culture, one should only bow in that sense before divinity (6-7). Wedderburn (1999) asserts that “[s]ome were perhaps initially unbelieving” (67). However, “the fact that the ‘doubt’ of some is mentioned suggests that this is no mere mundane encounter. What they ‘see’ also induces worship (v. 17)” (71). See also Bowman and Komoszewski (2007), 294-95n7.

<sup>291</sup> J. Wenham (1984) notes that the nearest parallel to the *hoi de* (but others) in Matt. 28:17 is in Matt. 26:67: then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others [*hoi de*] slapped Him (114). Wenham wants to say these others in Matt. 28:17 consist of a different group than the disciples. While possible, this is not required. After all, those who spat in Jesus’ face and those slapping him were members of the same group and it goes without being said that those who worshipped Jesus were not the same persons who doubted. They could have been members of the same group, perhaps of the more than five hundred or of the disciples themselves. Since others are not mentioned, there is a slight bit more weight tipping to the disciples only.

Galilee both to see Jesus and for fear of the Jews, let us suppose that they arrived there on Tuesday. Either sometime on Tuesday or Wednesday the appearance of Jesus takes place. Jesus is seen publicly on the mount. The disciples are excited and begin to worship him while he comes to them and others gather to see what is going on and to hear Jesus again. In the back of the crowd one man says to another, “What is all the excitement about? We have heard Jesus before. What is so special this time?” The other answers, “Didn’t you hear? Jesus was crucified last Friday in Jerusalem and he has risen from the dead!” The first is skeptical of the report and says, “Someone got things wrong. The Romans must have crucified someone else.” Thus, they did not doubt that Jesus was before them but that he had been crucified a few days ago. While I regard this explanation as plausible, there is another that I think is most likely what Matthew was thinking.

Matthew uses *ἐδίστασαν* to communicate doubt in this passage. There is only one other occurrence of this term in the New Testament and it is also in Matthew (14:30-31). Matthew reports that the disciples see Jesus walking on water. Peter accepts Jesus’ invitation to do likewise and while walking on water feels the strong wind around him, is overcome by fear and begins to sink. Jesus rescues him and asks why he doubted (*ἐδίστασας*). *Διστάζω* has the meaning of having two (*δίς*) thoughts on a matter. That is what we find here with Peter. His belief was accompanied by doubt. Bracketing the issue of the historicity of the story, we can imagine Peter walking on water and being completely overwhelmed with what was taking place. As the wind picks up and the waves crash around him, perhaps Peter begins thinking about his last experience on a boat when a similar wind was blowing and he wonders how he is now walking atop deep water and what would happen to him if something went wrong. Fear arises in the midst of faith.

Is this far different than our first experience in an airplane? After the thrill of a speedy takeoff and watching the buildings and automobiles become smaller as we lifted higher into the sky, many of us experienced wonder over the flight. But as we looked at the ground thousands of feet below, some of us pondered our fate should a wing fall off, and fear resulted.

A similar message of dual thoughts is communicated in Mark 9:24. When a man comes to Jesus to have his son exorcized of demons, Jesus tells him that all things are possible to the one who believes. The man replies, *πιστεύω· βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ* (I believe. Help my unbelief). Any believer knows of a time when she has uttered a sincere prayer out of faith while also asking God to increase her faith. The point I would like to make here is that in both Matthew 14:31 and Mark 9:24 we do not see those doubting as one having his arms crossed and saying “I don’t agree with your assessment of the situation.”<sup>292</sup> We do not have a doubting Thomas. Peter is walking on water and the man has brought his son to Jesus to have him healed. Thus, an incomplete or challenged faith that includes both belief and doubt is present in these uses of *ἐδίστασας* and *ἀπιστίᾳ*.

I am convinced there is a parallel thought to Matthew 28:17 in Luke 24:41 that supports this view and clarifies for us Matthew’s words. After Jesus had appeared to the Emmaus disciples, they ran into Jerusalem to tell the eleven that Jesus was alive.

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<sup>292</sup> Keener (1999), 716.



When the disciples heard the news they replied that they already knew Jesus had risen from the dead because he had earlier appeared to Peter. At that moment Jesus appeared before them in the room and they were frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost. Jesus told them not to be afraid and showed them his hands and feet. It is at this point that Luke makes the following comment in 24:41a:

ἔτι δὲ ἀπιστούντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς καὶ θαυμαζόντων εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἔχετε τι βρώσιμον ἐνθάδε;

And [while they were] still *unbelieving* from joy and astonishment, he said to them, “Do you have any food to eat here?”

Notice why they were in disbelief: from joy and amazement. I have a friend who once asked me about this passage. His mother had died only two years prior. I answered, “What if while we are talking your mother walked into the room? She smiles and says, ‘Hi, Son.’ You are overcome with joy and quickly rise up and hug her. You kiss her head and realize that she has the same smell and touch as before. It is definitely her. But then you remember seeing her in a casket and burying her. This cannot be—or can it?” Is this not a description of what the disciples were experiencing? They were there when Jesus was arrested and knew he had been crucified just a few days earlier. But with open mouths and wide eyes that are filled with tears they now see him standing before them in perfect health. Does this not describe how they were “unbelieving from joy and astonishment”? I think this passage sheds light on Matthew 28:17 where upon seeing Jesus they worshiped him while some doubted or had two thoughts simultaneously.

This is a far more plausible interpretation of the doubt passages than the claim that Matthew and Luke were trying to answer those contending that the appearances were ethereal in nature. Had that been the case, the empty tomb was sufficient to accomplish the task and to mention doubts and unbelief would have been counterproductive to such a purpose.<sup>293</sup>

Before moving along, I would like to address an interesting counter-explanation by Carnley. He asserts that Matthew had a need to include a passage where the disciples doubted. He contends that at the Great Commission, all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Jesus. He is already exalted and yet there is no suggestion that this has already taken place.

The only indication in this pericope that Jesus was understood to have appeared as a material or physical body walking on this earth (as in a Christepiphany), rather than more elusively ‘from heaven’ (as in a Christophany), are the words “Jesus came near and said” in verse 18. But this phrase is a typical Matthean one which is found some thirty times in Matthew's gospel but nowhere else in the New Testament. It is clearly an editorial comment which Matthew elsewhere adds to his source material and it seems likely he has added it here also, to an original resurrection tradition which, without it, unequivocally implied that Jesus appeared “from heaven.”<sup>294</sup>

<sup>293</sup> See Catchpole (2002), 67.

<sup>294</sup> Carnley (1987), 237. Sympathetic to Carnley is Dunn (2003), 858.

I was able to identify 33 references in Matthew where *someone came near and said something*.<sup>295</sup> So, Carnley is correct on this point. However, although typical for Matthew, the phrase is found elsewhere in the New Testament contrary to Carnley, appearing twice in Mark, seven times in Luke/Acts, and once in John.<sup>296</sup> Below is a list of every Matthean occurrence of the phrase “coming to and saying” (προσέρχομαι, λαλέω or λέγω) with its parallels in the other canonical Gospels:

1. Matt 8:2/Mark 1:40/Luke 5:12
2. Matt 8:19/Luke 9:57
3. Matt 8:25/Mark 4:38/Luke 8:24
4. Matt 9:14/Mark 2:18/Luke 5:33
5. Matt 13:10/Mark 4:10/Luke 8:9
6. Matt 13:27 (no parallel)
7. Matt 13:36 (no parallel)
8. Matt 14:15/Mark 6:35/Luke 9:12
9. Matt 15:1-2/Mark 7:1-5/Luke 11:37-38 (In this pericope, Matthew is closer to Mark who provides more information and Luke differs from both)
10. Matt 15:12/Mark 7:17
11. Matt 15:23/Mark 7:24-30 (In this pericope, Matthew provides a statement by the disciples not reported by Mark)
12. Matt 17:6-7/Mark 9:2-10/Luke 9:28-36 (In this pericope, Matthew provides a statement by Jesus not reported by Mark and Luke)
13. Matt 17:19/Mark 9:28/Luke 9:37-43a (In this pericope, Matthew and Mark are very close whereas the disciples’ question is not reported by Luke although Jesus’ reply is)
14. Matt 17:24 (no parallel)
15. Matt 18:1/Mark 9:33-37/Luke 9:46-48 (In this pericope, Matthew portrays the disciples asking the question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” whereas in Mark and Luke the disciples debate the question among themselves and Jesus knew what was in their hearts. Thus, the Markan and Lukan Jesus is a little more Christologically charged than the Matthean Jesus.)
16. Matt 18:21-22/Luke 17:4 (In this pericope, Matthew reports Jesus answering a question asked by his disciples, whereas Luke reports Jesus’ words as teaching. It is possible that these are two different occasions.)
17. Matt 19:3/Mark 10:2
18. Matt 19:16/Mark 10:17/Luke 18:18
19. Matt 21:23/Mark 11:27-28/Luke 20:1-2
20. Matt 21:28, 30 (no parallel)
21. Matt 22:23-24/Mark 12:18/Luke 20:27-28
22. Matt 24:3/Mark 13:3/Luke 21:7 (Matthew and Mark are close.)
23. Matt 25:20, 22, 24/Luke 19:16, 18, 20
24. Matt 26:17/Mark 14:12/Luke 22:7-9 (Matthew and Mark are close while Luke first adds a question by Jesus to which their question is a reply.)
25. Matt 26:49/Mark 14:45/Luke 22:47-48/John 18:3-4 (Matthew and Mark report that Judas came to Jesus and said “Rabbi!” In Luke, Judas comes near and it

<sup>295</sup> Matt. 4:3; 8:2, 19, 25; 9:14, 27ff.; 13:10, 27, 36; 14:15; 15:1, 12, 23; 17:7, 19, 24; 18:1, 21; 19:3, 16; 21:23, 28, 30; 22:23; 24:3; 25:20, 22, 24; 26:17, 49, 69, 73; 28:18.

<sup>296</sup> Mark 6:35; 14:45; Luke 7:14; 8:24; 9:12; 13:31; John 12:21; Acts 22:26, 27; 23:14.

- is Jesus who speaks to him. In John, when Judas and the others come, Jesus goes to them and speaks.)
26. Matt 26:69/Mark 14:66-67/Luke 22:56/John 18:25 (Matthew reports that a maid came to Peter and spoke, while Mark reports that a maid came into the courtyard and spoke to Peter, while Luke reports that a maid in the courtyard spoke to the others, while John reports that others spoke to Peter.)
  27. Matt 26:73/Mark 14:70/Luke 22:59/John 18:25-27 (Matthew reports that others came to Peter and spoke, while Mark reports that others spoke to Peter, while Luke reports that an individual spoke to the others, while John does not report the third accusation.)
  28. Matt 28:18/Mark 16:15/Luke and John omit (Mark does not report Jesus coming to them but reports Jesus' words.)

Looking through these occurrences, we can make the following observations concerning the phrase “coming to and saying” (προσέρχομαι, λαλέω or λέγω) in primarily Matthew but also the other Synoptics:

- In more than half of the occurrences, the same event is reported in one or more of the other Gospels although a different word may be employed. For example, Matthew prefers προσέρχομαι to Mark's έρχομαι (1:40; 2:18; 7:17; 9:28; 11:27-28; 12:18; 14:66-67).
- In one passage Matthew and Mark report a question not reported by Luke (13),<sup>297</sup> while in another Matthew and Mark do not report a question reported by Luke (24).
- In two passages, Matthew provides a statement not reported by Mark and Luke (11, 12).
- In one passage Matthew provides less information than Mark (9).
- There are four passages in Matthew where the phrase occurs without parallel reports in the other Gospels (6, 7, 14, 20).
- In two passages where the phrase appears, Matthew's report appears less Christologically charged than the reports of Mark and Luke (15) and while Matthew agrees with Mark, Jesus is presented as being more in control of the situation in Luke and John who do not use the phrase (25).
- Matthew reports that Jesus came and spoke while Mark reports that Jesus spoke (28).

For New Testament uses of the phrase outside of Matthew 28:18, both occurrences in Mark also appear in Matthew and thus cannot be said to be Matthean, given Markan priority (Mark 6:35; 14:45). In Luke, two occurrences also appear in Matthew (Luke 8:24; 9:12), while another is unique to Luke (13:31). There are three occurrences of the phrase in Acts (22:26, 27; 23:14). The only occurrence of the phrase in John is unique (12:21).

While the phrase “coming to and saying” (προσέρχομαι, λαλέω or λέγω) is preferred by Matthew, it is not uniquely his. In no case outside of 28:18 do we observe him employing it to bolster his narrative in order to promote orthodoxy. In fact, we see almost the opposite occurring (15, 25). Moreover, it is important to note that this is the same Matthew writing who reports only a few verses earlier that Jesus has been

<sup>297</sup> Numbers here in parentheses refer to the list of 28 above.

raised from the dead, is no longer in his tomb, but is on his way to Galilee where they will meet him (28:6-7). It is the same Matthew who also provides the report of the women that they had met Jesus on their way to tell his disciples the news and who then hold onto his feet and worship him (28:9-10). These reports could not be more physical in nature. When Jesus reiterates that the women are to tell his disciples to go to Galilee where they will see him, we may assume that he is not referring to an appearance different than what they have just experienced, although this cannot be stated with certainty. Given what we have observed from Matthew's use of the phrase in question, his reporting of the empty tomb, and the grasping of Jesus' feet, I see no reason to hold that Matthew sensed a need to add the phrase "Jesus came near and said" in order to be clear that the Galilean appearance was physical in nature. Moreover, had that been his intentions, we may rightly expect Matthew to omit the clause "but some doubted" (οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν) if he believed it stood in contrast to the type of appearance that he envisioned and reported.<sup>298</sup>

#### 4.3.2.7. Fates of the Apostles

After Jesus' death, the disciples endured persecution and a number of them experienced martyrdom. The strength of their conviction indicates they were not just claiming that Jesus had appeared to them after rising from the dead. They really believed it. They willingly endangered themselves by publicly proclaiming the risen Christ. A number of texts may be cited in support.

One need only read through the book of Acts to find reports that the disciples were willing to suffer for their belief that the risen Jesus had appeared to them.<sup>299</sup> Jesus' statement to Peter in John 21:18-19—that when he is old he will stretch out his hands, signifying the type of death he would die—is typically taken to mean that Peter was martyred by crucifixion.<sup>300</sup> Jesus' statement to James and John that they will drink the cup he drinks and be baptized with the baptism in which he is baptized may indicate that they were both martyred (John 10:35-40). This interpretation is strengthened by the report that James the brother of John was martyred (Acts 12:2). Elsewhere, Jesus tells his disciples that persecution awaits them (John 15:19-21; 16:1-3). Perhaps written around the same time as John, 1 Clement reports the sufferings and probably the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul:

διὰ ζῆλον καὶ φθόνον οἱ μέγιστοι καὶ δικαιοτάτοι στύλοι ἐδώθησαν καὶ ἕως θανάτου ἤθλησαν <sup>3</sup> λάβωμεν πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ἡμῶν τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἀποστόλους <sup>4</sup> Πέτρον ὃς διὰ ζῆλον ἄδικον οὐχ ἕνα οὐδὲ δύο ἀλλὰ πλείονας ὑπήνεγκεν πόνους καὶ οὕτω μαρτυρήσας ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον τόπον τῆς δόξης <sup>5</sup> διὰ ζῆλον καὶ ἔριν Παῦλος ὑπομονῆς βραβεῖον ὑπέδειξεν <sup>6</sup> ἑπτάκις δεσμὰ φορέσας φυγαδευθεὶς λιθασθεὶς κήρυξ γενόμενος ἔν τε τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ δύσει τὸ γενναῖον τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ κλέος ἔλαβεν <sup>7</sup> δικαιοσύνην διδάξας ὅλον τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς δύσεως ἐλθὼν

<sup>298</sup> Wright (2003), 643-44. In fact, Wright argues that Matthew's mention of those who doubted is "[t]he strongest mark of authenticity in this paragraph" (643).

<sup>299</sup> See Acts 4, where Peter and John are arrested and imprisoned; Acts 5, where the apostles are arrested, imprisoned, and flogged; and Acts 12, where James the brother of John is martyred and Peter is imprisoned. Other persecutions are reported in Acts but not targeted specifically against the original disciples. We are specifically told that the resurrection of Jesus was their central message (Acts 4:2, 33).

<sup>300</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 491; Witherington (2006), 92; cf. *John's Wisdom* (1995), 356.

καὶ μαρτυρήσας ἐπὶ τῶν ἡγουμένων οὕτως ἀπηλλάγη τοῦ κόσμου καὶ εἰς τὸν ἅγιον τόπον ἀνελήμφθη ὑπομονῆς γενόμενος μέγιστος ὑπογραμμός

Because of envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and contended unto death.<sup>3</sup> Let us set the good apostles before our eyes.<sup>4</sup> Peter, who because of unrighteous envy, not once or twice but endured many afflictions and having borne witness went to the due glorious place.<sup>5</sup> Because of envy and rivalries, steadfast Paul pointed to the prize.<sup>6</sup> Seven times chained, exiled, stoned, having become a preacher both in the East and in the West, he received honor fitting of his faith,<sup>7</sup> having taught righteousness to the whole world, unto the boundary on which the sun sets; having testified in the presence of the leaders. Thus he was freed from the world and went to the holy place. He became a great example of steadfastness.<sup>301</sup>

Clement reports that Peter and Paul suffered multiple attacks, and likely refers to their martyrdoms, although the latter is not without question. “Unto death” (ἕως θανάτου) appears sixteen times in the LXX and can refer to dying or being on the verge of death.<sup>302</sup> In Mark 14:34 and Matthew 26:38 Jesus says, περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου (“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death”). Jesus did not die while experiencing this extensive grief. A few years later, Clement’s friend and colleague Polycarp (Pol. *Phil.* 1.2) used the same phrase in a manner certainly referring to the death of Jesus: τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν ὃς ὑπέμεινεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἕως θανάτου καταντῆσαι ὃν ἤγειρεν ὁ θεός λύσας τὰς ὠδίνιας τοῦ ἔδου (“our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] ‘whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave’”). Thus, without contextual considerations, an interpretation based solely on the term ἕως θανάτου is inconclusive.

Martyrdom may be seen with the use of μαρτυρήσας in 1 Clement 5:4, 7. However, those in the Asia Minor church may not have employed the word in that sense until the middle of the second century in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* where the author uses it several times in this sense.<sup>303</sup> A possible earlier exception is found in Revelation 2:13, which mentions Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ’ ὑμῖν (Antipas, my martyr, my faithful one, who was killed in the presence of you). However, we cannot be certain this is what the author had in mind. Was Antipas a ‘martyr’ because he was killed or was he a ‘witness’ who was killed? While the meaning of the term also leaves us without a firm answer in 1 Clement, the context leads me to conclude that Clement was referring to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. In 1 Clement 6, Clement continues his thoughts in 5:1–2, saying that, in addition to Peter, Paul, and possibly all of the apostles, there was a vast number of other believers who became examples for us, because they had been through horrible persecutions. He adds that Christian women suffered horrible torture but that “they reached and achieved the suitable honorable prize.” Holmes comments on the women Danaids and Dircae: “In ancient mythology, the daughters of Danaus were given as prizes to the winners of a race; thus it is likely that *Danaids* is a reference to Christian women

<sup>301</sup> 1 Clem. 5:2-7.

<sup>302</sup> 2 Chron. 32:24; Isa. 38:1; 39:1; Jon. 4:9; Zech. 5:3 (twice); 4 Macc. 1:9; 14:19; Sir. 4:28; 18:22; 34:12; 37:2; 51:6; Odes Sol. 16:6.

<sup>303</sup> E. H. Strathmann in *TDNT* 4:504–508.



being raped prior to being martyred. Dirce died by being tied to the horns of a bull and then dragged to death.”<sup>304</sup> So it seems that Clement is reporting that Christian women were martyred, and the language used was euphemistic (βέβαιον δρόμον κατήντησαν [they finished the course strongly]). Thus, there is good reason to hold that similar words used for Peter and Paul (ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον τόπον τῆς δόξης [went to his appointed place of glory] and εἰς τὸν ἅγιον τόπον ἀνελήμφθη [went to the holy place]) meant that they died a martyr’s death, especially since this is attested elsewhere and no conflicting accounts exist. In summary, Clement refers at minimum to the continuous sufferings of Peter and Paul and probably refers to their martyrdoms for two reasons: (1) A euphemism similar to what Clement uses for their deaths is used in the chapter that follows for other Christians who were certainly martyred: “they safely reached the goal” (6:2); (2) Their martyrdoms are attested by other sources. Either way, Peter and Paul are described as being *willing* to suffer continuously and greatly for their faith, irrespective of whether they were martyred. I must add that Clement of Rome is of limited use in our investigation, since we have assigned a rating of “*possible-plus*” in terms of the strength of this document as a source that reliably preserves apostolic testimony given that we cannot confirm the author’s relationship to the apostles.

Polycarp likewise provides us with reports pertaining to the fate of some early Christians, including Paul. After mentioning the “endurance” (πάσαν ὑπομονήν) the church had seen in Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, the apostle Paul, the rest of the apostles, and others, Polycarp comments that “They are in the place due them with the Lord, with whom also they suffered” (εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον αὐτοῖς τόπον εἰσὶ παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ ᾧ καὶ συνέπαθον).<sup>305</sup> Through Polycarp, we know that Paul, other apostles, and other believers suffered for their faith. Polycarp himself would follow their example of strength and conviction in the face of martyrdom. We are also reminded that Polycarp’s letter is of limited weight, since we have assigned it a rating of “*possible.*” What we can say with certainty, however, is that by AD 110 in the case of Polycarp and AD 97 in the case of Clement there were strong traditions that Peter and Paul had suffered the fate of martyrs.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>304</sup> Holmes (2007), 53, note on 6.2.

<sup>305</sup> Pol. *Phil.* 9.2.

<sup>306</sup> For other reports pertaining to the fates of the disciples, see Ign. *Smyrn.* 3:2, 4 where the disciples are said to have acted in a manner that they thought little of dying and that “beyond death they were found,” which may refer to their attitude toward death being proved or demonstrated by their own boldness when the moment of execution actually came. He at least means that the disciples were so strengthened by seeing the risen Jesus that they preached without a thought for their earthly fates because they believed immortality awaited them. Think of an employee who suffers under an unreasonable boss, then suddenly inherits enough money to become independently wealthy. With the money deposited safely in the bank, the employee can go to work on his last day and smile at whatever abuse his supervisor dishes out.; Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, 15 (Peter crucified); Tertullian also claims that the martyrdoms of some of the apostles were a matter of public record, being reported in “the lives of the Caesars.” This book has either been lost or he is referring to Nero’s campaign to kill Christians in Tacitus’ *Annals* (15.44); Origen reported that Peter was crucified upside down in his commentary on Genesis, vol. 3. This work has been lost but is mentioned by Eusebius in *HE* 3.1. Crucifying victims upside down or in positions other than upright is also mentioned by Seneca (*Dialogue* 6, 20.3) and Josephus (*War* 5:449–51). Elsewhere Origen strongly implies that the disciples were so strengthened in their faith after the risen Jesus had appeared to them that they continued to preach without hesitation in the face of death (*Contra Celsum* 2.56, 77). Dionysius of Corinth (cited by Eusebius, *HE* 2.25.8) reports that Peter was martyred in Italy during the persecution by Nero (AD 64–68). Hippolytus was a disciple of Irenaeus and a leader in the church of the late second and early third centuries. The fates of

All of these sources affirm the disciples' willingness to suffer and die for their faith. Of course the conviction of the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to them does not necessarily mean they were right. After all, followers of other religions and causes have willingly suffered and died for their beliefs. However, this does not mean that their beliefs were true or worthy. This misses the point: The disciples' willingness to suffer and die for their beliefs *indicates that they certainly regarded those beliefs as true*. The case is strong that they did not willfully lie about the appearances of the risen Jesus. Liars make poor martyrs.

No one questions the sincerity of the Muslim terrorist who blows himself up in a public place or the Buddhist monk who burns himself alive as a political protest. Extreme acts do not validate the truth of their beliefs, but their willingness to die indicates that they are sincerely convinced of the truth of their beliefs. Moreover, there is an important difference between the martyred apostles and those who die for their beliefs today. Modern martyrs act solely out of their trust in beliefs passed along to them by others. The apostles died for holding to their own testimony that they had *personally* seen the risen Jesus. Contemporary martyrs die for what they *believe* to be true. The disciples of Jesus suffered and were willing to die for what they *knew* to be either true or false.

We may ask whether it is likely that the disciples *willingly* suffered and/or died for the beliefs? What if they were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and executed against their wills and may have even recanted prior to their death and that Acts cleaned up the historical recollections of their ordeals? This seems unlikely. The disciples became well aware that publicly proclaiming Jesus as risen Lord on certain occasions and locations would likely result in sufferings and possible martyrdom. Accordingly, to continue on this path while being fully aware of the outcomes to be anticipated demonstrated their willingness to endure suffering and martyrdom regardless of whether these were actually experienced. We must also keep in mind that there is an absence of any hints that any of the Twelve (other than Judas) had recanted or walked away from the Christian community. If the news had spread that one or more of the original disciples had recanted, we would expect for Christianity to have been dealt a severe blow. If those in management of a publicly traded company are bailing out, the workers are not going to dump their life savings into company stock. And yet we find early Christians willingly suffering and dying for their beliefs.<sup>307</sup> We may also expect

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the apostles are reported in a work attributed to him. However, the actual dating and authorship of this text is doubtful. The fates given for Peter and Paul are consistent with what others wrote. The accounts regarding the remaining apostles are interesting and may contain historical kernels, but they are anecdotal and cannot be accorded too much weight. See "Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus: Containing Dubious and Spurious Pieces" in Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, eds. and trans., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V (1.5.0.2.3.0, XLIX).

<sup>307</sup> A selection of these sources might include *Shepherd of Hermas* (parable 9, section 28; vision 3, section 1, verse 9–2:1; 5:2); Melito of Sardis (cited by Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.3); Dionysius of Corinth (cited by Eusebius, *HE* 2.25.8); Hegesippus (cited by Eusebius, *HE* 3.32.3; 2.23.18; 4.22.4); Eusebius, *HE* 2.25; 5.2.2–3; Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, in his letter to Victor of Rome; Josephus, *Ant.* 20:200; and the correspondence of Pliny (10.96–97). The New Testament notes the martyrdoms of Stephen (Acts 7:59–60), James the brother of John (Acts 12:2), and Antipas (Rev. 2:13); Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44. This passage is also interesting in that Tacitus wrote that Jesus' execution by Pontius Pilate "checked [the Christian movement] for the moment," but then it "broke out not only in Judaea . . . but even in Rome." Tacitus is consistent with the reports in the Gospels and Acts of the transformation of the disciples, who had been emboldened through seeing the risen Jesus to proclaim him publicly in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

that a recantation by any of the disciples would have provided much ammunition for Christian opponents like Celsus and Lucian in the third quarter of the second century, the former of which wrote against the Church while the latter wrote of the Christian movement in a pejorative manner. Thus, to suggest that the disciples did not willingly suffer for their message would be to posit a scenario greatly lacking in plausibility. It may likewise be suggested that to claim that the disciples suffered because they believed in the risen Christ is to claim too much, because they suffered for Christian teachings, of which the Resurrection was only one. However, if the original disciples had not believed that they had seen the resurrected Jesus, their firm commitment to the Christian faith after the death of their leader is not easily explained.

#### **4.3.2.8. Conclusion Pertaining to the Appearances to the Disciples**

What may we conclude about the appearances to the disciples? A similarity exists with the miracles of Jesus. Bracketing the issue of the nature of the event itself, that is, was it a divine act, magic, psychological or trickery, a paucity of evidence prohibits us from affirming the historicity of particular miracles of Jesus. Historians may conclude that Jesus performed acts that he and others interpreted as miracles and exorcisms and that these acts caused many onlookers to drop their jaws in amazement. However, it is difficult to award historicity with a great deal of certainty to any particular miracle or exorcism reported in the Gospels. In a similar manner, historians may conclude that subsequent to Jesus' death by crucifixion, a number of his followers had experiences, in individual and group settings, that convinced them Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. We may affirm with great confidence that Peter had such an experience in an individual setting and we will see that the same may be said of an adversary of the Church named Paul.<sup>308</sup> We may likewise affirm that there was at least one occasion when a group of Jesus' followers including "the Twelve" had such an experience.<sup>309</sup> Did other experiences reported by the Gospels occur as well, such as the appearances to the women, Thomas, the Emmaus disciples, and the multiple group appearances reported by the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 and John? Where did these experiences occur? Historians may be going beyond what the data warrants in assigning a verdict with much confidence to these questions.

I reiterate that historians may conclude that subsequent to Jesus' execution, a number of his followers had experiences, in individual and group settings, that convinced them Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to them in some manner. This

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<sup>308</sup> See section 4.3.3.

<sup>309</sup> Ehrman (2000) grants that some and maybe all of the disciples had an experience (178). Given that the appearance to the Twelve is early (1 Cor. 15:5) and multiply-attested in independent sources (1 Cor. 15:5; Mark 16:7 [implied]; Matt. 28:16-17; Luke 24:33-51; John 20:19-29), there is no reason to deny an experience of the Twelve as a group which they interpreted as a post-mortem appearance of the risen Jesus. Catchpole (2002) states that the appearance to the Twelve "is in fact the best attested of all the appearances, and cannot easily be set aside as dependent. . . . the appearance to the group is a central feature of early Christian resurrection claims" (157). Catchpole (2002) sees three appearance traditions behind the resurrection narratives: a group appearance to the disciples, an individual appearance to Simon, and a group appearance to the Emmaus disciples (152-53). Dunn (2003) sees multiple appearances (861-62). Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998) grant visionary religious experiences to Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene (454) but were doubtful of any group appearances (484). Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) sees multiple individual and multiple group appearances (98).

conclusion is granted by a nearly unanimous consensus of modern scholars and may, therefore, be added to our “historical bedrock.” Paula Fredriksen asserts that “the disciples’ conviction that they had seen the Risen Christ . . . [is part of] historical bedrock, facts known past doubting.”<sup>310</sup> E. P. Sanders agrees: “That Jesus’ followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgement, a fact.”<sup>311</sup> Wedderburn writes, “It is an indubitable historical datum that sometime, somehow the disciples came to believe that they had seen the risen Jesus.”<sup>312</sup>

These are only a sampling.<sup>313</sup> Habermas has catalogued the opinions of hundreds of scholars writing on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection in French, German, and English since 1975. His database divides the opinions into more than one hundred categories pertaining to questions and subquestions related to the resurrection of Jesus. He comments, “As firmly as ever, most contemporary scholars agree that, after Jesus’ death, his early followers had experiences that they at least believed were appearances of their risen Lord.”<sup>314</sup> Scholars differ, however, on the perceived nature of the experiences.<sup>315</sup>

### 4.3.3. The Conversion of the Church Persecutor Paul

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, better known in history as the apostle Paul, to an aggressive Christian missionary who was largely responsible for the early spread of the Church is a historical fact which must be adequately accounted for by any responsible historical hypothesis.<sup>316</sup>

In his letters to the churches in Galatia, Corinth, and Philippi, Paul himself writes of his conversion from being a persecutor of the church to one who strongly promoted the Christian message.<sup>317</sup> His hostile actions against the Church and his conversion

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<sup>310</sup> Fredriksen (1999), 264.

<sup>311</sup> Sanders (1993), 280; cf. 11.

<sup>312</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 13.

<sup>313</sup> See also Borg in Borg and Wright (1998), 135; Braaten (1999), 148; Carnley (1987), 224; Craffert (2002), 99-100; Ehrman (1999), 230-32; cf. (2000), 282-83; Lapidé (2002), 126; Lüdemann (1995), 80; Montefiore (2005), 105; Vermes (2008), 149; Viney (1989), 126; Wright (2003), 710.

<sup>314</sup> Habermas (“Mapping,” 2006), 79. Elsewhere Habermas (*Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 2003) provides a list of more than sixty “recent critical scholars who believe that Jesus’s disciples had real experiences that led them to conclude that they saw appearances of the risen Jesus, whether or not the resurrection actually occurred” (46-48n148).

<sup>315</sup> Craffert (2002), 91; Fredriksen (1999), 261-62; Habermas (*Resurrection Research*, 2005), 151; Sanders (1993), 280; Wedderburn (1999), 143.

<sup>316</sup> A detailed account of the life of Paul would, of course, take us far off topic. For recent treatments on the subject, see Bruce (1977); Crossan and Reed (2004); Kim (2002); Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, eds. (1993); Lüdemann (2002); Wenham (1995); Witherington (*The Paul Quest*, 1998); Wright (1997); Wright (*Paul*, 2005).

<sup>317</sup> Gal. 1:12-16, 22-23; 1 Cor. 15:9-10; Phil. 3:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:13. Koester (2000) doubts the Acts reports pertaining to the extent and manner in which Paul persecuted the Church: “It is unthinkable that Paul, equipped with letters from the high priest, could have taken Christians from outside Palestine to Jerusalem for punishment. Neither the high priest nor the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem ever had such powers of jurisdiction” (107). Instead, he suggests the persecutions took place in the local synagogues. Witherington (*Acts*, 1998) finds support for Acts in Josephus (*Ant.* 14:192-200): “There we are told that Julius Caesar confirmed such rights and privileges to the Jewish people and the high priest in particular, even though they were no longer a sovereign or independent state. This privilege may have still existed in Saul’s day” (316).

experience are also reported in Acts.<sup>318</sup> The story of Paul’s conversion from persecutor to promoter of the Church also appears to have been circulating around Judea within three years of his conversion, being hinted at in a statement by Paul to the Galatians. He tells them that during the period of three years to, perhaps, a decade or so after his conversion he was not known by sight to the believers in Judea. Despite this, these believers had heard of his conversion and were saying, ὁ διώκων ἡμᾶς ποτε νῦν εὐαγγελίζεται τὴν πίστιν ἣν ποτε ἐπόρθει (“The one who once persecuted us now preaches the faith which once he [sought to] destroy”), verifying that others either knew or had heard of his pre-Christian actions against the Church.<sup>319</sup> Thus, Paul’s notorious pre-Christian activities and conversion are multiply attested by Paul’s own testimony that he himself writes within roughly twenty to thirty years of the events, Luke’s record in Acts written thirty to sixty years of the events, and a story that was probably circulating among Christians in Galatia and that most likely dates to within three to a little more than ten years of Paul’s conversion.<sup>320</sup>

#### 4.3.3.1. Pauline Texts on Paul’s Conversion Experience

We will give consideration to the texts that specifically mention or may allude to Paul’s experience that led to his conversion to Christianity. We start with texts written by Paul himself.

##### 4.3.3.1.a. Galatians 1:11-19

Γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθῆν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον·<sup>12</sup> οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτὸ οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. . . .<sup>15</sup> Ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ<sup>16</sup> ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι<sup>17</sup> οὐδὲ ἀνήλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπήλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.<sup>18</sup> Ἐπειτα μετὰ ἔτη τρία ἀνήλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἱστορήσαι Κηφᾶν καὶ ἐπέμεινα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡμέρας δεκαπέντε,<sup>19</sup> ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου.

<sup>318</sup> Acts 7:58; 8:1–3. 22:1–5; 26:4–5, 9–11. In 22:4–5, Paul says that he persecuted the church to the death, arresting men and women, throwing them into prison, and finally bringing them to Jerusalem in order to be punished (ἄχρι θανάτου in 22:4 is not found in the LXX. In the New Testament it appears only here and in Rev. 2:10 and 12:11). Paul’s testimony in Acts 26:10 indicates that these persecutions included seeing Christians put to death. In Acts 26:4–5, Paul says that “all the Jews” knew of his prior life in Judaism as a strict Jew and is very similar to what he writes in Galatians 1:22–23. In Acts 26:9–11, he confesses to imprisoning many Christians, voting that they be put to death resulting in their execution, punishing them often, trying to make them blaspheme Christ, and persecuting them even outside of Jerusalem to foreign cities. Witherington (*Acts*, 1998): “The more one is inclined to believe Luke was a sometime companion of Paul, the more one is inclined to believe [sic.] in the veracity of his portrayal of the Apostle to the Gentiles” (308).

<sup>319</sup> Gal. 1:22-23; cf. Acts 9:21.

<sup>320</sup> It would be nice to have a letter written by Paul prior to his conversion that expresses his hatred for the Church or a mention of Saul by a Jewish source confirming his anti-Christian actions. Unfortunately, if any of these ever existed, they have not survived.



For I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel being preached by me is not according to man.<sup>12</sup> For neither from man did I receive it or was taught it, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ. . . .<sup>15</sup> But when the one who set me apart from my mother's womb and called [me] through his grace was pleased<sup>16</sup> to reveal his son in me, in order that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles (or nations), I did not consult immediately with flesh and blood.<sup>17</sup> Neither did I go up to Jerusalem to those apostles before me. But I went away to Arabia and again returned to Damascus.<sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.<sup>19</sup> But I did not see any other of the apostles except James the brother of the Lord.

Much discussion has occurred over this passage, specifically as it relates to Paul's conversion. What insights may we gain from him? Most scholars maintain that Paul is referring here to his conversion experience on the road to Damascus.<sup>321</sup> Some want to go further and propose that the words of Paul here suggest that his conversion experience did not involve an external appearance of the resurrected Jesus but rather it was something that occurred inside of him—perhaps a subjective vision or an epiphany.<sup>322</sup> In support of this proposal, these scholars note Paul's use of the term "revelation" in verse 12 to describe how he received the gospel that he preached and his statement in verse 16 that God "was pleased to reveal his son *in me*."

While this interpretation seems initially plausible, it is far from clear. The term ἀποκάλυψις is employed on a number of occasions throughout the Pauline corpus to refer to a physical revealing.<sup>323</sup> Even where Paul's use of the term on other occasions appears very close in meaning to our Galatians passage, it is uncertain that an internal experience is how Paul necessarily regarded divine revelations. For example, in 2 Corinthians 12:1 Paul says that he is about to report "visions and revelations of the Lord" he had received.<sup>324</sup> In the three verses that follow Paul claims to have been taken to heaven and that he is uncertain whether he was in or out of his body during the experience. In saying this, Paul seems to be inferring that the "revelation" was not merely something in his mind.

The ἐν ἐμοί of Galatians 1:16 is even more ambiguous. A number of scholars render it "in me"<sup>325</sup> while others "to me" or "through me [to the Gentiles]."<sup>326</sup> Here is how Paul uses the phrase elsewhere:

- Galatians 1:24: "they were glorifying God *in me*" (i.e., because of me)
- Galatians 2:20: "Christ lives *in me*"

<sup>321</sup> Dunn (2003), 857; 873.

<sup>322</sup> Carnley (1987), 209; Segal (2004), 407.

<sup>323</sup> Certain: Rom. 8:19; 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; Possible: Rom. 2:5.

<sup>324</sup> Note the ὄπτασις καὶ ἀποκάλυψις κυρίου of 2 Cor. 12:1 with ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ of Gal. 1:12.

<sup>325</sup> Bruce (1977), 75; Dunn (2003), 857, 873; Longenecker (2002), 30; Lüdemann (2002), 174; Morris (1996), 55-56.

<sup>326</sup> RSV, NRSV, NAB, NLT. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 264; Arichea and Nida (1993), 22; Borg and Crossan (2006), 206; Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 301; Wright (2003), 380. Elsewhere, Paul writes that the "mystery" made known is that Gentiles are now fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body of Christ, and fellow-partakers of the promise of the gospel (Eph. 3:1-11, especially 3:6). Paul asserts that he was specifically selected to bring this good news to the Gentiles (especially 3:2-3, 7-8).

- 1 Corinthians 9:15: Having mentioned his right to receive financial and material support from the Corinthian church as well as to take along a Christian wife on his journeys, Paul says that he has chosen not to and does not mention these things in order that “it may be [this way] *in me*” (i.e., he is not laying the ground that he might start claiming these rights)
- 1 Corinthians 14:11: Paul says that it is not beneficial for believers to speak in tongues to one another. For if Paul cannot understand what is being said, “I will be a foreigner to the one speaking and the one speaking a foreigner *in me*” (i.e., to me, from my point of view)
- 2 Corinthians 11:10: “The truth of Christ is *in me*” (i.e., I am telling you the truth of Christ)
- 2 Corinthians 13:3 “Since you are seeking proof of the one speaking *in me*: Christ, who is not weak toward you, but powerful in you” (i.e., they wanted proof that Christ was speaking through Paul)
- Romans 7:8: “through the commandment sin produced *in me* all kinds of wrong desires”
- Romans 7:17, 20: “sin which lives *in me*”
- Romans 7:18: “for I know that nothing good lives *in me*”
- Philippians 1:26: “your proud confidence *in me*”
- Philippians 1:30: “having the same conflict which you saw *in me*” (i.e., you saw me experiencing), and now hear [to be] *in me*” (i.e., you hear that I am experiencing)
- Philippians 4:9: “practice the things you have learned and received and heard and seen *in me*”
- Colossians 1:29: “his working that works powerfully *in me*”<sup>327</sup>

I have translated every occurrence as “in me,” although the reader will notice numerous shades of meaning. It seems clear that when Paul asserts that it pleased God “to reveal his son *in me*” that he could with *at least* equal plausibility have been meaning “to reveal his son *to me*.” Moreover, a number of commentators interpret Paul in Galatians 1:16 as focusing on the inward illumination that coincided with his external experience.<sup>328</sup>

My opinion is that in Galatians 1:16 it is unclear whether Paul is revealing some of his thoughts pertaining to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body, and if he is, his expression of them is quite ambiguous. As a result, one’s view of the resurrection of Jesus will most likely be the guiding force behind their exegesis of Galatians 1:16. Having observed other passages in Paul related to the resurrection of Jesus, it is clear to me that he thought of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of an event that revived his corpse and transformed it into a new and immortal body. Therefore, *if* Paul is referring to his conversion experience in Galatians 1, it is my opinion that he is not conveying even indirectly that he understood that experience as being only an internal phenomenon and that the resurrected Jesus is an ethereal being. For that would be in

<sup>327</sup> See also 1 Tim. 1:16.

<sup>328</sup> Bruce (1982), 92; cf. (1977), 75; Bryskog (2002), 227; See also Hendriksen (1995), 53; Longenecker (1990), 30. For Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), “Paul is referring to what God did in his heart, not the mode of the appearance which he saw” (81). Witherington (*Acts*, 1998) maintains that the real issue in Galatians is “the *content*” of the gospel revealed to Paul. It is “a revelation *about* the Son of God” *in me* [i.e., to Paul], specifically that the benefits of Christ were available to Gentiles (314; cf. *Paul*, 1998, 75).

stark contrast to everything Paul has taught about the resurrection elsewhere. To make such a proposal given the amount of ambiguity present in this passage betrays the canons of sound exegesis.<sup>329</sup> Ambiguous passages must be interpreted in light of clear passages by the same author. We should never do violence to multiple clear texts in order to make them agree with a desired interpretation of a text that possesses significant ambiguity.

#### 4.3.3.1.b. 1 Corinthians 9:1

οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐώρακα;

Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

This statement only informs us that Paul believed he had seen Jesus. No details pertaining to the appearance are provided.<sup>330</sup>

#### 4.3.3.1.c. 1 Corinthians 15:8

ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κάμοί.

<sup>329</sup> Price notes what he understands as a contradiction between what Paul says here and elsewhere (see Price's comments during "Gary Habermas, Robert Price, Mike Licona and Richard Spencer Debate the Resurrection of Jesus" on Infidel Radio, Jan. 17, 2007). Paul's statement in Galatians 1:12 and the emphatic tenor throughout the rest of the passage is that he received this revelation from God and not from any man. However, in 1 Corinthians 15:3 he writes, "For I delivered to you of first importance what I also received." This statement is followed by the teachings of the death, burial, resurrection, and post-mortem appearances of Jesus. Simply put, in 1 Corinthians Paul states that he received the gospel from others whereas in Galatians he says that he did not receive it from man but from God. This contradiction does not seem at all apparent to me. As we will discuss in the following chapter, there is virtually unanimous agreement among New Testament scholars from numerous theological and philosophical persuasions that in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. Paul is providing tradition he had received. It is this tradition in its formal structure, then, that he received from man and passed along to the Corinthians rather than the gospel. This by no means suggests that Paul is contradicting himself in Galatians 1:11ff., as Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998) explains: "[In Galatians 1:11-12] Paul does not thereby claim that he did not learn summaries of the so-called kerygma—the first creedal statements of the Jesus movement—from his predecessors, summaries like the one he cites in 1 Cor 15:3-8: Christ died, was buried, rose on the third day, and appeared to several of us. He is referring rather to what he calls 'the truth of the gospel'—the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus from Christian behavior, especially with respect to circumcision and observing kosher. The significance of Jesus' death—that no one is justified by observing circumcision and kosher—he learned, so he claims, not from the Jerusalem leaders, Cephas (Peter), James, and John, but directly from Jesus Christ (Gal 2:1-14)" (458). Moreover, Gerhardsson (1998) notes that in 1 Cor. 15:1-2 Paul reminds the Corinthians of what they received (ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε), that is the word (τῶν λόγων) he had preached to them. "He thus made use, when preaching the gospel, of a logos which he himself had received as authoritative tradition (ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε). How are we to reconcile this with his definite denial of having received the gospel by means of human mediation? Here we must draw a distinction between τὸ εὐαγγέλιον and ὁ λόγος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. When we read, in the passage of tradition which describes Peter's authorization as chief Apostle (Matt. 16.16 ff.), that his insight that Jesus was the Son of God was not due to flesh and blood, this does not imply that he received no instruction from Jesus or about Jesus. The same is true of Paul. His declaration that he did not receive 'his gospel' from man does not mean that he received no teaching, no tradition whatever, derived from the Lord. Here he states expressly that he received the logos of the gospel as authoritative tradition. He says the same thing, as we shall see, about other parts of this *didache*. He has thus received authoritative tradition from, and about, the Lord" (296). Also see Wenham (1995), 396; Wright (2003), 319.

<sup>330</sup> See section 4.3.2.1.d above for a discussion of the term ἐώρακα (ὄραω).

And last of all as to one untimely born he appeared to me.

This text has likewise been discussed above.<sup>331</sup> It most likely is a supplement by Paul to the remnants of the early tradition included in his letter. We do not find specific details about the appearance to Paul other than its chronological order in relation to the other appearances.

#### 4.3.3.1.d. 2 Corinthians 4:6

ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὁ εἰπὼν· ἐκ σκοτῶν φῶς λάμψει, ὃς ἔλαμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ [Ἰησοῦ] Χριστοῦ.

For God, the One who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” is He who shined in our hearts with light [or enlightenment] of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>332</sup>

A number of scholars have proposed that Paul is or may be referring to his conversion experience in this text.<sup>333</sup> Harris notes “the many similarities in thought and diction between 2 Cor. 4:6 and the three Lukan accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts.”<sup>334</sup> In each, the inward and outward characteristics of Paul’s conversion experience are expressed, although Paul emphasizes the inward traits in 2 Corinthians 4:6—and Galatians 1:12, 15-16 for that matter—while Luke places an emphasis on the external components in his three accounts of the event.<sup>335</sup>

If the “light” to which Paul refers alludes to the bright light Luke describes in the three Acts texts we will examine momentarily, it would double up as a description of the revelation and good news that is eternity-changing. This would be in line with Harris’s proposal.<sup>336</sup> However, we must also regard it as possible that Luke has added an external aspect to Paul’s conversion experience of which Paul knew nothing and that 2 Corinthians 4:6 is referring only to the inward illumination aspect of Paul’s experience.

While some exegetes see in 2 Corinthians 4:6 support for Luke’s report of Paul’s conversion experience in Acts, others see support for an interpretation of Paul’s experience as an internal illumination, moment of insight, or epiphany of a sort. It is difficult to choose between the two if the text is taken in isolation. But a responsible exegesis should consider all of Paul’s comments on the subject. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul writes of the God “who shined in *our* hearts,” which appears to include the Corinthian believers. Earlier he wrote that the risen Jesus had appeared to him “last

<sup>331</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d, sections 4.3.2.1.a above and 4.3.3.9.b below.

<sup>332</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 4:4.

<sup>333</sup> Bruce (1977) opines that Paul’s language here “perhaps implies a reminiscence of the same event” (75) while Harris (2005, 334) and Lüdemann (2002, 167-74) are confident.

<sup>334</sup> Harris (2005), 334.

<sup>335</sup> Harris acknowledges the presence of a tension in his view. In 2 Cor. 4:6, God has shone in “your hearts” (pl./pl.), whereas in 6:11 it is “our heart” (pl./s.). He answers that Paul may be wishing to convey that the internal aspect of his experience is common to all Christian conversion experiences (334).

<sup>336</sup> Lüdemann (2004) likewise understands the mention of “light” as a possible reference to Paul’s Damascus experience (46-47).

of all” (1 Cor. 15:8). We may infer that Paul knew of a major difference between his experience and those of the Corinthian believers: He was the recipient of an appearance of the risen Jesus.<sup>337</sup> Thus, not only is it unlikely that the “light” of which Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:6 is a reference to the bright light found in the appearance to Paul reported in Acts, it is at least equally unlikely that the shining in the heart in 2 Corinthians 4:6 was the only aspect of Paul’s conversion experience. Paul may have been speaking solely of the insightful aspect of his experience in this text. But we need not conclude that this is all there was to it any more than one describing the peace he or she received through counseling excludes the external aspect of the experience: the counselor.

#### 4.3.3.1.e. 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων, εἴτε ἐν σώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, ἀρπαγέντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ. <sup>3</sup> καὶ οἶδα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον, εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, <sup>4</sup> ὅτι ἠρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in or out of the body I do not know, God knows—was taken up to the third heaven. <sup>3</sup> And I know such a man, whether in or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>4</sup> He was taken up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words that are not permissible for a human to utter.

Funk and the Jesus Seminar suggest that this text “depicts a vision of his own that may be his account of the appearance to him. These and other epiphanies provide essential clues to the nature of the appearances.”<sup>338</sup> That Paul is referring to his Damascus road experience here seems highly unlikely, since he states that this vision occurred fourteen years prior (12:2). If 2 Corinthians was composed around AD 56, this places Paul’s vision around AD 42, about a decade after his conversion. If we accept the later dating of Galatians at AD 55 and that Paul wrote it shortly after the Jerusalem Counsel to which he refers, this places Paul’s conversion no later than seventeen years before in AD 38, still too early to have been the experience that he describes in 2 Corinthians 12.<sup>339</sup>

Our brief survey of five Pauline texts thought to be referring to his conversion experience has yielded precious little information pertaining to that experience. We may say that Paul’s conversion experience provided illumination or insight into God’s glory through Christ, but that this was not its only aspect. We may also conclude that, whatever its nature, he viewed it as the last appearance made by the risen Jesus up to the time he had written 1 Corinthians (c. AD 54-55).

<sup>337</sup> See also Acts 9:10 where the appearance to Paul is distinguished from a “vision” (ὄραματι) in which the Lord appears to Ananias after he appeared to Paul.

<sup>338</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 452. Crossan (1994) regards this text as a possible reference to Paul’s conversion experience (168); cf. Crossan (1995) 204.

<sup>339</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 123; Wright (2003), 387.



#### 4.3.3.2. Acts Texts on Paul's Conversion Experience

Many more details of Paul's conversion experience have been reported by Luke in his three accounts of the event. The value of these reports to our investigation largely hinges upon how one answers two questions: Was Luke a traveling companion of Paul, and how much literary freedom did Luke take when providing the reports? Perhaps one half or more of modern English-speaking commentators on Acts maintain that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul.<sup>340</sup> There is no consensus opinion pertaining to the extent of liberties Luke took in writing Acts. Whatever one believes regarding to the historicity of Jesus' virgin birth or the presence of angels at the empty tomb will impact one's opinion pertaining to how much liberty Luke took. Since we are attempting to employ only the historical bedrock and there is no consensus concerning these two questions, we will not take a position on the three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts. Instead, we will only claim that they provide a *possible* account of his conversion experience.

Since our discussion of Paul's conversion experience and weighing of hypotheses in the chapter that follows may require an extent of interaction with Luke's rendition(s) of the event, I will provide his three accounts followed by a few observations.

##### 4.3.3.2.a. Acts 9:3-20

Ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξειν τῇ Δαμασκῶ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ <sup>4</sup> καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; <sup>5</sup> εἶπεν δέ· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· <sup>6</sup> ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ λαληθήσεταιί σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν· <sup>7</sup> οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες· <sup>8</sup> ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν· <sup>9</sup> καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν· <sup>10</sup> Ἦν δέ τις μαθητῆς ἐν Δαμασκῶ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὄραματι ὁ κύριος· Ἀνανία· ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε· <sup>11</sup> ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν· ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθείαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσέα· ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται <sup>12</sup> καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα [ἐν ὄραματι] Ἀνανίαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ [τὰς] χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ· <sup>13</sup> ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας· κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἀγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ· <sup>14</sup> καὶ ᾧδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δεῖν πάντα τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου· <sup>15</sup> εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· πορεύου, ὅτι σκευὸς ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἔθνων τε καὶ βασιλέων υἰῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ· <sup>16</sup> ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν· <sup>17</sup> Ἀπῆλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ ἐπιθεὶς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθείς σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἢ ἥρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἁγίου· <sup>18</sup> καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψέν τε καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη <sup>19</sup> καὶ λαβὼν τροφήν ἐνίσχυσεν· Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐν Δαμασκῶ μαθητῶν ἡμέρας τινὰς <sup>20</sup> καὶ

<sup>340</sup> I am grateful to Craig Keener who provided this figure as a rough estimate in a personal email correspondence dated March 27, 2008. Keener's massive commentary on Acts is currently in the editing process. Of course, like other estimates pertaining to a consensus, this is an educated hunch rather than an actual count.

εὐθέως ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς ἐκήρυσσεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

Now as he was traveling, he came near Damascus. And, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed brightly around him.<sup>4</sup> And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”<sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he *answered*, “I am Jesus whom you persecute.<sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city and you will be told what you must do.”<sup>7</sup> And the men traveling with him had been standing speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.<sup>341 8</sup> And Paul rose up from the ground and, although his eyes were open, he could see nothing. And leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.<sup>9</sup> And he was without sight for three days and he did not eat or drink.<sup>10</sup> Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord spoke to him in a vision. And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”<sup>11</sup> And the Lord *said* to him, “Arise *and* go to Straight Street and seek in the house of Judas a Tarsian named Saul. For, behold, he is praying.<sup>12</sup> And he saw [in a vision] a man named Ananias come and lay hands on him in order that he may receive sight.”<sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how much evil he did to your saints in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind everyone calling on your name.”<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, because he is to me a chosen instrument. This one is to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.<sup>16</sup> For I myself will make known to him how much he must suffer for my name.”<sup>17</sup> Ananias went away and came into the house, and laying his hands upon him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me, [that is,] Jesus who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming, in order that you may receive your sight and may be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes, he received his sight, rose up and was baptized.<sup>19</sup> He took food and was strengthened. And he was with the disciples in Damascus for several days.<sup>20</sup> And immediately, he began preaching in the synagogues, “This one is the Son of God.”

#### 4.3.3.2.b. Acts 22:6-16

Ἐγένετο δέ μοι πορευομένῳ καὶ ἐγγίζοντι τῇ Δαμασκῶ περιῶν ἐξαιφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι φῶς ἱκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ, <sup>7</sup> ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; <sup>8</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην· τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς με· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος, ὃν σὺ διώκεις. <sup>9</sup> οἱ δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ ὄντες τὸ μὲν φῶς ἐθεάσαντο τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι. <sup>10</sup> εἶπον δέ· τί ποιήσω, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με· ἀναστὰς πορεύου εἰς Δαμασκὸν κακεῖ σοι λαληθήσεται περὶ πάντων ὧν τέτακταί σοι ποιῆσαι. <sup>11</sup> ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐνόησον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτός ἐκείνου, χειραγωγούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συνόντων μοι ἦλθον εἰς Δαμασκόν. <sup>12</sup> Ἀνανίας δὲ τις, ἀνὴρ εὐλαβῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον, μαρτυρούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων, <sup>13</sup> ἔλθων πρὸς με καὶ ἐπιστάς εἶπέν μοι· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ἀνάβλεψον. καὶ γὰρ αὕτῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἀνέβλεψα εἰς αὐτόν. <sup>14</sup> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό

<sup>341</sup> While the masculine μηδένα could be translated “nothing,” φῶς in 9:3 is neuter. Accordingly, I have offered the translation “no one,” since Luke would probably have used the neuter μηδέν if either he was referring to the flash of light or the entire experience. Indeed, Luke uses the neuter οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν to say just that in the verse that immediately follows (9:8).

σε γινῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, <sup>15</sup> ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἑώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας. <sup>16</sup> καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

And while on my way and approaching Damascus, it happened to me about midday that suddenly, an intense light from heaven flashed around me. <sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” <sup>8</sup> And I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” He said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you persecute.” <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not hear the voice of the one speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I asked, “What should I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus and it will be told to you everything that has been arranged for you to do.” <sup>11</sup> And since I could not see because of the glory of that light, I came into Damascus being led by the hand by those with me. <sup>12</sup> Now a certain Ananias, a pious man according to the Law being testified by all of the Jews living there, <sup>13</sup> came to me and standing near said to me, “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” And that very hour, I looked up and saw him. <sup>14</sup> He said, “The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear the voice from his mouth.” <sup>15</sup> For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now, why do you delay? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

#### 4.3.3.2.c. Acts 26:12-18

Ἐν οἷς πορευόμενος εἰς τὴν Δαμασκὸν μετ’ ἐξουσίας καὶ ἐπιτροπῆς τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων <sup>13</sup> ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμπαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους. <sup>14</sup> πάντων τε καταπεσόντων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἤκουσα φωνὴν λέγουσαν πρὸς με τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζεις. <sup>15</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν· ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις. <sup>16</sup> ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στήθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδές [με] ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι, <sup>17</sup> ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε <sup>18</sup> ἀνοῖξαι ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν, τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκοτῶν εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρον ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ.

In these things, I proceeded to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> In the middle of the day during my journey I saw, King, from heaven, brighter than the sun, a light *which* shined around me and those going with me. <sup>14</sup> And all of us having fallen down to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*” <sup>15</sup> And I said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom you persecute.” <sup>16</sup> But get up and stand on your feet. For to this I have appeared to you, to appoint you as an assistant and witness to the things which you saw [me] and

<sup>342</sup> Harris (2005): “In Acts 22:14 ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ would seem to imply that the preceding statement ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον includes the seeing of Christ’s face” (334n111).

to those in which I will appear to you, <sup>17</sup> rescuing you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I am sending you, <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, to turn from darkness unto light and from the authority of Satan to God, for them to receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.”

#### 4.3.3.3. Similarities Between Paul and Acts Texts

While we did not see corroboration of the Acts accounts in 2 Corinthians 4:6, specifically the “light,” we find corroboration of other details from a few of Paul’s other letters. From these we learn that Paul was a zealous Jew, advancing beyond his peers, extremely zealous for the traditions of the fathers (Gal. 1:14), a circumcised Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, zealous, righteous according to the Law (Phil. 3:5-6). Compare this with his words reported in Acts that he was brought up in Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of the fathers, zealous for God (Acts 22:3), lived among Jerusalem Jews from his youth, and was a Pharisee according to the strictest sect (Acts 26:4-5).<sup>343</sup> In the letters we read that Paul persecuted the Church beyond measure and tried to destroy it (Gal. 1:13, 23; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6) and was a blasphemer, persecutor, violent aggressor, and the foremost of sinners because of these actions (1 Tim. 1:13-16). Compare these with Acts where he went door to door in Jerusalem arresting and imprisoning Christians (8:3), was passionate about threatening and murdering Christians, went to the high priest and obtained letters to the synagogues in Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem (9:1-2), persecuted Christians unto death, arresting and imprisoning men and women, obtained letters from the high priest and entire Council of elders to the Jews in Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment (22:4-5), felt obligated to be hostile against the Church, received authority from the chief priest to imprison and vote against Jerusalem Christians resulting in their executions, punished them in the synagogues, compelled them to blaspheme (Christ), was extremely enraged against Christians, persecuted them outside of Jerusalem, and even set out for Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests (26:9-12). In Paul’s letters and Acts we read that the risen Jesus appeared to Paul (Gal. 1:12, 16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-20; 26:13-18). In both we also learn of Paul’s commissioning by God to preach to the Gentiles and Jews (Gal. 1:16; Acts 9:15; 26:17-18), and that he went to Damascus after his experience (Gal. 1:17; Acts 9:8; 22:10-11; 26:20).<sup>344</sup>

Given the number of details corroborated by Acts, Allison comments, “We can be fairly certain that the author of Acts had access to a traditional call story that included most or all of the elements just enumerated, a story that, even if expanded with legendary elements and revised by Luke, goes back ultimately to Paul’s own narrative.”<sup>345</sup> On the other hand, it is possible that Luke had Paul’s letters before him and invented narratives in which he situated the details found in the letters.

<sup>343</sup> Witherington (*Paul*, 1998) asserts that the majority of Acts specialists accept the testimony of Acts 22:3 that Paul was raised and educated in Jerusalem (306-07). One such scholar is F. F. Bruce, “Paul in Acts and Letters” in Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, eds. (1993), 682. Against reports that Paul lived in Jerusalem, Koester (2000) asserts that Paul “was probably a resident” in Damascus to where his persecuting activities were confined (108; cf. 107-08 for his reasons).

<sup>344</sup> However, Gal. 1:17 implies that he left Damascus for Arabia before returning to Damascus.

<sup>345</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 263.

#### 4.3.3.4. Differences among the Acts Texts

The observant reader will also note numerous similarities and differences among the three accounts in Acts. The differences primarily involve Paul’s traveling companions.

- Light: Not excluded in 9:3-7; present in 22:9 and 26:13
- Voice: Present in 9:7; absent in 22:9; not excluded in 26:13-14
- Posture: Standing in 9:7; not specified in 22:6-9; on ground in 26:14

There appear to be contradictions within Luke’s accounts pertaining to whether Paul’s traveling companions heard the voice and their posture at the time. What may be said of these?

Regarding whether they heard the voice, there are 153 occurrences of ἀκούω in Luke’s writings (Luke: 65; Acts: 88). Most of these refer simply to “hearing.” Luke employs it 57 times to refer to “listening with an intent to understand”<sup>346</sup> and seven occurrences where it means “to obey.”<sup>347</sup>

Some have noted that in Acts 22:9 ἀκούω appears with the accusative and can be understood as meaning “to understand.” Robertson writes, “The accusative (case of extent) accents the intellectual apprehension of the sound, while the genitive (specifying case) calls attention to the sound of the voice without accenting the sense.”<sup>348</sup> However, Wallace regards this as “doubtful,” since the New Testament literature is “filled with examples” of where ἀκούω plus the genitive is employed to mean “understanding” and ἀκούω plus the accusative “*where little or no comprehension takes place*” (ital. his). He adds, “The exceptions, in fact, are seemingly more numerous than the rule!”<sup>349</sup>

We may likewise note that Luke does not appear to prefer use of this distinction elsewhere where he has a clear opportunity to employ it, although the very few examples we have give us great pause toward making a firm conclusion on the matter. Before turning to Luke, it may be helpful to observe a text to which Luke (or Jesus) was referring and to observe how it was employed by others.

#### Isaiah 6:9-10 (LXX)

πορεύθητι καὶ εἶπὸν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδῃτε. <sup>10</sup> ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς

<sup>346</sup> Luke 2:46, 47; 5:1, 15; 6:18, 27, 47, 49; 8:8, 10, 18, 21; 10:39; 11:28, 31; 14:35 (2x); 15:1; 16:14, 29, 31; 18:6; 19:11, 48; 20:45; 21:38; Acts 2:6, 8, 11, 22; 7:2; 10:22, 33, 44; 13:7, 16, 44; 14:9; 15:7, 12, 13; 16:14; 17:21, 32 (*bis*); 22:1, 22; 24:4, 24; 25:22 (2x); 26:3, 29; 28:22, 26, 27 (2x), 28.

<sup>347</sup> Luke 8:8; 9:35; 10:16 (2x); Acts 3:22, 23; 4:19.

<sup>348</sup> Robertson (1934), 506. See also Witherington (*Acts*, 1998), 312.

<sup>349</sup> Wallace (1996), 133.



“Go and say to this people, ‘Hearing, you will hear and never understand and seeing you will see and never perceive.’<sup>10</sup> For the heart of this people has become insensitive and their ears dull of hearing and their eyes have closed, lest they would see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand in their heart and turn and I heal them.”

#### Matthew 13:13-15

διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ, ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνίουσιν,<sup>14</sup> καὶ ἀναπληροῦται αὐτοῖς ἡ προφητεία Ἰσαΐου ἣ λέγουσα· ἀκοῆ ἄκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε, καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε.<sup>15</sup> Ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδιά τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου, καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν, μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνώσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

Because of this, I speak to them in parables. For seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor do they understand.<sup>14</sup> And to them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, “Hearing, you will hear and never understand and seeing you will see and never perceive.”<sup>15</sup> For the heart of this people has become insensitive and [their] ears dull of hearing and their eyes have closed, lest they would see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand in their heart and turn and I heal them.”

#### Acts 28:26-27

πορεύθητι πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ εἰπὸν· ἀκοῆ ἄκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε.<sup>27</sup> Ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδιά τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν· μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνώσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

“Go to this people and say, ‘Hearing, you will hear and never understand and seeing you will see and never perceive.’<sup>27</sup> For the heart of this people has become insensitive and [their] ears dull of hearing and their eyes have closed, lest they would see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand in their heart and turn and I heal them.”

#### John 12:40

τετύφλωκεν αὐτῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐπώρωσεν αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν, ἵνα μὴ ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ νοήσωσιν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ στραφῶσιν, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and they would not understand with their heart and they would turn and I heal them.

In Isaiah, Matthew, Acts, and John, ears, eyes, and the heart are all mentioned in relation to understanding. In Matthew, Jesus uses a clear play on the terms βλέπω and ἀκούω, being employed as physical senses and also of understanding: βλέποντες οὐ

βλέπουσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνίουσιν. This is not repeated elsewhere.

Luke's Jesus appears to have Isaiah 6:9 in mind.

Luke 8:10

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὑμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς, ἵνα βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν.

And he said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the remaining *it is* in parables, in order that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand."<sup>350</sup>

We observe that, bracketing Acts 22:9, Luke never employed ἀκούω in a clear sense of "to understand," although it was certainly used in that sense by others in his day (Matt. 13:13). Moreover, it should be remembered that while various definitions of terms appear in our Greek lexicons, these are only to assist us in our understanding of how the terms were employed and that nuances are common so that the lines separating one definition from another are often blurred. For example, hearing accompanied by understanding appears to be strongly implied on numerous occasions in Acts (2:6, 8, 11; 10:44; 13:7 [12]; 14:9; 15:7; 16:14; 22:22; 24:24 [25]; 28:22 [24], 28).

In summary, it is *possible* that a contradiction exists pertaining to whether Paul's traveling companions heard the voice that spoke to him (9:7; 22:9). But the presence of a contradiction should not be stated with any certainty (e.g., *probable*). It is one thing to note a contradiction between two authors. However, it is another thing to claim that an author is contradicting himself, within his same writing no less. Unless Luke was being careless, it seems to me that it is better to be charitable in our interpretations of surface contradictions within the same work as long as they do not require much strain. The following translation is plausible, given numerous occurrences in Acts where ἀκούω refers to hearing with understanding: "Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not *understand* the voice of the one speaking to me."<sup>351</sup>

This brings us to our next difference among the three accounts pertaining to the posture of Paul's traveling companions during the experience. They are standing in 9:7, but are on the ground in 26:14. At first glance, this seems to present a more dramatic difference than what we find in the question of whether they heard the voice. But a closer look reveals a simple resolution. There are 26 occurrences of ἴστημι in

<sup>350</sup> Mark appears to have Jeremiah rather than Isaiah in mind. Mark 8:18: ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὠτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε (Having eyes they do not see and having ears they do not hear); Jer. 5:21 (LXX): ἀκούσατε δὴ ταῦτα λαὸς μωρὸς καὶ ἀκάρδιος ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ οὐ βλέπουσιν ὠτα αὐτοῖς καὶ οὐκ ἀκούουσιν (Now hear this, foolish and heartless people, who have eyes and do not see, who have ears and do not hear). See also Ezek. 12:2.

<sup>351</sup> So with the ESV, GWN, NAU, NET, NIB, NIV, NLT.

Luke's Gospel and 35 in Acts.<sup>352</sup> Luke employs ἵστημι in the sense of “stopped,”<sup>353</sup> being stationary or in a fixed position,<sup>354</sup> to be present,<sup>355</sup> to put forward,<sup>356</sup> to remain intact,<sup>357</sup> and to appoint or hold to one's account.<sup>358</sup> In Luke 7:38 while Jesus is reclining to eat in the house of Simon the Pharisee, an immoral woman stood (στᾶσα) behind him and wet his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with perfume. Since Jesus is reclining, it is difficult to interpret the woman's position of στᾶσα as “standing up” while she is honoring Jesus. She would need to be an extraordinary gymnast! The meaning of remaining in a particular location should be preferred.

Of the 61 occurrences of ἵστημι in Luke/Acts, 16 percent refer to being stopped, in a stationary or fixed position, present, or together.<sup>359</sup> Thus, one need not strain in the least to interpret Acts 9:7 as follows: “And the men traveling with him *remained with him* speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.”<sup>360</sup> If this interpretation is correct, the posture of Paul's traveling companions is not stated other than that they were with him. All we can say on this matter is that it is not at all clear that the differences between the accounts often cited are contradictory.

We may likewise discuss the differences among the accounts pertaining to what Jesus said to Paul. All three accounts agree on a number of details pertaining to the conversation between Jesus and Paul.

*Jesus:* “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (9:4; 22:7; 26:14) 26:14 adds, “*It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*”

*Saul:* “Who are you, Lord?” (9:5; 22:8; 26:15)

*Jesus:* “I am Jesus (of Nazareth—22:8) whom you persecute.” (9:5; 22:8; 26:15)

*Saul:* “What should I do, Lord?” (22:10 only)

*Jesus:* “Get up and enter the city and you will be told what you must do.” (9:6)

“Arise and go into Damascus and it will be told to you everything that has been arranged for you to do.” (22:10)

<sup>352</sup> Luke 1:11; 4:9; 5:1, 2; 6:8 (2x), 17; 7:14, 38; 8:20, 44; 9:27, 47; 11:18; 13:25; 17:12; 18:11, 13, 40; 19:8; 21:36; 23:10, 35, 49; 24:17, 36; Acts 1:11, 23; 2:14; 3:8; 4:7, 14; 5:20, 23, 25, 27; 6:6, 13; 7:33, 55, 56, 60, 60; 8:38; 9:7; 10:30; 11:13; 12:14; 16:9; 17:22, 31; 21:40; 22:25, 30; 24:20, 21; 25:10, 18; 26:6, 16, 22; 27:21.

<sup>353</sup> Luke 5:2; 7:14; 8:44; 18:40; 19:8; 24:17; Acts 8:38. Similar to a soldier's response when ordered to “Stand down.”

<sup>354</sup> Luke 7:38.

<sup>355</sup> Luke 9:27.

<sup>356</sup> Acts 1:23.

<sup>357</sup> Luke 11:18.

<sup>358</sup> Acts 7:60; 17:31.

<sup>359</sup> Luke 5:2; 7:14, 38; 8:44; 9:27; 11:18; 18:40; 19:8; 24:17; Acts 8:38.

<sup>360</sup> This solution may likewise be proposed to solve the tension between Luke's report that the two angels were “standing” (ἐπέστησαν) in the tomb (Luke 24:4) as opposed to reports by Mark 16:5 (καθήμενον), Matt. 28:2 (ἐκάθητο), and John 20:12 (καθεζομένους) that he or they were sitting.

“Get up and stand on your feet. For to this I have appeared to you, to appoint you as an assistant and witness to the things which you saw [me] and to those in which I will appear to you, rescuing you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I am sending you, to open their eyes, to turn from darkness unto light and from the authority of Satan to God, for them to receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.” (26:16-18)

Paul was blinded by the light and had to be led by his traveling companions.

There are slight differences between the accounts in the conversation between Paul and Ananias in Damascus. In Acts 9:11-16, there is first a conversation between the Lord and Ananias in a vision:

“Arise *and* go to Straight Street and seek in the house of Judas a Tarsian named Saul. For, behold, he is praying.<sup>12</sup> And he saw [in a vision] a man named Ananias come and lay hands on him in order that he may receive sight.”<sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how much evil he did to your saints in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind everyone calling on your name.”<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, because he is to me a chosen instrument. This one is to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.<sup>16</sup> For I myself will make known to him how much he must suffer for my name.”

When he arrives at the house where Saul is staying, Ananias says,

9:17-18: “Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me, [that is,] Jesus who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming, in order that you may receive your sight and may be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Paul regained his sight, got up and was baptized.

22:13-16: “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” After Paul regained his sight, Ananias said, “The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear the voice from his mouth. For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you delay? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

It is obvious in these passages that Luke is not attempting to provide a word-for-word accounting of the event. He knows what he has written earlier and is paraphrasing. In Acts 26:16-18, Luke provides additional details pertaining to Jesus’ words to Paul on the road to Damascus than he has in his two previous accounts. Only in Acts 9:10-16 does Luke provide details of the conversation between the Lord and Ananias, although it is assumed in 22:12. There is no reason to require Luke to recount every detail in all three accounts. Indeed, since Acts 22 and 26 are direct speeches, we expect that Luke is already reporting summaries of what was said.<sup>361</sup> Perhaps he is providing additional details in the other renditions of the event.<sup>362</sup>

<sup>361</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.3. See also Witherington (*Acts*, 1998), 311-13.

<sup>362</sup> Soards (1994): “Luke has a well-known practice of omitting material from one context and then using it later in another story” (207n52).

We have already determined that, given the lack of strong agreement pertaining to the reliability of the three Acts accounts, we will regard them as *possible* sources for obtaining information pertaining to Paul's conversion experience. Keeping the limited historical value of these accounts in mind, we note that they report that Paul's experience, perceived as the risen Jesus appearing to him, involved both visual and auditory components. Paul saw a very bright light which he believed to have been Jesus himself (22:14) and heard the voice of Jesus which communicated to him specific information within a dialogue. Paul believed that his experience differed from a vision that had no external reality in the material world, given his "last of all" statement in 1 Corinthians 15:8 and with Acts 9:10 and Luke's report that his traveling companions perceived portions of the audio and visual aspects of the experience, although to a limited extent.<sup>363</sup>

#### 4.3.3.5. Addressing Others

While we are intentionally restraining our use of the Acts accounts of Paul's conversion experience in our historical investigation, we may use the results of our survey to assess the proposals of a few. Borg writes, "Paul saw a great light and heard the voice of Jesus. Those traveling with Paul did not share the experience, indicating that it was a private and not a public experience. It was what is commonly called a vision."<sup>364</sup> However, our observations led us to a different conclusion. If Borg is going to include the Acts accounts as Paul's recollections of his conversion experience (which he does), he should certainly take them in light of what Paul himself says about the experience in his letters. As just stated in the previous paragraph, in 1 Corinthians 15:8 Paul tells us that he regarded his conversion experience as the last post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to others, at least of the same nature. In Acts 9:10, Luke reports that Jesus appeared to Ananias "in a vision" (ἐν ὁράματι) sometime after appearing to Paul, indicating that it is not of the same sort as what Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. Moreover, the Acts accounts lead us to the conclusion that Paul's traveling companions were partakers of the experience, although to a limited extent. Contrary to Borg's assertion, the experience was shared and it was public.

Allison comments that Christians continued to report christophanies (Acts 7:56; Rev 1:9-10) and that Acts and Paul report several other appearances of Jesus to Paul (Acts 18:9; 22:18; 23:11; 2 Cor. 12:8-9).<sup>365</sup> But we need to remember that these appearances were different in Paul's eyes, as described both by Paul in his own words and in words attributed to him in Acts. In Acts 18:9, Jesus speaks to Paul "through a vision" (δι' ὁράματος). In Acts 22:17-18, Paul says that Jesus appeared to him after "he fell into a trance" (γενέσθαι με ἐν ἐκστάσει). In Acts 23:11, Jesus appeared to Paul at night. Did this occur in a dream? If it was an appearance in the same room as Paul, was it of the same nature as his conversion experience? The text does not say. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, there are no details pertaining to the nature of the communication between Jesus and Paul regarding his thorn in the flesh. In the others, there is no indication that anyone else experienced any aspect of Stephen's vision in Acts 7:55-56. In Acts 26:19 Paul refers to his conversion experience as "a heavenly

<sup>363</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 75, 393.

<sup>364</sup> Borg (2006), 277.

<sup>365</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 260-61.



vision” (τῆ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ). However, as earlier noted, there are only five occurrences of this term in the New Testament literature and its meaning in a text such as this one is ambiguous, since each of the occurrences may refer to natural sight of something in space-time or visionary sight where only those permitted are able to see.<sup>366</sup> In Revelation 1:9-10, John said he was “in the Spirit” when the experience occurred. His similar words in 4:10 may indicate that this was not something that occurred in space-time. If these appearances are different in nature than Paul’s conversion experience, the continued christophanies appealed to by Allison tell us nothing about Paul’s conversion experience.

Segal asserts that the experience Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 is similar to his conversion experience in Acts.<sup>367</sup> But this seems a bit of a stretch. In the former, Paul was not certain whether he was in or out of his body when he was caught up into Paradise, and heard words he was forbidden to repeat—which is in line with later Rabbinic rules.<sup>368</sup> In the latter, Paul is in his body, in a specific location on earth, among others who partook of the experience, eliminating the possibility that Paul in Acts viewed it purely as an event with no correspondence to a material reality in this world, and heard words he was instructed to repeat (Acts 22:15; 26:16). Segal may wish to reject or ignore Paul’s traveling companions and the instruction to tell others what he had heard and seen as Lukan additions. But on what basis would he be warranted in doing so? Why is the voice from heaven in Acts a more historically reliable detail of the event than what the voice said or the joint experience of his traveling companions whom we would expect to accompany Paul on such a journey?

Segal argues that the aorist passive ὤφθη is frequently employed in the sense of “visionary seeing” or “seeing a divine being.”<sup>369</sup> Thus, Paul’s use of the aorist passive ὤφθη in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 indicates that he viewed the appearances as more visionary in nature. However, while the aorist passive ὤφθη is commonly used for an appearance of the divine, there are numerous exceptions.<sup>370</sup> Moreover, in many instances the appearance of the divine was not a heavenly vision but took place in space-time.<sup>371</sup> Thus, Paul’s use of the aorist passive ὤφθη does not warrant the conclusion that Paul regarded his conversion experience of the risen Jesus to be a vision with no external reality in the material world such as may have been the case with the later appearances of Jesus to him and others.<sup>372</sup>

<sup>366</sup> See section 4.3.2.1.d above.

<sup>367</sup> Segal (2004), 415; cf. 409 where he writes that Paul’s conversion experience “may have been one such prophetic incident, though it need not have been one.” Segal refers to the experience as “mystical” (415) and a “religiously altered state of consciousness (RASC)” (402). Contra is Wright (1997) who opines that Luke’s description of Paul’s conversion experience “is not the language of mystical vision, of spiritual or religious experiences without any definite objective referent” (35).

<sup>368</sup> Segal (2004), 416.

<sup>369</sup> Segal (2004), 406.

<sup>370</sup> Gen. 1:9; 2 Sam. 22:11; 1 Macc. 4:6, 19; 9:27; Song of Solomon 2:12; Bar. 3:22; Dan. 4:22; Acts 7:26. See also Jos. *Ant.* 7:298; 16:12; 18:239; *War* 6:306.

<sup>371</sup> Gen. 18:1; Exod. 3:2; 16:10; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:29, 42; Judges 6:11-12; Tobit 12:22; 2 Macc. 3:25; Bar. 3:37; Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 1:11; 24:34 (the corpse is gone); Acts 7:30; 13:31 (13:30, 34 indicate bodily resurrection). Moreover, many other examples provide no details, simply stating that the Lord appeared and, thus, cannot be employed to support either.

<sup>372</sup> Segal (2004) himself writes that in 1 Corinthians 9:1, Paul used perfect tense ἐώρακα to describe his visionary experience “have I not seen the Lord?” By this, “Paul emphasized that his vision was equivalent to normal ‘seeing,’ just as you and I might see each other” (405-06). See also Wright (2003), 376.

Those mining Acts in their historical investigations must keep a few principles in mind. When considering Paul's conversion experience, Paul's letters must be given priority over Acts.<sup>373</sup> Stated differently, historically speaking, Paul on Paul is more valuable than Luke on Paul. Moreover, when electing to use Acts as a source, we must use it consistently with other passages in Acts as well as with Paul. For example, those who use the three accounts of Paul's conversion experience in Acts to support their position that Paul viewed the risen Jesus as a "spiritual" (i.e., ethereal, immaterial) being should likewise consider that in Paul's speech in Acts 13, he states in the clearest of terms that Jesus was raised bodily (13:28-37). Jesus was executed by Pilate (28), removed from the cross, and buried in a tomb (29). God raised him from the dead (30). For many days he appeared to his disciples (31). Jesus' resurrection was in fulfillment of prophecy: Psalm 2:7 and 16:10 (32-35). In the latter it is prophesied that God will not allow his holy one to undergo decay. David (who wrote the psalm) died, was buried, and decayed (36). Thus, the psalm refers to Jesus. God raised him and his body did not decay (37).

One should not uncritically accept the three accounts of Paul's conversion experience in Acts while rejecting Paul's teaching on Jesus' resurrection in Acts 13, a teaching that, as we will see below, is in line with what we observe in Paul's letters: Paul believed that Jesus had been raised bodily. Thus, contentions that Paul had Jesus' immaterial body in mind in the three accounts of his conversion experience in Acts are not strong enough to commend acceptance by historians.

#### 4.3.3.6. The Fate of Paul

Paul reports of the sufferings he endured for the gospel.<sup>374</sup> In 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, Paul says that he has been imprisoned on account of the gospel many times and beaten so many times that he cannot count them. He has lived often in danger of death, having received thirty-nine lashes five times from the Jews. He has been beaten with rods three times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, been in danger in every conceivable place, gone sleepless nights, endured hunger, cold, and exposure. In Acts, Luke reports the numerous sufferings of Paul. In 14:19, Paul is stoned, dragged outside the city, and left for dead. In 16:19–24, Paul and Silas are flogged, thrown into prison, and their feet fastened in stocks. In 17:5, Paul and Silas are hunted by a mob. In 17:13–15, the crowds are stirred up against Paul, forcing him to be escorted outside of the city. In 18:12–13, the Jews arrest Paul and bring him before a Roman proconsul. In 21:27–36, a Jewish crowd seizes Paul, drags him from the temple, and attempts to kill him. Additional reports exist, reporting that Paul suffered and was martyred for his faith.<sup>375</sup> Paul's commitment to the message he preached leads us to conclude that he sincerely believed in the truth of his message.

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<sup>373</sup> Crossan and Reed (2004) understand Paul's belief in bodily resurrection to be so clear that they are willing, in a sense, to ignore the accounts of Paul's conversion experience in Acts (8).

<sup>374</sup> 2 Cor. 1:5-11; 4:8-14; 17; 6:4-5; 7:4-5; 11:23-28; Eph. 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 17, 29-30; 3:10; Col. 1:24; 4:3, 18; 1 Thess. 1:3-4, 7; 2:2; 3:4; 2 Tim. 1:8, 12, 16; 2:3, 9; 3:11; Philemon 1:10, 13.

<sup>375</sup> See Clement of Rome (*1 Clem* 5:2–7), Polycarp (*Pol. Phil.* 9:2), Tertullian (*Scorpiace* 15; cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:8), Dionysius of Corinth (cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:8), Origen (*Commentary on Genesis*; cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:1). Tertullian reports that Paul was beheaded while Origen and Dionysius—to our knowledge—only reported that he was martyred.

#### 4.3.3.7. Parallels

Some have noted parallels to Paul's conversion in Acts. Heliodorus attempts to take the temple treasury but is stopped and beaten nearly to death by three heavenly beings. The traveling companions of Heliodorus ask the high priest Onias to pray that Heliodorus will live. He does and Heliodorus is healed. The heavenly beings who had beaten Heliodorus appear before him and instruct him to thank Onias for his prayers. He obeys, departs, and testifies to the works of the great God (2 Macc. 3:1-39; cf. 4 Macc. 4:1-14).<sup>376</sup>

In Ezekiel 1:25-3:11, a heavenly being appears and tells Ezekiel to stand up and receive instruction. In Daniel 10:2-21, a heavenly being appears, Daniel is present with others who do not see the being but are fearful and run away. Daniel falls on his face asleep, is touched by the being, stands up, is given information, and is touched again by the being to give him strength. In *Joseph and Aseneth* 14:1-14, there is a bright light, Aseneth falls to ground, is addressed with a double use of her name (Aseneth! Aseneth!), stands up, and receives further instruction.<sup>377</sup>

Wright comments that "Luke's underlying aim, and perhaps that of his original sources, seems to have been to tell the story in such a way as to align Paul with the prophets and visionaries of Israel's history."<sup>378</sup> Koester opines that "the report given in Acts is told in the style of a legend of a prophetic call." He does count the appearance as one of the "resurrection epiphanies of Christ."<sup>379</sup> Even if these speculations turn out to be correct, this would only call into question Luke's rendition of the conversion experience. Since Paul claimed that the risen Jesus had appeared to him and his letters contain numerous details that corroborate the three reports of the appearance to Paul in Acts, we know that the Acts reports are not wholesale inventions of Luke.

#### 4.3.3.8. Conclusions Related to the Appearance to Paul

The majority of modern scholars grant that Paul had an experience he was convinced was an appearance to him of the risen Jesus. As mentioned earlier, Habermas has surveyed more than thirty years of German, French, and English critical scholarship relating to Jesus' resurrection. He writes, "Perhaps no fact is more widely recognized than that early Christian believers had real experiences that they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus. In particular, virtually all scholars recognize Paul's testimony that he had an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus. . . . Seldom is the historical authenticity of any of these testimonies or the genuine belief behind them challenged by respected critical scholars, no matter how skeptical."<sup>380</sup>

Some scholars, while granting Paul's conversion experience, do not acknowledge that Paul's experience requires the conclusion that Jesus actually appeared to Paul.

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<sup>376</sup> Catchpole (2002), 160; Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 73-75; Wright (2003), 390-92.

<sup>377</sup> Wright (2003), 390-92. He also mentions *Philo Praem.* 165 (390n49).

<sup>378</sup> Wright (2003), 393.

<sup>379</sup> Koester (2000), 108. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 264-65.

<sup>380</sup> Habermas and Licona (2004), 74. See Ehrman (*Lost Christianities*, 2003), 96; Koester (2000), 108.

Marxsen: “one can say with some certainty that Paul understood the resurrection of Jesus as having happened through an act of God. To use our term, he regarded it as an *event*. This much is very clear, because Paul was a Jew. Right here, however, we have to be very careful not to jump to an unwarranted conclusion. Although Paul *conceived* of the resurrection of Jesus as an event brought about by God at a given point in the past, that does not mean that it *was* an event which once took place.”<sup>381</sup>

Crossan and Reed: “To take seriously Paul’s claim to have *seen* the risen Jesus, we suggest that his inaugural vision was of Jesus’s body simultaneously wounded *and* glorified. . . . We propose, therefore, that in reading the Lukan accounts of Paul’s inaugural conversion and vocation experience, we bracket that blinded-by-light sequence and imagine instead a vision in which Paul both *sees* and hears Jesus as the resurrected Christ, the risen Lord. It need not be added that, then as now, dreams and visions are hard-wired possibilities of the human brain.”<sup>382</sup>

Lüdemann: “the objectivity that his account assigned to the event in no way impugns the fact that his report details a subjective rather than an objective occurrence.”<sup>383</sup>

We must agree that Paul’s belief that the risen Jesus had appeared to him is not proof that he, in fact, did. For our purposes we may conclude that Paul converted from a staunch persecutor of the Church to one of its most aggressive advocates. What led him to such a dramatic and unexpected reversal? Why did one who so vehemently persecuted Christians suddenly become one? Paul himself and Luke report that it was because he firmly believed he had experienced an encounter with Jesus who had been raised. Early, multiple, and firsthand testimony support our conclusion. Moreover, the large majority of scholars grant it, regardless of where they lay on the theological spectrum. Accordingly, we may add the appearance to Paul to our collection of facts that make up our historical bedrock.

#### 4.3.3.9. What did Paul Believe About Jesus’ Resurrection?

This brings us to six important passages in the Pauline corpus.

##### 4.3.3.9.a. Romans 8:11

εἰ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἐγείραντος τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ νεκρῶν οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὁ ἐγείρας Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ζωοποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν διὰ τοῦ ἐνοικοῦντος αὐτοῦ πνεύματος ἐν ὑμῖν.

Now if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Jesus from the dead will give life also to your mortal bodies through the dwelling of His Spirit in you.

<sup>381</sup> Marxsen (1990), 86.

<sup>382</sup> Crossan and Reed (2004), 8.

<sup>383</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 47.

There are four occasions outside this passage where Paul draws a close connection between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-23; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14).<sup>384</sup> The word ζωοποιήσει (life giving) appears eleven times in the New Testament.<sup>385</sup> For most of these, God is said to be the giver of eschatological life and the future tense indicates that this will be a future event, namely the final resurrection of the dead.<sup>386</sup>

Paul says the "life-giving Spirit" will give life to the *mortal bodies* of believers. Accordingly, "Not only has the spirit of the Christian been made alive (v. 10), but in time the body (now under the curse of death) will be resurrected as well. The indwelling Spirit is the guarantee of the believer's future resurrection."<sup>387</sup> Moo comments "Because reference to resurrection is so plain in the protasis of the sentence, the future ζωοποιήσει . . . must also refer to future bodily transformation."<sup>388</sup> For Käsemann, "The promise, then, is not for the present life."<sup>389</sup> Likewise Dunn, "So here, even when he focuses on the 'mortal body,' Paul's point is precisely that the life-giving work of the Spirit will finally embrace that too; salvation will be completed not by escape from the body but by redemption of the body (v 23). . . . Of this Christ's own resurrection from the dead has provided both the pattern and the assurance."<sup>390</sup>

As Dunn notes, in verse 23 Paul writes, "We have the Spirit as the first portion. And we groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body."<sup>391</sup> The term ἀπολύτρωσις is in the accusative and is in simple apposition to our adoption (υἰοθεσίαν), thus explaining what will occur in the future at our adoption. This redemption could refer to a "releasing of" or "releasing from" our bodies.<sup>392</sup> Given a parallel thought in Ephesians 1:14 which speaks of a redemption of God's possession,<sup>393</sup> "releasing of" is to be preferred. Moreover, as Büschel notes, the redemption of our bodies in Romans 8:23 is related to 8:21-22 where Paul asserts that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that all of creation groans together and suffers together until the present day."<sup>394</sup> To this Paul adds verse 23: "and not only

<sup>384</sup> In 1 Corinthians 6:13-20, a passage that is all about our bodies, Paul says in verse 14 that God raised Jesus and his Spirit will raise us too (ὁ δὲ θεὸς καὶ τὸν κύριον ἡγείρειν καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐξεγερῆι διὰ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ). Paul also asserts that God raised Jesus in Rom. 4:24, 17; 10:9. See also Rom. 6:4-9; Phil. 3:10-11, 20-21; Col. 1:18; 2:12-13; 3:3-4.

<sup>385</sup> John 5:21 (twice); 6:63; Rom. 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:22, 36, 45; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:21; 1 Pet. 3:18; seven are in the Pauline corpus.

<sup>386</sup> Brodeur (1996), 214.

<sup>387</sup> Mounce (1995), 179-80. See also Byrne (1996), 241; Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 146-47; Davis (1993), 76n24; Dunn (1988), 445; Fitzmyer (1993), 491; Morris (1976), 227-28; Moule (1965), 108; Murray (1968), 291-92; Osborne (2004), 201; Schreiner (1998), 416; Wright (2003), 256; contra Dodd (1932), 125.

<sup>388</sup> Moo (1991), 525-26.

<sup>389</sup> Käsemann (1980), 225.

<sup>390</sup> Dunn (1988), 445; cf. Murray (1968), 292.

<sup>391</sup> αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.

<sup>392</sup> BDAG (2000), 117; Liddell-Scott (1996), 208.

<sup>393</sup> ὅ ἐστιν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως

<sup>394</sup> Büschel in *TDNT* (1964), 4:351. αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ. οἴδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν.



this, but also we ourselves, having the first portion of the Spirit, groan in ourselves, eagerly waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body.”<sup>395</sup> Along with all of creation, our bodies will be redeemed from its bondage to corruption. This can only be said to occur in the future at the Parousia. Therefore, Romans 8:11 and 23 present similar thoughts regarding the dual benefits of the work of Christ. There are benefits for the present and for the future and those future benefits include the bringing to life and redemption of our mortal bodies.<sup>396</sup> Accordingly, in Romans 8:11, Paul seems to be saying that the mortal bodies of believers will be raised even as the body of Jesus was raised.<sup>397</sup>

#### 4.3.3.9.b. 1 Corinthians 15:42-54

οὕτως καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν. σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ, ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ·<sup>43</sup> σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ· σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει·<sup>44</sup> σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν. Εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν.<sup>45</sup> οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται· ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν.<sup>46</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικόν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν, ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν.<sup>47</sup> ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.<sup>48</sup> οἷος ὁ χοϊκός, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ χοϊκοί, καὶ οἷος ὁ ἐπουράνιος, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ ἐπουράνιοι.<sup>49</sup> καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ.<sup>50</sup> Τοῦτο δὲ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ.<sup>51</sup> ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω· πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα,<sup>52</sup> ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ, ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι· σαλπίζει γὰρ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐγερθήσονται ἄφθαρτοι καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀλλαγησόμεθα.<sup>53</sup> Δεῖ γὰρ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν.<sup>54</sup> ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν, τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος· κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption. It is raised in incorruption.<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.<sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual [body].<sup>45</sup> So

<sup>395</sup> οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.

<sup>396</sup> We find a similar thought in John 5. In 5:21 Jesus says, “ὡςπερ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἐγείρει τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ ζωοποιεῖ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς οὓς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ” (“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life [to them], so also the son gives life to whomever he desires”). This refers to the present given one may have eternal life now (5:24) and that the time “νῦν ἔστιν ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσουσιν” (“is now when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those hearing will live”). Jesus so far has referred to the eternal life he gives at the present. However, the future bodily resurrection is included a few verses later in 5:28-29: “μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο, ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα ἐν ἣ πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκπορεύονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς, οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως” (“Do not marvel at this, for an hour comes in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out; those who did good deeds unto a resurrection of life, and those who practiced bad deeds unto a resurrection of judgment”).

<sup>397</sup> Wright (2003), 256.

also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit.”<sup>46</sup> But the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.<sup>47</sup> The first man is from the dust; the second man is from heaven.<sup>48</sup> As the dust is, such also are the dusty [i.e., earthly] ones. And as the heaven is, such also are the heavenly ones.<sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne the image of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.<sup>50</sup> Now this I say, brothers: Flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God; nor can the corruptible inherit the incorruptible.<sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery. All shall not sleep, but all will be changed<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in a blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible and we will be changed.<sup>53</sup> For, it is necessary that this corruptible will put on incorruption and this mortal will put on the immortality.<sup>54</sup> Now when this corruptible has put on incorruption and this mortal has put on immortality, then the word that was written shall be [fulfilled]: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

In this passage, Paul answers two questions: How are the dead raised and what will our future bodies be like? He answers both questions, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown . . . It is raised” (15:42). At first glance the change from plural to singular in his answer appears awkward. A closer look provides clarity. For in 15:42 Paul is answering the questions asked in 15:35: How are the dead (plural) raised and with what kind of body (singular) do they come? In 15:42ff., he writes, “So also is the resurrection of the dead (plural): It [i.e., the body] (singular) is sown . . . It is raised.” In the text immediately preceding (15:37-38) Paul provides the analogy of a seed: A seed is sown and something different comes up. But there is continuity between the seed and the plant which comes forth from it as indicated by 15:36: “That which you sow is not *made alive* [here is our word ζωοποιεῖται from Romans 8:11] unless it dies.”<sup>398</sup> The seed that is dead and sown (buried) is made alive once again. In the same way, there is continuity between the believer’s present body (the seed) and the resurrection body. What dies and goes down in burial comes up in resurrection, having been made alive and transformed.<sup>399</sup> This is confirmed by Paul’s

<sup>398</sup> οὐ ὁ σπείρεις, οὐ ζωοποιεῖται ἐὰν μὴ ἀποθάνῃ.

<sup>399</sup> Ellingsworth and Hatton (1993), 317; Fee (1987), 777; Gwynne (2000), 12; Kistemaker (1993), 572-73; Osiek (1997), 110. See also Braaten (1999), 156; Robinson (1982): “He [Paul] conceives of the resurrection as bodily, but emphasizes change within the continuity of corporeality (1 Cor 15:40, 43, 48, 54)” (7); Wright (2003): “The new resurrected body will be in continuity and discontinuity with the present one” (341). The discontinuity pertains to the corruption/incorruption, etc. (360; cf. 371). Garland (2003) differs and argues that it is improbable that “‘sowing’ refers to burial. . . . ‘Sowing’ was used as a metaphor in the Greco-Roman world for human origins” (733). Meyer (1986) renders 15:44 as “a natural body is sown, a spiritual body is raised” (378). This rendering is possible, since the nouns “natural body” and “spiritual body” are in the nominative case. Carrier’s translation of 15:44 is identical. (See my debate with Carrier [Carrier and Licona (2004)] and Carrier in Price and Lowder, eds. [2005], 127.) However, his interpretation differs from Meyer, who envisions a transformation of the natural body (378-79). Carrier envisions an exchange. Moreover, Carrier’s statement during our debate that the word “it” does not appear here in Greek is deceptive, although I am not implying that he meant it that way. In first-semester Greek, everyone learns that Greek verbs imply their subject. On many occasions a verb appears without its subject, because it is implied in the verb’s inflection. This is like the waiter who says “Enjoy!” upon delivering a meal; the subject “you” is implied. The passage under consideration is a perfect example of this occurring, even when verse 44 is excluded. What we have in verse 44 is a third-person singular verb. Thus, if the nouns “natural body” and “spiritual body” are to be understood as predicate nominatives, the implied subject of the verb “sown” is “it.” Predicates rename the subject and are usually interchangeable. Of twenty-nine English translations in

use of τοῦτο in 15:53-54: τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο will put on the imperishable; τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο will put on immortality; etc.<sup>400</sup> One can almost see Paul grabbing his arm as he emphasizes that it is *this* body that will put on immortality as one puts on a coat. A transformation of the corpse will occur and it will be clothed with immortality and imperishability. There can be no doubt that what is being sown in 15:42-44 is our present body. There can be little doubt that the third person singular “it” that is sown is what is raised. Thus, the body that is sown is transformed and raised. There is neither an elimination of a body nor an exchange of one for the new. Rather, it is the mortal being transformed into immortality.

This implies a bodily resurrection and an empty tomb. If it is true that in this context Paul uses the term *resurrection* to imply that the body that is buried is the same body that is raised, though transformed, one need not ask why the empty tomb is never mentioned in the Pauline corpus. For him, it is so clear that it need not be mentioned. Today, if a child dies of SIDS, the parents would not need to make a point of an empty crib. It is implied. Thus, Lüdemann is mistaken when he writes, “For that

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BibleWorks 7.0, only one renders 15:44 as Meyer and Carrier do (NJB). However, in 15:42, five of the twenty-nine render as Carrier does (ESV, NET, NJB, NRS, RSV) and in 15:43 only one (NJB).

We have two possible translations:

Carrier: “A natural body is sown. A spiritual body is raised.”

Licona: “It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.”

Carrier’s translation is meant to support the conclusion that the action of raising is not done to the same subject as the action of sowing, so that what is sown is not then raised. Let me explain why I believe my translation is to be preferred. First, as noted above, the plural-singular structure in Paul’s answers in 15:42 mirrors his questions in 15:35. Moreover, in the context of 15:42b-44a, Paul writes the following:

- (1) σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ
- (2) ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ
- (3) σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ
- (4) ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ
- (5) σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ
- (6) ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει
- (7) σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν
- (8) ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν

Paul uses the verbs “σπείρεται” and “ἐγείρεται” four times each in these verses. Note that even if we exclude the last two statements (7-8; which is verse 44), all of the others (1-6) represent a clear case where the “it” (i.e., the corpse) is implied in the verb. This is indisputable. Otherwise, there are no subjects in 1-6 and the sentences are incoherent. Paul is crystal clear in 1-6: “It is sown...It is raised.” What about statements 7-8? Carrier’s translation requires that, after Paul has said “it is sown” and “it is raised” three times each (1-6) that he suddenly switches the thought so that the “it” is not implied in the verb even though the verbs and grammatical order of 7-8 are identical to what he writes in 1-6. Paul has changed what completes the thought of the verbs from the dative case in 1-6 to the nominative in 7-8. But the strength of the precise repetition of the exact verbs and grammatical order virtually requires that the nominatives be taken as predicates to the subject “it,” which is implied in the verbs in 7-8 as in 1-6. The translation that I and the large majority of modern translators offer is simple and smooth. Carrier’s translation is anything but simple or smooth when it is placed in its immediate context. Instead, it breaks the smooth thought that proceeds through Paul’s text.

<sup>400</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 144; R. H. Gundry, “Trimming the Debate” in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 122; Segal (2004), 433; cf. 439-40.

reason alone [1 Cor. 15:50] it is questionable whether the apostle was interested in the empty tomb.”<sup>401</sup>

We come now to four points of contention in this passage. The first is Paul’s statement that the body is sown *natural* (ψυχικόν) and raised *spiritual* (πνευματικόν) (15:44). Wedderburn and the earlier Dunn to which he appeals interpret these words with the RSV/NRSV to mean *physical* and *immaterial*.<sup>402</sup> Dunn later seems to have backed away from this position.<sup>403</sup> We will need to search the ancient literature carefully in order to obtain a good understanding of these words.

There are 846 occurrences of ψυχικόν from the eighth century BC through the third century AD.<sup>404</sup> There are only five occurrences prior to the fourth century BC, but usage explodes in the first century BC and continues into the first century AD. Then the occurrences in the first century grow one thousand percent in the second century. Especially interesting is that ψυχικόν is often contrasted with σώματος. In fact, ψυχικόν dwells in the σώμα. Starting with Pseudo-Galen in the second/third century AD, ψυχικόν is often contrasted with φυσικόν.<sup>405</sup> In Pseudo-Plutarch, *daimonioi* are described as ψυχικάς.<sup>406</sup> Of even more interest are the combinations ψυχικόν πνεύμα, πνεύματος ψυχικοῦ, ψυχικοῦ πνεύματος, and τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ψυχικόν, first appearing in the third century BC in Erasistratus<sup>407</sup> and Chrysippus,<sup>408</sup> then Alexander,<sup>409</sup> then Cassius Iatrosophista,<sup>410</sup> and Vettius Valens.<sup>411</sup> Although I did not look at all of the 846 occurrences, I viewed most. I failed to find a single reference where ψυχικόν possessed a meaning of “physical” or “material.”

There are 1131 occurrences of πνευματικόν during the same time period.<sup>412</sup> It first appears in the sixth century BC, with an explosion of occurrences in the first century AD. There is an almost four hundred percent growth that occurs in the second century. On numerous occasions the word appears to refer to the immaterial. However, there are a robust number of exceptions. Of particular interest is Zeno’s “spiritual ones” (οἱ πνευματικοί) who enjoy Stoic teachings (fourth/third century BC).<sup>413</sup> The Corpus Hermeticum (second century AD) mentions the πνευματικόν ἄνθρωπον.<sup>414</sup> Chrysippus (third century BC) speaks of our *bodies* (σώματικῶν) having a *spiritual* (πνευματική) essence<sup>415</sup> and of a σώμα πνευματικόν και ἀίθερωδες<sup>416</sup>

<sup>401</sup> Lüdemann (1995), 46.

<sup>402</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 66; cf. Dunn (1985), 74. See also Dunn (1995), 40; R. Brown (1997), 525.

<sup>403</sup> Dunn (2003), 870-72.

<sup>404</sup> These and the findings for πνευματικόν below are the results of a TLG search (disk E). There were no occurrences of either word in the Oxyrhynchus papyri.

<sup>405</sup> See *Introductio seu medicus* 14.697.7; 14.726.7; Alexander, *De anima libri mantissa* 104.4, mentions a σώματος φυσικοῦ.

<sup>406</sup> *Placita philosophorum* 882.B.5.

<sup>407</sup> *Testimonia et fragmenta* 112.2; 147.17; 203.1.

<sup>408</sup> *Fragmenta logica et physica* 716.2; 722.2; 781.3; 783.2; 870.2.

<sup>409</sup> *Problemata* 2.64.28; 2.67.40.

<sup>410</sup> *Quaestiones medicae et problemata physica* 52.3; 72.9.

<sup>411</sup> *Anthologiarum libri ix* 109.13.

<sup>412</sup> Of these, 610 appear in Origen, the majority of which describe the “spirituality” of the Law.

<sup>413</sup> *Testimonia et fragmenta* 33.2.

<sup>414</sup> *Fragmenta varia* 21.2.

<sup>415</sup> *Fragmenta logica et physica* 389.5.

<sup>416</sup> *Fragmenta logica et physica* 1054.13.

(notice that “spiritual” is distinguished from “ethereal”). A “spiritual body” is mentioned also by Democritus (fifth century BC),<sup>417</sup> Straton (third century BC),<sup>418</sup> Comarius (second century AD),<sup>419</sup> Clement of Alexandria (third century AD),<sup>420</sup> and Pseudo-Plutarch (third/fourth century AD).<sup>421</sup> With the possible exception of Chrysippus, none of these seem to be referring to ethereal bodies. However, Ptolemaeus (second century AD) appears to think along these lines when he speaks of converting or changing from “bodily” to “spiritual.”<sup>422</sup> Philo argues that some prophets and angels changed their former essence from *spiritual* and *psuchikal* (πνευματικῆς και ψυχοειδοῦς) to *one of human form* (ἀνθρωπόμορφον).<sup>423</sup>

In summary of our discussion thus far, we have combed through eleven centuries of the extant Greek literature and observed that πνευματικόν has numerous meanings throughout this period. While it can refer to something as “ethereal,” other meanings appear frequently. We noticed six occurrences of “spiritual body” and noticed that with one improbable exception, the term is never employed to mean an “immaterial body.” We also observed that ψυχικόν never takes a meaning of “physical” or “material.” Focusing our attention on early Christian uses of these two words will prove even more helpful.

The term πνευματικόν appears twenty-six times within the New Testament literature; all of these are within the Pauline corpus except for two occurrences in 1 Peter 2:5.<sup>424</sup> Πνευματικός is employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:15; 3:1; 14:37; Galatians 6:1 in the sense of the spiritually mature. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 (spiritual wisdom), 9:11 (spiritual blessings), 10:3-4 (spiritual food and drink in the wilderness; i.e., physical food provided by God), 12:1 (spiritual gifts), and 14:1 (spiritual gifts) it refers to something that has to do with the Holy Spirit, or has the Holy Spirit as its origin or power. Other occurrences in the Pauline corpus include Romans 1:11 (spiritual gift), 7:14 (the Law is spiritual), 15:27 (spiritual blessings), Ephesians 1:3 (spiritual blessing), 5:19 (spiritual songs), 6:12 (where “spiritual” forces of evil are contrasted with “flesh and blood”), Colossians 1:9 (spiritual wisdom and understanding), and 3:16 (spiritual songs). In the New Testament, the term appears outside of Paul only in 1 Peter 2:5 in reference to “spiritual sacrifices.” Πνευματικός is absent in the LXX. Therefore, with the possible exception of Ephesians 6:12, Paul never employs πνευματικόν in a sense that means “ethereal.”<sup>425</sup>

<sup>417</sup> *Testimonia* 140.2.

<sup>418</sup> *Fragmenta* 94.2.

<sup>419</sup> *De lapide philosophorum* 2.290.18.

<sup>420</sup> *Eclogae propheticae* 55.1.1.

<sup>421</sup> *Placita philosophorum* 905.B.7.

<sup>422</sup> *Epistula ad Floram* 6.4.2.

<sup>423</sup> *On Abraham* 113.2, but note that ψυχοειδοῦς is likewise employed in contrast to human form. See also *1 Genesis* 1.92.

<sup>424</sup> Rom. 1:11; 7:14; 15:27; 1 Cor. 2:13 (twice), 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3, 4 (twice); 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44 (twice), 46 (twice); Gal. 6:1; Eph. 1:3; 5:19; 6:12; Col. 1:9; 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:5 (twice). The related adverb πνευματικῶς occurs in 1 Cor. 2:14 and Rev. 11:8.

<sup>425</sup> We will observe below that the term “flesh and blood” refers to “mortals” rather than “physical.” Thus, even in Ephesians 6:12, πνευματικός probably does not mean “ethereal.” It is also noteworthy that this is the only text in which Paul uses πνευματικός in reference to demonic spirits; elsewhere, Paul always uses it in reference to effects of the Spirit of God.



Ψυχικόν appears only six times in the New Testament, four of which are in the Pauline corpus, all of which are in 1 Corinthians (2:14; 15:44 [two times], 46). The first reference (2:14) is of particular interest, since not only is it the lone appearance in Paul outside of 1 Corinthians 15, but also because Paul uses the precise contrast of terms he employs in 1 Corinthians 15:44 and 46. He writes,

ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ· μαρτία γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι, ὅτι πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται.

But the *natural* man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he is unable to understand them because they are *spiritually* examined.

In the following verse (15), Paul speaks of the πνευματικὸς in contrast to the ψυχικὸς: “But the *spiritual* examine all things, but he himself is examined by no one” (ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει [τὰ] πάντα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπ’ οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνεται). It is clear here that Paul is not contrasting physical beings with ethereal ones. Rather, he is contrasting those governed or animated by their fleshly and sinful desires and who think in accordance with the world’s wisdom with those governed by holy desires and heavenly wisdom that are centered on God. In fact, the NRSV, which translates ψυχικὸς as “physical” in 15:44 translates the same word as “unspiritual” in 2:14. Richard Hayes puts it this way: “The term *psychikoi* is difficult to translate properly; it refers to human beings living in their natural state apart from the Spirit of God and therefore unenlightened and blind to the truth. They just don’t ‘get it.’”<sup>426</sup> On the other hand, the *spiritual* person “has a privileged understanding of reality.”<sup>427</sup> We can imagine Paul handing out T-shirts to the members of the Corinth Community Church. The front of the shirt reads “The Wisdom of God.” The back says, “You wouldn’t understand. It’s a spiritual thing.” It is clear that Paul is not contrasting material and immaterial objects, since for him humans can be natural or spiritual. In other words, when employing the terms “natural” and “spiritual” Paul is not referring to the substance of the old and new bodies, but rather their mode of existence.<sup>428</sup> Later on in 15:44 when Paul employs these same terms, he is saying that our current body is buried with all of its “natural” or “this-worldly” appetites and weaknesses but is raised and transformed into a new body with spiritual appetites and qualities.<sup>429</sup> He may also be including the power that animates the body.<sup>430</sup> Modern machines are empowered by steam, diesel, nuclear, etc. Our present mortal body is animated by a heart, lungs, etc. Our resurrection body will be animated by God’s Spirit.

Other New Testament occurrences of the term only support an interpretation along these lines. Ψυχικός appears on two other occasions in the New Testament. In James

<sup>426</sup> Hayes (1997), 46. Ackerman (2006) renders *psychikos* in 1 Cor. 2:15 as “unspiritual” (53) and in 15:44 as “earth-bound” or “unspiritual” (94).

<sup>427</sup> Hayes (1997), 46.

<sup>428</sup> Johnson (2004), 304-05; Keener (2005), 132; MacGregor (2006), 233; Quest (1994), 96; Watson (1992), 176.

<sup>429</sup> Ackerman (2006), 96.

<sup>430</sup> Hayes (1997) offers the following interpretation: “It is to be a ‘spiritual body’ not in the sense that it is somehow made out of spirit and vapors, but in the sense that it is determined by the spirit and gives the spirit form and local habitation” (272). Also Thiselton (2000), 1277, 1279. Contra is Orr and Walther (1976), who hold that Paul is not speaking of the Eschaton. Rather, he is saying that the resurrection occurs to individuals as they die (345).

3:15 it is used to contrast a proper spiritual state of the heart with one that is not from God, which James describes as earthly, natural (ψυχική), or even demonic. In Jude 19, the term refers to mockers focused on their ungodly lusts, who cause divisions, are natural (ψυχικοί), and do not have the Holy Spirit.<sup>431</sup> The word appears just one time in the LXX, in the Apocrypha. In 4 Maccabees 1:32, being temperate is mastery over the desires of “souls” (ψυχικαί) and the desires of bodies (σωματικάί). As examples of the former, the author mentions overcoming greed, choosing virtue over affection for parents, and a willingness to rebuke one’s wife, children, and friends when they act wrongly. It repels the love of power, vainglory, pride, arrogance, slander, and anger (2:8-20). Thus, with the lone improbable exception of Ephesians 6:12, neither Paul nor any other New Testament author nor any writer or translator of the LXX refers to ψυχικός or πνευματικός in the senses understood by Wedderburn.<sup>432</sup> Granted,

<sup>431</sup> In chapter 1.3.2, letter b, we noted that some scholars use exegesis as a torture chamber where texts and Greek words are stretched until they confess to the particular interpretation desired by the exegete. Good examples of this brutality are found in Carrier in reference to 1 Cor. 2:14-15, James 3:15, and Jude 19-20 (Carrier in Price and Lowder, eds. [2005]). Of 1 Cor. 2:14-15 he writes, “So we can infer that the *psychikos anthrōpos* has only a *psychikon sōma* and therefore is doomed to destruction. . . . In contrast, the *pneumatikos anthrōpos* will be given by God a *pneumatikon sōma*, and thus will survive the destruction of his body and the world by escaping into a new, superior one . . . Many of the concepts here also turn up in Paul’s many discussions of resurrection” (130). But Paul makes no such inference here. If the inference is that the natural man has a natural body that is doomed, this might likewise infer that the spiritual man has a spiritual body that will not be doomed. But Paul is clear a few chapters later that *both* the natural man and the spiritual man *have a natural body*. Moreover, Paul is not discussing bodies in the context of 1 Cor. 2:14-15. It is about the natural man who, unlike the spiritual man, cannot understand spiritual things. Carrier imports his interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:44 into 2:14-15 where he applies it to bodies, then claims that this conclusion will turn up in Paul’s discussion of resurrection in 1 Cor. 15—a perfect circle! In James 3:15ff., James is contrasting conduct, asserting that bitter jealousy and rivalry is wisdom not from heaven, but rather is earthly, natural, and demonic and creates disorder and all evil practices. In contrast, the wisdom from heaven is above all pure, then peaceable, yielding, considerate, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and genuine. James then accuses the believers to whom he writes of exhibiting the former type of wisdom. Carrier stretches the text to get a confession when he writes, “So by extension, if a *psychic* wisdom is not from heaven but comes from earth and is subject to demonic forces and attached to perishable life, then a *psychic* body comes from earth and is subject to demonic forces and attached to perishable life, and consequently can have no place in heaven or our new and future life” (131). In Jude 19-20, he warns his readers of these evil men in their midst who live for their impious lusts, are divisive, natural, and without the Holy Spirit. Instead they are to build themselves up in the holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in the love of God, expecting the Lord’s mercy for eternal life, having mercy on those who doubt, and saving others (perhaps by sharing with them the message of salvation through Christ). Carrier notes Jude’s strong warning against evil men who, like others before them, will be destroyed. He then writes, “It follows that the *psychic* man will perish because all he has is a *psychic* body, and all *psychic* bodies will be destroyed, but the spiritual man is building for himself a spiritual body (as in Jude 20) and will thus be saved, jumping into it like an escape pod at the end of days” (131). Carrier knows where he wants to go and once again stretches the text to assist him. We can hear the screams of Paul, James, and Jude coming from his exegetical chamber until there is silence after which Carrier emerges with a new confidence.

<sup>432</sup> The following modern commentators maintain that Paul’s contrast between ψυχικός and πνευματικός does not refer to a contrast between the “physical” and “immaterial”: Ackerman (2006), 96; Barnett (1994), 9; Barrett (1968), 373; Bostock (2001), 271; Brodeur (1996), 122; Collins (1999), 567; Conzelman (1975), 290; Fee (1987), 788-89; Gundry (1976), 165-66; Harris (1985), 118; Hayes (1997) contends that the “NRSV’s translation (‘physical body’) is especially unfortunate, for it reinstates precisely the dualistic dichotomy between physical and spiritual that Paul is struggling to overcome. In any case, *psychikon* certainly does not mean ‘physical’” (272); Héring (1962), 176-77; Hurtado (*LJC*, 2003): “‘Spiritual’ here can only mean empowered by the Spirit, as Paul consistently uses the term in this epistle” (170-71n29). Elsewhere (Hurtado in “Jesus’ Resurrection in the Early Christian Texts,” 2005) he opines that the translation “physical” has “seriously misleading connotations” (200); Johnson

the terms maintain a degree of ambiguity for us modern readers and, perhaps, for Paul's readers as well. Notwithstanding, we can come fairly close to understanding Paul's meaning and we may have certainty that this does not include his comparing a physical and material body with one that is non-physical and immaterial.<sup>433</sup>

Although later than the New Testament literature, uses of these terms by the Apostolic Fathers may likewise be helpful to us. *Ψυχικόν* does not appear in the Apostolic Fathers. However, there are twenty-two occurrences of *πνευματικόν*.<sup>434</sup> The term generally carries the same meanings that are found in New Testament usage. However, of interest is that Ignatius provides a number of passages contrasting or combining "flesh" and "spirit." He refers to Jesus as the "physician, who is flesh and spirit (*σαρκικός καὶ πνευματικός*), born and unborn" (Ign. *Eph.* 7:2). Although the "spiritual" to which Ignatius refers is immaterial, it is not clear that this is what "spiritual" means in this context. Here it appears to denote the divine nature of Christ in contrast to his human nature. Ignatius's point is that the whole person of Christ, human and divine, rose from the dead. In Ign. *Eph.* 10:3, Christians are told to abide in Christ "physically" and "spiritually." In Ign. *Magn.* 13:1-2, Christians are told to be grounded in the dogmas of the Lord and the apostles so that they may prosper "physically" and "spiritually" and that they should obey the bishop so that there may be "physical" and "spiritual" unity (Ig. *Smyr.* 13:2). Only in Ig. *Eph.* 8:2 does Ignatius employ "fleshly" in a negative sense: οἱ σαρκικοὶ τὰ πνευματικὰ πράσσειν οὐ δύνανται, οὐδὲ οἱ πνευματικοὶ τὰ σαρκικά ("Those who are *fleshly* are not able to do *spiritual* things. Neither can the *spiritual* do *fleshly* things"). This looks much like Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 3:1. Ignatius urges Polycarp to give all

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(2004), 304-05; Kistemaker (1993), 573; Lockwood (2000), 584-85, 589, 594-95, 602; D. M. Martin (1995), 189; Segal (2004), like Hayes above, refers to "physical body" as "an unfortunate English translation" (429); Snyder (1992), 206; Thiselton (2000), 1275-78; Witherington, (*Corinth*, 1995), 309; Wright (2003), 282, 348-55. Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) likewise understands Paul as referring to the transformation of the present body (330). For a contrary position, see Baxter (1999), 27; Barclay in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 17; Borg (Borg and Wright, 1998) correctly understands what these terms mean before allowing his misunderstanding of the term "flesh and blood" to lead him astray: "the Greek phrase behind 'physical body' means literally 'a body animated by soul,' and the second phrase means 'a body animated by spirit.' Yet the context suggests to me that the contrast 'physical body' and 'spiritual body' does express what Paul means. According to other things Paul says in the immediate context the 'body animated by soul' is 'flesh and blood,' 'perishable,' 'of the earth,' 'of dust.' This is what we typically mean by a physical body. The 'body animated by spirit,' on the other hand, is none of these things" (133); Dunn (1995): "It makes better sense to see his distinction between the 'natural (physical) body' of this life and the 'spiritual body' of the resurrection (15.44) as an attempt to re-express Jewish understanding of existence as always an embodied existence in a way which made more sense to those who thought in Greek terms" (40); Hooke (1967), 55; Murphy-O'Connor (1998), 171; Quest (1994), 96, 122-23; Tabor (2006), 232; Wedderburn (1999), 66. Also see Gooch (1987), 69-70 and Harrisville (1987), 274, 281 who understand the resurrection state of believers as one of disembodiment and without continuity with our present body, although Harrisville contends that "natural" does not mean physical (276). I found five of thirty-two English translations that rendered *ψυχικόν* as "physical": RSV, NRSV, REB, GWN (God's Word to the Nations Bible), and the Amplified Bible. The following lexicons rendered *ψυχικόν* in 1 Cor. 15:44 as "physical": BDAG (2000), 1100 (The influence of BDAG on translators has probably been quite significant here.); Friberg, Friberg, and Miller (2000), 414; Newman (1993), 201; Louw and Nida (1996, c 1989), 1:693.

<sup>433</sup> Accordingly, it was an innocent but incorrect understanding of Paul which led the widely-respected philosopher Antony Flew to comment, "I find the idea of a spiritual body very peculiar in that, after all, when you say something is spiritual it's rather like saying it's immaterial." (Flew's comments in Ankerberg, ed. [2005], 17).

<sup>434</sup> 1 *Clem.* 47:3; 2 *Clem.* 14:1ff; *Barn.* 1:2; 4:11; 16:10; Ign. *Eph.* 5:1; 7:2; 8:2 (thrice); 10:3; 11:2; Ign. *Magn.* 13:1f; Ign. *Smyrn.* 3:3; 12:2; 13:2; Ign. *Pol.* 1:2; 2:2; *Did.* 10:3.

attention to things “fleshly” and “spiritual” (Ign. *Pol.* 1:2). Polycarp should ask that the unseen things may be revealed to him (i.e., spiritual discernment). This is why he is both “fleshly” and “spiritual” (2:2). Of special interest is Ign. *Smyrn.* 3:1-3 where he states that Jesus was in the “flesh” when after his resurrection he appeared to the disciples, inviting them to touch him so that they would see that he was not a δαιμόνιον ἀσώματον (bodiless *daimonion*). They touched him and believed because they could relate to his flesh and blood [or spirit] (κραθέντες τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ αἵματι [A] πνεύματι [GLC] “blended with his flesh and blood [spirit]”). Jesus then ate and drank with his disciples as in the *flesh* (ὡς σαρκικός) although he had been *spiritually* united with the Father. In 12:2, Ignatius greets all in the name of Jesus Christ and τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ αἵματι, πάθει τε καὶ ἀναστάσει σαρκικῇ τε καὶ πνευματικῇ, ἐν ἐνότητι θεοῦ καὶ ὑμῶν (“in his flesh and blood, he suffered and was resurrected both in the *flesh* and in the *spirit*, in unity with God and you”). Accordingly, for Ignatius, although flesh and spirit were distinct, they were not necessarily set in antithesis to one another any more than “tall” is the antithesis of “heavy.” It was not an either/or but a both/and.

Our word study of ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν has taken us from the eighth century BC through the third century AD. We have observed that ψυχικόν is never employed in a sense that carries the meaning of “physical” or “material.” Of greater importance is that this conclusion carries throughout the writings of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers. Of greatest importance is that Paul did not employ ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν to describe a contrast of “physical/material” and “ethereal/immaterial” in 1 Corinthians. Moreover, I would like to add that had Paul desired to communicate this sort of contrast, he had better words at his disposal, one of which he had employed just a few chapters earlier while using a seed analogy similar to that of 1 Corinthians 15. In 9:11 he writes, “If we sowed spiritual (πνευματικὰ) things in you, is it too much if we reap material (σαρκικὰ) things from you?”<sup>435</sup> If the apostles were providing spiritual teachings to the Corinthian Christians, were not they entitled to receive material benefits like food, clothing, and shelter?<sup>436</sup> Since Paul had used both ψυχικός and σαρκικός earlier, if he had desired to communicate that our resurrection body would not be physical but rather immaterial in nature, why use the former term in a sense not employed earlier in his letter or for that matter anywhere else in the Pauline corpus, the New Testament, or by any known author from the eighth century BC through the third century AD, while ignoring a clearer term used just a few chapters earlier in a similar seed analogy?<sup>437</sup> Moreover, had Paul wanted to communicate that our resurrection bodies will be ethereal, he may have used ἀόρατος. Within the Pauline corpus, this term is found in Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; 1 Timothy 1:17, all in this sense.<sup>438</sup> While many question Pauline authorship of

<sup>435</sup> See also Rom. 15:27 where Paul writes, “For if the Gentiles shared in their [i.e., Jews] spiritual things, they ought also in their material things to serve them.” Paul employs the same Greek words for “spiritual” and “material” that he does in 1 Cor. 9:11.

<sup>436</sup> Σαρκικός is likewise found in Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 1:12; 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:11. All but the Petrine reference are found in Paul’s letters.

<sup>437</sup> Brodeur (1996), 101n21. Moule (1965) notes that πνευματικῇ, ψυχικῇ, and σαρκικῇ all appear in a passage in the Reginus *de resurrectione* from Nag Hammadi (45:14-46:2) but then notes the problems with dating this text (112).

<sup>438</sup> Outside the Pauline corpus, ἀόρατος appears in Heb. 11:27. In the LXX, it occurs in Gen. 1:2, Isa. 45:3, and 2 Macc. 9:5.



Colossians<sup>439</sup> and most reject it for 1 Timothy,<sup>440</sup> a large number agree that these contain Pauline thought.<sup>441</sup>

We now move to the second point of contention which appears in the next verse where Paul refers to Adam as a “living soul” (ψυχὴν ζῶσαν) and Jesus as a “life-giving spirit” (πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν). He alludes to Genesis 2:7 which reads:

καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν.

And God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

In 15:45, Paul provides further explanation of what he means by natural and spiritual bodies:

οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται· ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν.

Thus also it is written: the first Adam became a living soul. The last Adam a life-giving spirit.

According to Genesis 2:7 God breathed on Adam with the result that he became a ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. In 15:45, Paul asserts that Jesus, who is the last Adam, became a πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν. The words Paul use for *soul* (ψυχὴν) and *spirit* (πνεῦμα) are roots of *natural* (ψυχικός) and *spiritual* (πνευματικός), which appear in the previous verse. The *ικός* has been omitted, since the terms appear substantively rather than adjectivally as in 15:44. We may very roughly translate Paul’s thought as “Adam became a *natural* entity that is living, whereas Jesus became a *spiritual* entity that is life-giving.” God breathed on *natural* matter and it came to life. The resurrected Jesus will breathe on others at the general resurrection and they will become *spiritual* entities. The verses that follow (46-49) provide additional context for interpretation:

ἀλλ’ οὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν, ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν.<sup>47</sup> ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.<sup>48</sup> οἶος ὁ χοϊκός, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ χοϊκοί, καὶ οἶος ὁ ἐπουράνιος, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ ἐπουράνιοι.<sup>49</sup> καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ.

But the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.<sup>47</sup> The first man is from the earth, of dust; the second man is from heaven.<sup>48</sup> As the dusty one

<sup>439</sup> R. Brown (1997) notes that “at the present moment about 60 percent of critical scholarship holds that Paul did not write the letter” (610). Wright (2003) places himself in the “recalcitrant minority” of scholars who regard Ephesians and Colossians as from Paul (236). Contra is Witherington (*Acts*, 1998) who writes, “Most scholars still believe that Paul wrote Colossians” (58).

<sup>440</sup> R. Brown (1997): “about 80-90 percent of modern scholars would agree that the Pastorals were written after Paul’s lifetime, and of those the majority would accept the period between 80 and 100 as the most plausible context for their composition” (668, emphasis in original).

<sup>441</sup> R. Brown (1997): “What is assured is that Col belongs in the Pauline heritage” (617). “The majority would also interpret [the Pastorals] as having some continuity with Paul’s own ministry and thought, but not so close a continuity as manifested in Col and Eph and even II Thess” (668).



is, such also are the dusty [i.e., earthly] ones. And as the heavenly one is, such also are the heavenly ones.<sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne the image of the dusty one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

The future tense indicates this change will occur at the general resurrection, which is confirmed by the remainder of chapter 15 and especially 15:52. Accordingly, in context, Paul provides four ways in which our present body differs from our resurrection body with additional comment on the fourth: *natural* and *spiritual*. Our present bodies are corruptible, dishonorable, weak, natural, and composed of an inanimate and earthly substance which came to life through the breath of God. Our future bodies will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and composed of heavenly substance that is given life by Christ. It is helpful to remember that neither Paul nor any other known author from the eighth century BC through the third century AD employed these terms to contrast *physical* and *immaterial* bodies. This is crushing to any hope of interpreting Paul as suggesting an ethereal body when he refers to Jesus as a “life-giving spirit.” Moreover, as we also previously observed, the word for “life-giving” (ζωοποιῶν) is used by Paul in Romans 8:11 where he says, “the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also *give life* [ζωοποιήσει] to your mortal bodies.” Since Paul uses the same Greek word on the same subject of our future bodies, it seems quite clear that, in 1 Corinthians and Romans, Paul held that a transformation of our present and mortal body will occur. Since Jesus was the “first fruit” (ἀπαρχή) of those who have died (1 Cor. 15:20), it seems that Paul would likewise have thought Jesus’ mortal body was raised as he implies in Romans 8:11.

The third point of contention in 1 Corinthians 15 is verse 50. Paul states that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ). Are Dunn and Wedderburn correct that Paul is contradicting Luke who reports Jesus saying “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:39)? A significant minority of today’s commentators interpret “flesh and blood” as a synonym for “physical.”<sup>442</sup> Most agree it is a figure of speech—and probably a Semitism—referring to man as a mortal being, rather than simply stating “*the living* cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”<sup>443</sup> It resembles North American idioms that refer to a person as being cold-blooded, hot-blooded, or red-blooded. When referring to a “red-blooded male,” North Americans are not

<sup>442</sup> Borg (2006), 289 (cf. Borg in Borg and Wright [1998], 133); R. Brown (1973), 87; Crossan in Halstead (1995), 521; Dunn (2002), 11; Viney (1989), 130; Watson (1992), 179.

<sup>443</sup> Jeremias (1955-56) notes that βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσα is “semitic language” (cf. Matt. 25:34). Thus, the entire sentence “is not a creation of the apostle himself but originates from the eschatological teaching of the early Church” (152); Barnett (1994), citing similar meaning in other passages where the phrase appears, although he makes no mention of it being a figure of speech (9); Carson (1998) comments on Matthew 16:17; Collins (1999), 579; Conzelmann (1975), 289-90; Garland (2003), 739-41. Gundry (1976) contends that the term “connotes the present body’s weakness and perishability (the parallel is *phthora*), but does not imply immateriality of the resurrected body. On the contrary, *sōma* in and of itself implies materiality” (166); Kistemaker (1993), 580-81; Lockwood (2000), 596; Johnson (2004), 306; Eriksson (1998), 273; Keener (2005), 133. Craig (*Assessing*, 1989) notes that “most commentators are agreed that ‘flesh and blood’ is a typical Semitic expression denoting the frail human nature” (141). He then cites ten scholars in support, none of whom has been listed above. Thiselton (2000) does not note the Semitism. However, he asserts that “flesh and blood” denotes “humankind in its weakness and vulnerability” and that 50a refers to “holiness in place of sin” and 50b refers to “the reversal of weakness, degeneration, and decay” (1291); Orr and Walther (1976) likewise note that the term’s meaning refers to humanity (349-50); Wright (2003) does not note the Semitism (359).

contrasting him with one who is green-blooded. The color and temperature of one's blood is not relevant. The expression "flesh and blood" appears five times in the New Testament (two of which are in the Pauline corpus),<sup>444</sup> appears twice in the LXX,<sup>445</sup> and is common in the Rabbinic literature, all carrying the primary sense of mortality rather than physicality.<sup>446</sup> That "flesh and blood" is employed in this sense in 1 Corinthians 15:50 is undergirded by the fact that, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 15 where the present body is described, its mortality rather than physicality is the issue.

Joachim Jeremias convinced many scholars that Paul is here employing synthetic parallelism to contrast the living with the dead. The term "flesh and blood" simply refers to those living at the parousia and the "perishable" refers to the dead in Christ at the parousia.<sup>447</sup> According to Jeremias, the thought behind verse 50 is "neither the living nor the dead can take part in the Kingdom of God—as they are."<sup>448</sup> However, many commentators now disagree with Jeremias. They argue that Paul is employing synonymous rather than synthetic parallelism.<sup>449</sup> In this structure, the latter statement "the corruptible cannot inherit the incorruptible" is a restatement of the former "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Collins suggests that the former is a statement in Semitic terms and the latter in Hellenistic terms.<sup>450</sup> In this case, Paul is saying that our mortal bodies with their weaknesses cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, our corruptible bodies cannot inherit incorruptibility. A slightly different interpretation of verse 50 results: "That which is sinful and corrupt cannot enter the presence of God and obtain that which is incorrupt. When that which is corrupt has been changed to a state of incorruption, we can speak of laying claim to the inheritance God offers to us."<sup>451</sup>

In favor of synthetic parallelism, there are three other occasions in the New Testament where the ὅτι . . . οὐδὲ may slightly favor the interpretation of Jeremias: Acts 2:27; Philippians 2:16; Hebrews 10:8.<sup>452</sup> However, it must be admitted that in each instance, the second thought in these passages may also be interpreted exegetically to the first thought without strain, supporting synonymous parallelism.

That neither interpretation stands out as significantly weightier is evidenced by the lack of even a resemblance of a majority view. Notwithstanding, whichever position one may adopt (synthetic or synonymous), there is no support from either for interpreting Paul to be implying that our incorruptible bodies will be ethereal. "Flesh and blood" is better interpreted "mortal," and even by Jeremias' view, "the living" is not necessarily synonymous with "physical" or "material."<sup>453</sup> If "flesh and blood" is

<sup>444</sup> Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14.

<sup>445</sup> Ecclesiasticus 14:18; 17:31.

<sup>446</sup> R. Meyer, *TDNT*, 7:116.

<sup>447</sup> Jeremias (1955-56), 157-58. Also see Barrett (1968), 379. Thiselton (2000) agrees with Jeremias that synthetic parallelism is used by Paul, but does not agree with his definition of "flesh and blood" (1291).

<sup>448</sup> Jeremias (1955-56), 152.

<sup>449</sup> Collins (1999), 579; Conzelmann (1975), 290; Fee (1987), 798; Garland (2003), 741; G. Harder, *TDNT*, 9:103-05; Kistemaker (1993), 581.

<sup>450</sup> Collins (1999), 579.

<sup>451</sup> Kistemaker (1993), 581.

<sup>452</sup> Luke 12:24 is not a good example, since the construction is not the same: ὅτι . . . οὐ . . . οὐδὲ.

<sup>453</sup> Meyer (1986): "Jeremias' 1955 essay all but put an end to the idea that 'flesh and blood' (interpreted as the corporeal principle itself) had no part in final salvation. After 1955 that particular

understood with the majority of commentators as a figure of speech, interpreting Paul as claiming in 15:50 that our future bodies will be ethereal is exegetically unfounded. He is saying that our mortal bodies in their weak state will not be what we have in the resurrection. They must be transformed. Since “flesh and blood” is a figure of speech and “flesh and bone” apparently was not, Paul is not at all contradicting Luke. Moreover, since Paul strongly suggests a resurrection of our mortal bodies elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 15:42ff, 53; Phil. 3:21), any interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50 that has Paul referring to an ethereal body proposes a Paul who not only contradicts Luke, but also himself.

The fourth and final point of contention results from verses 51-52, where Paul says that on the day of resurrection “we will be changed” (ἀλλαγησόμεθα). This text appears to have an earlier parallel in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 where Paul writes, “For with a shout of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God the Lord Himself will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will be raised first.<sup>17</sup> Next, we who are living and remaining will be taken at the same time with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we will be with the Lord always.”<sup>454</sup> Paul does not appear to believe in a “soul sleep,” since, for him, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and this will occur immediately upon death (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24). Paul envisions instead that dead believers are with Christ until the Parousia, at which time they return to their bodies and are resurrected. Believers who are alive at the Parousia will have their bodies changed to immortality and will be similar to the resurrection bodies of the now formerly dead believers. Paul’s thoughts in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 support a “transformation” view.

Some have contended that Paul is not communicating that we will be changed in the sense of altering, but is instead employing a meaning of mercantile exchange, in other words, of *trading* one thing for another.<sup>455</sup> While this meaning is possible, it seems unlikely. It is difficult to translate 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 to mean an exchange. If the dead experience resurrection at death, why are they raised at the Parousia: “the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible” (1 Cor. 15:52); “the dead in Christ will be raised first” (1 Thess. 4:16)?<sup>456</sup> These texts likewise make

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reading of the text of 1 Cor 15:50 was largely abandoned, few today being ready to follow Teichmann in suppressing the prima-facie sense of ‘change’ (‘we shall all be changed’) in favor of making it mean annihilation and new creation. [In a footnote here, Meyer cites Lüdemann “among the exceptions.”] With the loss of 1 Cor 15:50, the full-blown hypothesis of ‘development’—a complete trajectory with visible point of departure (1 Thess 4), apogee (1 Cor 15), and arrival at a new eschatology (2 Cor 5)—did indeed collapse” (375).

<sup>454</sup> ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, <sup>17</sup> ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα.

<sup>455</sup> Dunn (1985) seems to support this view: “Paul believed in the resurrection of the *body*, but not the resurrection of *this body*” (74); Barrett (1973), 153; Carnley (1987), 58; Harris (1990) writes that in verse 44 the discontinuity is so emphasized that “the ‘exchange’ motif is present,” but only alongside a dominant transformation motif in verses 36-37 and 51-54 (201-02). Also see Jos. War 2:162-63.

<sup>456</sup> Word usage elsewhere is not very helpful. Several instances in biblical texts exist where the meaning of *exchange* is present (Gen. 41:14; Lev. 27:10, 33; Jdg. 14:13; 2 Sam. 12:20; 1 Ki. 5:28; 2 Ki. 5:5, 22, 23; Neh. 9:26; Ps. 101 [102]:27; 105 [106]:20; Isa. 24:5; Jer. 2:11; 52:33.). However, there are also instances, though fewer, where the term is used of *altering*, such as in Gen. 31:7 (“your father has cheated me and *changed* my wages ten times”). For other uses in non-biblical sources more

it clear that resurrection for Paul did not occur at death. The continuing life of the soul is not ‘resurrection.’

Thus far, we have discovered that the meaning of *altering* is clearly more at home than *exchanging* in 1 Corinthians 15 through verse 50. Paul has stated that *this* present mortal body will put on immortality and the remaining scholars who understand “flesh and blood” and πνευματικόν to be referring to an ethereal existence are mistaken. But what about verse 51? Jeremias links this statement to verse 35 and says this is Paul’s answer to the question “How are the dead raised?” Verses 51-52 is Paul’s answer, the πῶς.<sup>457</sup> The mystery revealed to Paul is that the change of the dead in Christ as well as believers living at the time will take place at the parousia. Jeremias draws this conclusion based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 which Paul wrote prior to 1 Corinthians and is a parallel passage. He also notes that in the Jewish apocalyptic literature the dead are raised in their earthly state (*Syriac Apoc. of Baruch* 49-51; esp. 50:2). “Only after the judgment the righteous are changed.”<sup>458</sup> I regard it as being more likely that Paul is rather answering the question implicitly prompted by the statement that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” which is, “How will the believer be changed in order to inherit the kingdom of God?” Either way, most agree that Paul meant *altering*.<sup>459</sup>

For Paul to be thinking of an exchange, he would have to be going against what he had just written in 15:42-44 and what he would later write in Romans and Philippians. Thus, there is no indication that Paul imagines an exchange. Everything points to an altering.

We have looked carefully at four points of contention in this passage and discovered that it is highly likely that Paul held to a transforming resurrection of Jesus’ corpse. To the extent that this observation is correct, the interpretations of Wedderburn, Dunn, and others who place Paul’s view of resurrection in conflict to the Evangelists are mistaken.<sup>460</sup>

#### 4.3.3.9.c. Philippians 3:21

ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξει αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

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contemporary with 1 Cor. 15, see Jos. *Ant.* 2:97, where Joseph’s face had *changed* over the years due to aging so that his brothers did not recognize him, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* Parable 9, 4:5, 8 which tells of stones that change or alter their colors. A few other texts could adopt either meaning: 3 Macc. 1:29; *Barn.* 10:7; 15:5. The only biblical references contemporary with 1 Cor. 15 are likewise found in Paul who only employs it twice (Rom. 1:23; Gal. 4:20) and Heb. 1:12. In Rom. 1:23 the meaning of *exchanging* is clear, but in Gal. 4:20 the meaning of *altering* is clear. Heb. 1:12 means an exchange.

<sup>457</sup> In agreement is Soards (1999), 351.

<sup>458</sup> Jeremias (1955-56), 158-59.

<sup>459</sup> Brodeur (1996), 31, 83, 96; Fee (1987), 800; Garland (2003), 743; Harris (1985), 216; Héring (1962), 180; Horsley (1998), 214; Kistemaker (1993), 582; Morris (1976), 233; Moule (1965), 120; Oster (1995), 407; Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 67; Talbert (1987), 103; Thiselton (2000), 1294-95.

<sup>460</sup> Borg is, thus, seriously mistaken when he asserts that 1 Corinthians 15 is “a chapter that strongly suggests that the resurrection body is not a physical body” (Borg in Borg and Wright, 1998, 134). See also Gwynne (2000): “Admittedly, Paul’s writings certainly create difficulties for supporters of an historical empty tomb” (12).

He will transform our humble body to be in similar form to his glorious body according to the working of his power even to subject all things to himself.

Μετασχηματίσει (transform) in Philippians 3:21 is employed by Josephus to mean “to change” as in changing clothes.<sup>461</sup> Is it possible that Paul was thinking more of an exchange of our present mortal body for a new one, rather than a transformation when he wrote to the Philippians?

There are five occurrences of the term in the Pauline corpus (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Cor. 11:13, 14, 15; Phil. 3:21). 1 Corinthians 4:6 provides a unique instance where it apparently means “to apply to.”<sup>462</sup> In each appearance in 2 Corinthians, either definition will work. False apostles are said to *disguise* (μετασχηματιζόμενοι) themselves as true ones. *Disguise* could mean that they are altering or changing their identity. However, one may claim that they exchanged their identity for another, although lexicographers do not appear to have understood it in the latter sense.<sup>463</sup> However, we will explore this thought further. Since Paul’s use of this word in his other writings is not of much help, let us look elsewhere. The word does not appear in the Apostolic Fathers and only once in the LXX. In 4 Maccabees 9:22, a man being tortured is said to be transformed by fire into immortality. This seems to be referring to his inner being, rather than his body. Nevertheless, it is a transformation rather than an exchange.

The matter may be decided by reading Philippians 3:21 employing each definition:

Christ will *transform* our humble body into conformity with his glorious body.  
Christ will *exchange* our humble body into conformity with his glorious body.

In our first option, Paul is saying that Jesus will alter our mortal bodies to be like (lit. *to have the same form as*) his own. This fits very well. In the second option, Paul says that Jesus will exchange our mortal bodies to be like his own. Exchanging something to be in conformity with something else does not read well. What is Jesus exchanging with our bodies? It is as though two different and disconnected thoughts are being presented. One must do violence to the text in order to arrive at such an interpretation. Thus, the text itself seems quite clear that Paul is referring to an altering of our present body.<sup>464</sup>

#### 4.3.3.9.d. Colossians 2:9

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς

For in him dwells all the fullness of deity bodily

<sup>461</sup> Jos. Ant. 7:257; 8:267.

<sup>462</sup> BDAG (2000), #3, 641.

<sup>463</sup> BDAG (2000), #1, 641; LS (1996), #1, 1117.

<sup>464</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 45; Moule (1965), 108; Witherington (*Paul*, 1998), 150-51. Contra is Lindars (1986) who argues that “following the lead of Paul, we can conclude that at his resurrection Jesus assumed ‘his glorious body’ (Philippians 3.21), suited to his status as the exalted Messiah. This view permits (but does not necessitate) the corollary that the physical body of Jesus remained in the unknown place of burial and decomposed in the same way as our own” (95). Lindars fails to note that in this same verse Paul says that our present bodies will be transformed.



We will only mention this passage in passing, since there is no consensus regarding authorship of Colossians or whether it contains Pauline thought.<sup>465</sup> Since a healthy number of scholars believe Paul wrote Colossians, it should at least be noted that in 2:9 the present tense of κατοικέω is employed. The author held that all of the fullness of God's nature and essence dwells presently (that is, in the post-ascension state) in Jesus' body. Although not as precise as the other references considered, Jesus in his resurrected state is said to possess a body of a sort.

Thus far, we have examined texts attributed to Paul. Of these, three strongly suggest his belief in the resurrection of the corpse and are located in his undisputed letters. The fourth suggests Paul's belief that Jesus has a body in his post-ascension state and is found in a letter for which there is heavy dispute over Pauline authorship. Before drawing a final conclusion on Paul, we will need to consider his teaching in a passage that has created much controversy and which presents the possibility that he changed his view of the meaning of "resurrection" after writing 1 Corinthians.

#### 4.3.3.9.e. 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8

Διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ὁ ἕξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ' ὁ ἕσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα.<sup>17</sup> τὸ γὰρ παραυτίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν,<sup>18</sup> μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα· τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια.<sup>1</sup> Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκήνου καταλυθῇ, οἰκοδομήν ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχομεν, οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.<sup>2</sup> καὶ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ στενάζομεν τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπενδύσασθαι ἐπιποθοῦντες,<sup>3</sup> εἶ γε καὶ ἐκδυσάμενοι οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα.<sup>4</sup> καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὄντες ἐν τῷ σκήνῳ στενάζομεν βαρούμενοι, ἐφ' ᾧ οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ' ἐπενδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῇ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς.<sup>5</sup> ὁ δὲ κατεργασάμενος ἡμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο θεός, ὁ δοὺς ἡμῖν τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος.<sup>6</sup> Θαρροῦντες οὖν πάντοτε καὶ εἰδότες ὅτι ἐνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐκδημοῦμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου.<sup>7</sup> διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἶδους.<sup>8</sup> θαρροῦμεν δὲ καὶ εὐδοκοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐκδημῆσαι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐνδημῆσαι πρὸς τὸν κύριον.

Therefore, we do not lose heart. But even if our physical body is wearing down our inner person is being renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For momentarily, our light sufferings are producing in [or for] us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.<sup>18</sup> We are not concerned about the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.<sup>1</sup> For we know that if our earthly house of dwelling is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house made without hands eternal in the heavens.<sup>2</sup> For even in this we groan, longing to be further clothed by our heavenly dwelling.<sup>3</sup> If indeed, even having taken it off, we will not be found naked.<sup>4</sup> For indeed we groan, being burdened while in this house, because we do not desire to be unclothed but to be further clothed in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by life.<sup>5</sup> God is the one who

<sup>465</sup> In favor of Pauline thought are R. Brown (1997), 617; Ehrman (2000), 349; Johnson (1986), 359; Wright (1986), 34.

prepared us for this very thing, who gave his Spirit to us as a deposit.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we are confident always and know that to be at home in the body is to be absent from the Lord.<sup>7</sup> For we walk by faith, not by sight.<sup>8</sup> And we are confident and rather pleased to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

This passage has been one of the most difficult in the New Testament for scholars to decipher and little agreement exists regarding its meaning. John Gillman lists three general categories of interpretations of this text:<sup>466</sup> (1) Paul has changed his mind pertaining to post-mortem existence during the time between writing 1 and 2 Corinthians and is saying in this passage that believers receive their new body at death.<sup>467</sup> (2) Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the body at the Parousia.<sup>468</sup> (3) Paul is speaking of a different matter than he was in 1 Corinthians 15, perhaps an intermediate state.<sup>469</sup> I agree with Moule as he writes, “I am not so simple as to imagine that I can provide clarity and precision where great scholars, past and present, have confessed to bewilderment.”<sup>470</sup> However, I would like to offer a few thoughts in the hopes they will contribute to the discussion and in the process suggest with a few others before me that a version of category three is correct that has Paul referring to *both* the Parousia and an intermediate stage. It is not an either/or of categories two and three, but both.

We begin by noting that in 5:3 there is a textual discrepancy: ἐκδυσάμενοι or ἐνδυσάμενοι.<sup>471</sup> Nestle’s 27 and UBS 4 both prefer ἐκδυσάμενοι.<sup>472</sup> Thus, the NRSV reads “if indeed, when we have *taken it off* [ital. mine] we will not be found naked” (εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐκδυσάμενοι οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα). However, the statement including the variant reads: “if indeed, when we have *put it on* [ital. mine] we will not be found naked” (εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα).

In *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, the committee preferred ἐκδυσάμενοι, with Metzger dissenting in favor of ἐνδυσάμενοι. The committee admitted that ἐνδυσάμενοι enjoys superior manuscript evidence. However, it ruled

<sup>466</sup> Gillman (1988), 439-54.

<sup>467</sup> Gillman (1988), 439. Glasson (1990) comments, “It is difficult to harmonise the views of resurrection given in 1 Cor. xv and 2 Cor. v. . . . it seems that Paul’s thinking had moved forward a stage if, as appears to be the case, the building from God is to be given at death, rather than at some future climax” (154). Moule (1965) argues “the difference between I Cor. Xv and II Cor. V concerns the manner, rather than the moment, of the change. Whereas I Cor. Xv implies that the new is *added to* the old and *superimposed upon* it, II Cor. Iv. 5 implies that the new is received only *in exchange for* the old” (116, also 107).

<sup>468</sup> Gillman (1988), 440. See Bultmann (1985), 134; Young and Ford (1987), 132.

<sup>469</sup> Gillman (1998), 441. See Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (1997), 262-63; Barrett (1973), 152-57; Fryer (1987); Harris (1985), 99; Héring (1967), 36-37; Hughes (1962), 171; Kistemaker (1997), 171; Raymond Martin (1986), 104-05; Osei-Bonsu (1986); Thrall (1994), 376-78; Witherington (*Corinth*, 1995), 318, 391; Woodbridge (2003), 17; Yates (1987).

<sup>470</sup> Moule (1965), 106.

<sup>471</sup> Uncertainty likewise exists concerning the correct interpretation of Paul’s use of the terms “naked” and “house.” While most commentators hold that “naked” refers to a disembodied state, a few others adopt a very wide range of other interpretations. Ellis (1959) understands it as a way of expressing guilt for not having a wedding garment (221); Furnish (1984) understands it as “alienation from Christ, to having in some way denied one’s baptism” (298); Scott (1998) sees Paul’s view of being naked as his being “physically buried without receiving a reward for his apostolic suffering and labor” (113).

<sup>472</sup> The NET has modified the Greek text to ἐνδυσάμενοι.

that had Paul employed ἐνδυσάμενοι, his statement would be “banal and even tautologous, whereas with ἐκδυσάμενοι it is characteristically vivid and paradoxical (‘inasmuch as we, though unclothed, shall not be found naked’).”<sup>473</sup> Therefore, they assigned ἐκδυσάμενοι a confidence grade of {C}.<sup>474</sup> Metzger preferred ἐνδυσάμενοι because of its “superior external support” and because the ἐκδυσάμενοι is probably “an early alteration to avoid apparent tautology.”<sup>475</sup> It is also noteworthy that the vast majority of English translations adopted ἐνδυσάμενοι.<sup>476</sup>

Initially, there appears to be a good reason for taking ἐκδυσάμενοι as original. The translation is fair and quite smooth. As just noted by the committee, it creates a paradox. We may render the καὶ as “even” so that 5:3 reads, “if indeed, even having taken if off, we will not be found naked.” To paraphrase 5:1-4, then, “We know that when our present body dies another one awaits us in heaven, an eternal body made by God. For now, we long to be clothed by that heavenly body. Thus, even when we lay aside our earthly body, we will not be naked [or disembodied].”

However, the smooth paradox is the only argument in favor of this rendering and I see four challenges to it. First, we should not be alarmed if Paul is “banal and tautologous” in this verse, since he is elsewhere. Consider the closely related passage of 1 Corinthians 15:53-54:

Δεῖ γὰρ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐκδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν.<sup>54</sup> ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐκδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐκδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν, τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος· κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκης.

For it is necessary for this perishable to clothe itself with incorruptibility and this mortal to clothe itself with immortality.<sup>54</sup> But when this perishable shall clothe itself with incorruptibility and this mortal shall clothe itself with immortality, then shall be the word that has been written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

This passage provides a clear example of Paul doing the very thing the committee rules against his doing in 2 Corinthians 5:3, while writing on the same subject no less.<sup>477</sup> However, I admit his redundancy seems greater in 2 Corinthians 5:3 than in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54. In the latter passage he repeats himself, whereas in the former he would have no worry about being disembodied if he was to further cloth himself. Notwithstanding, this may be Paul’s reassurance to his fellow believers in the

<sup>473</sup> Metzger (1994), 511.

<sup>474</sup> This is an upgrade from the UBS 3 {D}.

<sup>475</sup> Metzger (1994), 511.

<sup>476</sup> In favor of the latter reading is Amplified Bible, ASV, Darby, DRA, ESV, KJV, NASB, NASB (Updated), NEB, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT, RWB, TNIV. The German ELB is likewise in agreement. In favor of the former reading is NAB, NRSV, RSV. The German HOF-IBS is in agreement with this reading, but only noted in a footnote. This is a 17:3 ratio for the English translations in favor of the reading “put it on.”

<sup>477</sup> Gillman (1988) holds that ἐνδυσάμενοι is not banal or tautologous, “but may be taken as a ‘virtual repetition’ of the double compound ἐπενδύω. The emphatic καὶ (see 1 Cor 4:7; 7:10-11) supports this reading” (447).

Hellenistic culture of Corinth that they will not become disembodied spirits at the general resurrection but rather they will be embodied.<sup>478</sup>

Second, as noted by Metzger, the textual evidence supporting ἐκδυσάμενοι is inferior to ἐνδυσάμενοι.

Third, ἐπενδύσασθαι in 5:4 generally refers to “further clothing” by placing a garment on top of other clothing and appears to be a thought parallel with the transformation of mortal bodies by putting on further clothing in 1 Corinthians 15:52-54.<sup>479</sup>

Fourth, the καταπίνω in the clause that follows describes that which is mortal being swallowed up by life and appears to fit with the further clothing picture (ἐπενδύσασθαι) immediately preceding it and has a parallel in 1 Corinthians 15:54. Thus, not only is the reason for accepting the weaker reading unsustainable, the other Greek terms employed by Paul in the immediate context weigh in against it.

If we adopt ἐνδυσάμενοι, a transformation of our earthly body seems more likely to be Paul’s thought and is similar to what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15. However, I see a major challenge. The καταλυθῆ in 5:1 seems a better fit with an exchange of bodies; in other words, an abandoning of our present body in order to get a new one.<sup>480</sup> The Synoptics report Jesus’ use of the term in reference to the destruction of the temple, which will be torn down (καταλυθῆ) without one stone being left upon another (Mark 13:2; Matt. 24:2; Luke 21:6). John employs a similar term (λύσατε) which was interpreted in the same way by the Jewish leaders when Jesus refers to the execution and resurrection of his body (John 2:19-21). Although his body would be destroyed in terms of being killed, he would raise it in three days. Therefore, total annihilation is by no means required by καταλυθῆ.<sup>481</sup>

With these thoughts let us look at our text in light of Gillman’s three categories of interpretations. Category one sees a shift in Paul’s thought from 1 Corinthians 15. I see three challenges to this view. First, the ἐπενδύσασθαι of 5:4 speaks not of clothing but of further clothing, a thought consistent with ἐνδυσάμενοι but not with ἐκδυσάμενοι. Second, in 5:4 Paul speaks of our current body being swallowed up by life, a statement that makes little sense if he holds that the current body will simply decay and be annihilated. Finally, this view requires that Paul altered his thoughts pertaining to post-mortem existence not once, but twice. For in 1 Corinthians 15 (c. AD 54-55) Paul is thinking of a transformation of the mortal body only to change his mind to an exchanged body when he wrote 2 Corinthians (c. AD 56), only then to return to his earlier view when he wrote Romans (c. AD 55-58; assuming the latter end) and Philipians (AD 59-63).<sup>482</sup> This is possible, of course, but it hints of an *ad*

<sup>478</sup> Harris (2005), comment on 2 Cor. 5:3 (Logos Libronix).

<sup>479</sup> Wright (“Early Traditions,” 1998), 129.

<sup>480</sup> Harris (1990), 202. Wright (2003) says that “Moule is no doubt right that Paul can envisage here the possibility of ‘exchange’ (losing one body, getting another one) rather than ‘addition’, as in 1 Corinthians 15” (367), although Wright takes a position that in 2 Corinthians 5 the body experiences a *change* rather than an *exchange* (366).

<sup>481</sup> In Acts 5:39, καταλύσαι (“destroy”) is a synonym for ἀνελεῖν (“to kill”) a few verses earlier in Acts 5:33. Moreover, καταλυθήσεται means “to fail” in the same context (Acts 5:38).

<sup>482</sup> Fryer (1987), 460; Osei-Bonsu (1986), 87-88; Wright (2003), 365.

*hoc* component and should be rejected if another interpretation possesses greater explanatory scope and power pertaining to related statements by Paul.<sup>483</sup>

Category two sees a consistency of thought in Paul, since he is speaking of the Parousia in both 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5. However, it is difficult to massage 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8 in such a manner that the text can accommodate the view that Paul is thinking only of the Parousia. I think this view would be smooth had Paul not written verses 6-9. If speaking only of the Parousia, how can verses 6-9 contribute to the discussion, since Paul contrasts being away from or absent from the body (ἐκδημησαι) and being with the Lord (ἐνδημησαι), whereas in 1 Corinthians 15 he is clearly thinking of a transformation of the present body?

Category three sees a difference in subject matter. Whereas Paul writes of a transformation at the Parousia in 1 Corinthians 15, he is writing solely of an intermediate state experienced by the dead in Christ prior to the Parousia in 2 Corinthians 5. This seems plausible at first. Paul speaks of our present body wearing down and finally being destroyed and replaced by a new one (5:1). We could interpret 5:3 as Paul asserting that believers need not fear disembodiment at death, since they will discard their earthly body and get a new one temporarily in heaven until the general resurrection at the Parousia. We may then interpret 5:4 as stating Paul's desire to remain embodied without interruption which he admits is in contrast to how he believes things will actually occur for those who die prior to the Parousia: "For indeed we groan, being burdened while in this house, because we do not desire to be unclothed [as we actually will be] but to be further clothed in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by life [which will not occur to those who die prior to the Parousia]." However, this interpretation is spoiled by Paul's assertion in 5:1 that the new body is not temporary but "eternal." It is further spoiled by the αὐτὸ τοῦτο in his statement that follows: "The one who will bring about *this very thing* is God." To what referent then does the αὐτὸ τοῦτο point? The οὖν of 5:6 brings everything to a conclusion and makes it unlikely that the αὐτὸ τοῦτο is kataphoric. If we understand αὐτὸ τοῦτο as anaphoric, it would seem most natural to connect it to that which immediately precedes it in 5:4: We will not be unclothed but further clothed and the mortal will be swallowed up by life in the process. We again note Paul's language of further clothing and that he speaks of our current body being swallowed up by life, a statement that makes a lot of sense with a further clothing but makes little sense if the believer is to jettison the present body and receive a new one. The only other referent

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<sup>483</sup> Moreover, if the Jerusalem apostles believed Jesus' tomb was empty, this would serve as still another reason against a shift in Paul's view concerning the nature of post-mortem existence for believers. For if Paul had actually heard the Jerusalem disciples claim that the tomb of Jesus was empty because his corpse had been resurrected, why would he later change his view of our future resurrection since he linked the mode of our resurrection to the mode of Jesus' resurrection? Pannenberg explains that "[i]f the Christian proclamation of Jesus has to be accounted for in connection with the emptying of his tomb, the possibilities of spiritualizing interpretations of the Christian Easter message are seriously reduced. Resurrection has to be understood in terms of transformation of the old life into the new one rather than in terms of replacing the perishable body by another one" (Pannenberg in D'Costa, ed. [1996], 70). Moreover, if Paul had actually changed his mind by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, we may ask why Paul would rush to return to his previous view of transformation. We may only speculate, of course. But had he realized that his new belief pertaining to the mode of post-mortem existence for believers in 2 Corinthians was in conflict with the mode of Jesus' resurrection and, as just mentioned, claims of an empty tomb, he may have revised what he regarded as a more speculative belief in deference to another that he held to be much more secure.



is the statement in 5:3 that having put on a new body we will not be disembodied. This seems plausible. In this case, 5:4 would then be understood as supporting 5:3. But this supports a consistency of thought with 1 Corinthians 15 maintained in category two and is incompatible with a different subject matter seen by exegetes embracing the third category.

I would like to suggest an amended form of the third category: Paul mentions *both* stages of resurrection.<sup>484</sup> The first refers to the state of believers who die prior to the Parousia while the second refers to the state of believers at the general resurrection at the Parousia. In this passage, Paul speaks first of the latter then of the former.

I paraphrase what I think Paul is saying:

Although our bodies are wearing down, our inner person is being renewed daily. For the tribulations we are experiencing produce for (in) us an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparison. We do not concentrate on the things that are seen but the unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal while the unseen things to which I am referring are eternal. For we know that if and when our *earthly* body dies, we have a body made by God in heaven that is an eternal one.<sup>485</sup> For we long to be further clothed with our heavenly body. Thus, when we put it on, we will not be naked [i.e., disembodied]. For we are troubled at present, because we do not want to be unclothed [or disembodied, which will be the case if we die prior to the Parousia] but further clothed in order that our current body may be swallowed up by life [which will occur to those believers alive at the Parousia]. [In other words, rather than die and become disembodied, we prefer to be changed at the Parousia.] God is the one who brought us about for this and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing we will be embodied at the general resurrection. Accordingly, we are confident [in our dependence on God], knowing that while we are in our current body we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident [in our dependence on God] and would rather be away from the body and with the Lord [in the event that we do not live to see the Parousia].

This interpretation eliminates the tensions created by the other categories while creating no new ones of which I am aware and is consistent with Paul's thoughts elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:42-54; Phil. 1:21-24; 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rom. 8:11-25). Indeed, Paul has stated this same idea in Philippians 1:23-24 where, in his personal situation of being imprisoned and awaiting trial, he understands his options as dying and being with Christ or continuing life in this world. Since Paul certainly understands a transformation of our mortal body two chapters later (Phil. 3:21), Paul's thinking in Philippians 1:23-24, like 2 Corinthians 5:8, refers to the state of believers who die prior to the general resurrection—disembodiment, while Philippians 3:21 parallels 2 Corinthians 5:2-5 and refers to the transformation of the bodies of believers at the general resurrection.

<sup>484</sup> Craig (*Assessing*, 1989), 154-57; Fryer (1987), 478; Meyer (1986), 380-81; Nichelsburg (2006), 235; Osei-Bonsu (1986), 95; Witherington (*Corinth*, 1995), 391; Woodbridge (2003), 17.

<sup>485</sup> "Earthly" (ἐπίγειος). Compare with φθορά, ἀτιμία, ἀσθένεια, and ψυχικός in 1 Cor. 15:42-44 and χοϊκός in 15:47.

In fact, there are impressive parallels relevant to this discussion of post-mortem existence in the Pauline corpus, both prior and posterior to 2 Corinthians—all located in his undisputed letters to boot—which assist us in discerning Paul’s thoughts in the difficult 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8:

i) *There is a further clothing and swallowing up:*

a. 2 Cor. 5:4: “We do not wish to be unclothed, but clothed [or further-clothed], in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by life.”<sup>486</sup>

b. 1 Cor. 15:54: “But when this perishable puts on the imperishable and this mortal puts on immortality, then the word which was written shall be [fulfilled]: Death is swallowed up in victory [Is. 25:8].”<sup>487</sup>

ii) *Our mortal bodies will be transformed:*

a. 1 Cor. 15:51: “we will all be changed”<sup>488</sup>

b. Phil. 3:21: “he will transform our humble body”<sup>489</sup>

c. Rom. 8:11: the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead “will also give life to your mortal bodies”<sup>490</sup>

iii) *Our present body is “earthly” whereas our new body will be “heavenly”:*

a. 2 Cor. 5:1: “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”<sup>491</sup>

b. 1 Cor. 15:47: “The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.”<sup>492</sup>

c. 1 Cor. 15:49: “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.”<sup>493</sup>

<sup>486</sup> οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ’ ἐπειδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῆ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς.

<sup>487</sup> ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν, τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος· κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος.

<sup>488</sup> πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα

<sup>489</sup> ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν

<sup>490</sup> εἰ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἐγείραντος τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ νεκρῶν οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὁ ἐγείρας Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ζωοποιήσῃ καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν

<sup>491</sup> Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκηνοῦ καταλυθῆ, οἰκοδομήν ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχομεν, οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Harris (2005) makes the following observation: “That Paul is alluding in v. 1 to the dominical saying recorded in Mark 14:58 is highly probable because of the remarkable verbal correspondence between the two passages (καταλύσω–καταλυθῆ, ἀχειροποίητον–ἀχειροποίητον, οἰκοδομήσω–οἰκοδομήν)” (comment on 2 Cor. 5:1, Logos Libronix).

<sup>492</sup> ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.

<sup>493</sup> καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ. Also see Phil. 3:21.

iv) *When we leave our body we are with the Lord:*

a. 2 Cor. 5:6: “while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.”<sup>494</sup>

b. 2 Cor. 5:8: “[we] prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”<sup>495</sup>

c. Phil. 1:23-24: “[I have] the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;<sup>24</sup> but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.”<sup>496</sup>

v) *Tribulation produces future glory for us:*

a. 2 Cor. 4:17: “For momentarily, our light sufferings are producing for<sup>497</sup> (in) us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.”<sup>498</sup>

b. Rom. 8:18: “For I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the future glory to be revealed to us.”<sup>499</sup>

vi) *Concern for the unseen rather than the seen:*

a. 2 Cor. 4:18: “We are not concerned about the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen.”<sup>500</sup>

b. Rom. 8:25: “But if we hope for that which we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”<sup>501</sup>

vii) *We groan in our present condition and have received the Spirit as a deposit:*

a. 2 Cor. 1:22: “[God is] the one who marked us with a seal and gave us the deposit (ἀρραβώνα) of the Spirit in our hearts.”<sup>502</sup>

b. 2 Cor. 5:2-5: “For even in this we groan (στενάζομεν), longing to be further clothed by our heavenly dwelling. . . .<sup>4</sup> For indeed we groan (στενάζομεν), being burdened while in this house, because we do not desire to be unclothed but to be further clothed in order that the mortal may be swallowed up by life.

<sup>494</sup> ἐνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐκδημοῦμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου·

<sup>495</sup> εὐδοκοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐκδημῆσαι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐνδημῆσαι πρὸς τὸν κύριον.

<sup>496</sup> τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων εἰς τὸ ἀναλῶσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, πολλῶ [γὰρ] μᾶλλον κρείσσον· <sup>24</sup> τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαιότερον δι’ ὑμᾶς.

<sup>497</sup> Given Rom. 8:18, I prefer “for us.”

<sup>498</sup> τὸ γὰρ παρατίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν

<sup>499</sup> Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς.

<sup>500</sup> ἡ σκοπούμενων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα·

<sup>501</sup> εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν, δι’ ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.

<sup>502</sup> ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος ἡμᾶς καὶ δοὺς τὸν ἀρραβώνα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν.

<sup>5</sup> God is the one who prepared us for this very thing, who gave his Spirit to us as a deposit (ἀρραβών).<sup>503</sup>

c. Rom. 8:23: “We have the Spirit as the first portion (ἀπαρχή). And we groan (στενάζομεν) within ourselves, eagerly waiting for our adoption, the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) of our body.”<sup>504</sup>

Given these numerous parallels that appear both before and after Paul’s penning of 2 Corinthians and that an interpretation is available that eliminates existing tensions without creating new ones, it is my opinion that there are no longer good reasons for maintaining that Paul changed his views on the post-mortem existence of believers in 2 Corinthians.

In summary, if I am correct, Paul sees two options for believers. Some believers will die prior to the Parousia and will become disembodied<sup>505</sup> until the general resurrection, while believers alive at the Parousia will have their earthly bodies clothed with their new resurrection body made by God. Paul certainly prefers to avoid the former. But his faith gives him confidence that, if he dies prior to the Parousia, even in a disembodied state Paul will be with the Lord—which he prefers over present life in the earthly body—and that is what matters most to him.<sup>506</sup>

#### 4.3.3.9.f. Galatians 1:11-19

Since we have already visited this text I will only reiterate our conclusions.<sup>507</sup> Some have proposed that Paul’s statements that he received the gospel through a “revelation of Jesus Christ” and that God revealed his Son “in me” suggest an experience more in line with a hallucination or epiphany than an objective reality. We observed that this is far from clear, since Paul employs ἀποκάλυψις on numerous occasions to refer to a revealing that is physical in nature and that ἐν ἐμοί could in this text just as plausibly be translated “to me.” We concluded that Paul’s description of his conversion experience in this text is too ambiguous to obtain details pertaining to the nature of his conversion experience that would be helpful to our investigation.

<sup>503</sup> καὶ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ στενάζομεν τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπενδύσασθαι ἐπιποθοῦντες. . . .<sup>4</sup> καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὄντες ἐν τῷ σκήνει στενάζομεν βαρούμενοι, ἐφ’ ᾧ οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ’ ἐπενδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῇ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς. <sup>5</sup> ὁ δὲ κατεργασάμενος ἡμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο θεός, ὁ δὸς ἡμῖν τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος. See also Eph. 1:13-14.

<sup>504</sup> αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν. For a discussion of the meaning of “redemption,” see my explanation of Rom. 8:11 above.

<sup>505</sup> See Jubilees 23:30-31.

<sup>506</sup> So Harris (2005): “In this regard he may have viewed Christ’s experience as paradigmatic. Just as Jesus experienced an interval of disembodiment between his death and his resurrection, so too will the Christian who dies before the parousia. Also, just as Paul must have believed in the preservation of the spirit of Jesus during his period of disembodiment, so also he taught the safekeeping of believers as, in a bodiless state, they await the resurrection: they are in active communion with Christ in his immediate presence (v. 8b). The difference between “the dead in Christ” and living Christians is not in their status (τὸ εἶναι ἐν Χριστῷ; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Thess. 4:16), but in their somatic state (disembodied vs. embodied) and in the quality of their fellowship with Christ and the degree of their proximity to Christ (τὸ εἶναι σὺν Χριστῷ; cf. Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8)” (see comments on 2 Cor. 5:8).

<sup>507</sup> See section 4.3.3.1.a.

We have looked carefully at a number of Pauline passages and have observed that Paul never regarded the final post-mortem state of believers to be one of disembodiment. While Galatians 1 is consistent with a disembodiment view, its ambiguity prevents it from affirming or implying it. Accordingly, no Pauline text can be employed legitimately to assert that Paul's view of resurrection in general and Jesus' resurrection in particular differed fundamentally from that of the Evangelists.<sup>508</sup> When Paul and the Evangelists claimed that Jesus had resurrected, they intended to communicate that the corpse of Jesus had returned to life.

Last evening I watched a popular American television news program named *20/20*. The first news item concerned kidnapped children and featured Jessyca Mullenberg, who was abducted just days after her thirteenth birthday and kept for three and a half months at a hotel.<sup>509</sup> Her kidnapper repeatedly molested her until an alert hotel maid reported her suspicion to the FBI who in turn rescued her. Jessica told authorities that the man told her every day that her new name was Cindy Johnson. After hearing this for months, when the FBI rescued her she was asked if she was Jessyca Mullenberg. She told them no, because at that point she had been brainwashed into thinking she was Cindy Johnson.<sup>510</sup> Analogously, for decades we have heard from a number of scholars, some of whom are academic heavyweights, that "resurrection" as defined by Paul was not something that involved the corpse. This interpretation has been reiterated so often that some scholars appear to regard it as a foregone conclusion. However, we have now seen that this interpretation is no longer sustainable.

#### **4.3.3.10. Why is Paul so important to historians interested in Jesus' resurrection?**

A priority must be assigned to Paul because he is the earliest known author to mention the resurrection of Jesus and there are numerous extant texts he wrote that give us clues pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Paul's letters are the only verifiable reports by a verifiable eyewitness of the risen Jesus himself.<sup>511</sup> And he personally knew the other disciples who were also claiming that the risen Jesus had appeared to them in both individual and group settings. Paul's conversion is especially interesting because he was an enemy of the Church when his experience of the risen Jesus occurred. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is reported not only by his friends but also by at least someone who was a vehement foe at the time of the experience. Paul's belief that he had witnessed the risen Christ was so strong that he, like the original disciples, was willing to suffer continuously for the sake of the gospel, even to the point of martyrdom.

Given the historical nuggets provided by Paul that can assist historians in their investigation of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, it is not surprising to find a few who have attempted to downplay its value. Roy Hoover writes, "No New

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<sup>508</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): "despite some scholarly opinion to the contrary, there is just no good evidence for belief in a non-physical resurrection in Paul, much less within the primitive Jerusalem community. . . . even Paul, in 1 Cor 15, when defending the notion of a 'spiritual body,' teaches—like 2 Bar. 51:10—the transformation of corpses, not their abandonment" (317; cf. 324, 325).

<sup>509</sup> The story is posted at <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=2954522&page=1> (accessed March 21, 2007).

<sup>510</sup> This part of the story does not appear in the article but was on the television program aired March 16, 2007.

<sup>511</sup> Hoover in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 129; cf. Lüdemann (2004), 34-35.



Testament text claims that the risen Jesus appeared to anyone who had not been a follower of Jesus *or who did not become a believer* [ital. mine].<sup>512</sup> This is quite a move, simply writing off those who became believers after they were convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus. Hoover fails to address the question of what may have led them to this belief against their previous wishes to reject who they believed was a false Messiah. So how does Hoover account for Paul's experience? He writes, "The risen Jesus was seen by one Pharisee who was a zealous enemy of the early church—Paul, from Tarsus; but so far as we know, Paul never met the Jesus of history and cannot, therefore, be counted among his enemies."<sup>513</sup> If we followed Hoover's logic, no one fighting against the Nazis in World War II or imprisoned in one of the Nazi death camps could consider Hitler his enemy unless he had personally met him!

Atheist philosopher Michael Martin offers a similar argument.

Why should the fact that Paul persecuted Christians and was subsequently converted to Christianity by his religious experience be given special existential significance? Whatever his past record, at the time of his report he was a zealous, religious believer and not a religious skeptic.<sup>514</sup>

For Martin, it seems that in order to be regarded as a credible witness, it is not good enough to be opposed to everything about Christianity, including her followers; one must also be no less than an agnostic. But as we observed earlier, historians are quite unanimous in their opinion that there is no neutrality when it comes to these matters. When we speak of bias, the knife cuts both ways and it is quite clear that some religious skeptics reveal their own bias, which is anti-religious in nature.

Martin cites as a primary source of revelation the conversion of Muhammad from polytheism to monotheism based on an appearance to him of the angel Gabriel. According to Muhammad, Gabriel directly communicated revelation from heaven: the *Qur'an*. So, why accept Paul's testimony while rejecting Muhammad's?<sup>515</sup> Martin's point has some weight. Muhammad's testimony that Gabriel revealed the *Qur'an* to him appears four times in the *Qur'an*.<sup>516</sup> Accordingly, both the *Qur'an* and Paul may qualify as providing eyewitness testimony. However, Martin overlooks some very important differences. First, the overall sources for the event are far from equal in quality. Outside of the Quranic texts, the appearance of Gabriel to Muhammad is found in the early biographies and hadith, all of which were written more than 200 years after Muhammad's death.<sup>517</sup> These are secondary sources that are, in a sense, similar to Luke's accounts of Paul's conversion. However, Luke's accounts are much closer to the time of the events they purport to describe and may even be provided by a traveling companion of Paul, whereas the Muslim sources are more than 200 years removed from Muhammad. For example, Luke is reporting events in Acts that

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<sup>512</sup> Hoover in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 134. Similar is Harrington (1986): "It is not at all coincidental that the New Testament speaks of 'appearances' of Jesus *only* to disciples, that is, to believers; for the resurrection is accessible only to faith. . . . The 'appearances' of the Lord mean that he was truly encountered, in faith, by his disciples" (96-97). Harrington completely misses that fact that Paul was not a believer.

<sup>513</sup> Hoover in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 135.

<sup>514</sup> M. Martin (1991), 84.

<sup>515</sup> M. Martin (1991), 84.

<sup>516</sup> 2:97; 26:192-93; 53:10; 81:19.

<sup>517</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari 1:1:2-5.

allegedly occurred between AD 30-62 and is writing between AD 61-90. He is writing 31-60 years after the events and may have personally known some of the subjects. In the case of the biographies and hadith, the earliest sources are more than 200 years removed from the subjects and could not have had any first, second, third, or fourth hand acquaintance with them. Accordingly, although the biographies and hadith probably contain some traditions that go back to Muhammad, those traditions are not of the same historical quality of the traditions preserved in the New Testament literature. Second, Paul's experience is in a sense corroborated by other eyewitnesses who claimed that the risen Jesus had appeared to them. Friend and foe alike reported that the resurrected Jesus had appeared to them in both individual and group settings. On the other hand, Muhammad is the only one who claimed to have been visited by Gabriel in connection with the rise of Islam. Third, Muhammad's dissatisfaction with the paganism and idolatry in his society existed prior to his alleged revelations.<sup>518</sup> Thus, no conversion from polytheism occurred as a result of his religious experience, as even according to Muslim sources. On the other hand, Paul seems to have been quite content with and extremely sold out to his strict sect within Judaism. Indeed, he was on his way to arresting Christians on his own initiative when his experience occurred. Muhammad's experience confirmed his views while Paul's opposed his. Perhaps most important of all, however, is that historians need not deny that Muhammad had an experience that he interpreted as a supernatural being appearing to him. They are at liberty to support an alternate explanation to Muhammad's for the experience just as they do for the experiences of Jesus' disciples.

We may wish to know from Martin and Hoover how they would respond if they had that for which they ask. Let us assume for a moment that we have a source from the middle of the first century who is a not a Christian (per Hoover) or is an agnostic or atheist (per Martin) and who reported that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to him—and that he remained a nonbeliever. Would we not question the credibility of such a witness who was the recipient of a divine appearance, yet still rejected him? Would Hoover and Martin end up dismissing such a source for that very reason?

A critic may assert that Paul's conversion is no big matter, since many have converted from one set of beliefs to another. However, the cause of Paul's conversion makes his different. People usually convert to a particular religion because they have heard the message of that religion from a secondary source and believed the message. Paul's conversion was based on what he perceived to be a personal appearance of the risen Jesus. Today we might believe that Jesus rose from the dead based on secondary evidence, trusting Paul and the disciples who saw the risen Jesus. But for Paul, his experience came from primary evidence: He had an experience he perceived as the risen Jesus who had appeared directly to him.

#### **4.3.4. The Conversion of James the Skeptical Brother of Jesus**

Although not in his current list of three facts that are virtually undisputed by specialists on the subject of Jesus' resurrection, in previous lists Habermas included the conversion of James, the skeptical half-brother of Jesus, because of an experience he regarded as the risen Jesus appearing to him.

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<sup>518</sup> Sahih-Al-Bukhari 5:58:169; A. Guillaume, *Islam* (New York: Penguin Books, reprinted 1990), 26-27.

**4.3.4.1. Evidence of James’s Skepticism from the Canonical Gospels.** We will study four passages in the canonical Gospels which have commonly been employed to suggest that James was not a follower of Jesus prior to his purported resurrection.

**4.3.4.1.a. Mark 3:20-35**

Καὶ ἔρχεται εἰς οἶκον· καὶ συνέρχεται πάλιν [ὁ] ὄχλος, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι αὐτοὺς μηδὲ ἄρτον φαγεῖν. <sup>21</sup> καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξήλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. <sup>22</sup> Καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς οἱ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων καταβάντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Βεελζεβούλ ἔχει καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια. <sup>23</sup> Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· πῶς δύναται σατανᾶς σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλειν; <sup>24</sup> καὶ ἐὰν βασιλεία ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν μερισθῆ, οὐ δύναται σταθῆναι ἢ βασιλεία ἐκείνη. <sup>25</sup> καὶ ἐὰν οἰκία ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν μερισθῆ, οὐ δυνησεται ἢ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι. <sup>26</sup> καὶ εἰ ὁ σατανᾶς ἀνέστη ἐφ’ ἑαυτόν καὶ ἐμερίσθη, οὐ δύναται στήναι ἀλλὰ τέλος ἔχει. <sup>27</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐ δύναται οὐδεὶς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ εἰσελθὼν τὰ σκευὴ αὐτοῦ διαρπάσαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῆσῃ, καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει. <sup>28</sup> Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν. <sup>29</sup> ὃς δ’ ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἔνοχος ἐστὶν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος. <sup>30</sup> ὅτι ἔλεγον· πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει. <sup>31</sup> Καὶ ἔρχεται ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔξω στήκοντες ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν καλοῦντες αὐτόν. <sup>32</sup> καὶ ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτὸν ὄχλος, καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· ἴδου ἡ μήτηρ σου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί σου [καὶ αἱ ἀδελφαί σου] ἔξω ζητοῦσίν σε. <sup>33</sup> καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει· τίς ἐστὶν ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί [μου]; <sup>34</sup> καὶ περιβλεψάμενος τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλῳ καθήμενους λέγει· ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί μου. <sup>35</sup> ὃς [γὰρ] ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.

And he went home. And the crowd came together again so that they were not able to eat a meal. <sup>21</sup> And having heard, his own went out to seize him. For they were saying that he is out of his mind. <sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came from Jerusalem were saying, “He has Beelzebul” and “He casts out demons by the ruler of demons.” <sup>23</sup> And he summoned them and was speaking to them in parables, “How is Satan able to cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> And if a kingdom is divided against itself, how is that kingdom able to stand? <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and has been divided, he is not able to stand but his end has come. <sup>27</sup> But no one is able to enter the house of the strong man to plunder his goods without first binding the strong man and then he can plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> Truly I say to you, all sins of the sons of men and whatever blasphemies they may utter will be forgiven. <sup>29</sup> But whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of eternal sin.” <sup>30</sup> For they were saying he has an unclean spirit. <sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came. And standing outside they sent for him, calling him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting near him and said to him, “Behold, your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you.” <sup>33</sup> And he answered them saying, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” <sup>34</sup> And looking at those sitting all around him, he said, “Look! My

mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, this one is my brother and sister and mother.”

In this text, Jesus comes home and a large crowd assembles to hear him teach. Thinking he has lost his senses, his mother and brothers come to take hold of him (3:21). Jesus responds that he regards his followers as being closer to him than his own family.

Painter may stand alone in his belief that this interpretation is mistaken. He argues that this pericope starts in 3:13 where Jesus called to himself twelve whom he wanted to be with him (13-14).<sup>519</sup> When his own (οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ), who according to Painter are his twelve disciples rather than his family, get word of it they went to seize him, thinking he was out of his mind (3:21).<sup>520</sup> Painter regards this as “the most natural reading,” since his disciples were those just mentioned and there is no clear mention of his family until 3:32.<sup>521</sup> However, Mark’s statement in the previous verse that Jesus had come home (3:20) would allow the οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ to fit very nicely as a reference to his mother and brothers. And Mary may have been accompanying Jesus’ brothers with the hope of softening or even dissuading them of their plans. Such a suggestion has plausibility, given that Mary is not mentioned among Jesus’ family members who did not believe in Jesus in John 5, which will be discussed below.<sup>522</sup>

Painter then addresses the tension his reading brings, since it is Jesus’ own disciples who seize him because they think he is out of his mind. Why would his disciples whom he had just appointed think this of their leader who has now attracted so many people to listen to his message? Painter answers that painting a negative picture of Jesus’ disciples is not uncommon for Mark. Judas betrays Jesus (3:19) and Peter becomes the mouthpiece of Satan (8:32-33).<sup>523</sup> But this does not answer the *why*. For certain, Mark reports the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to Jesus’ disciples. Peter’s rebuking Jesus for predicting his forthcoming execution and Judas’ betrayal approach the insolence on the part of Jesus’ disciples required in Painter’s reading. However, such audacity on their part on the heels of their appointment by

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<sup>519</sup> Painter doubts the historicity of this incident (3:20-35), arguing that the story is reported only by Mark and contains Markan vocabulary and construction (25). However, Markan vocabulary and construction are of no surprise if Mark was retelling a story *ipsissima vox*. Single attestation on the other hand cannot be ignored. However, if another independent source attests to the brothers of Jesus being nonbelievers—and at least one does as we will shortly see—that would provide multiple attestation to their unbelief. Moreover, if these texts actually report nonbelief on the part of Jesus’ brothers, this would certainly fulfill the criterion of embarrassment. When a condition such as the nonbelief of Jesus’ brothers is supported by a fulfillment of the criterion of multiple independent reports and the criterion of embarrassment, we may be quite confident that we are in possession of a historical kernel.

<sup>520</sup> The term οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ is found only here in the New Testament. In the LXX, it only appears in 1 Macc. (9:58; 12:28, 29; 13:52; 15:15; 16:16), where in each occurrence, companions rather than family is meant. In Josephus (*Ant.* 1:193) the term references Abraham’s family. The term is absent in Philo and the Apostolic Fathers.

<sup>521</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 26.

<sup>522</sup> Painter notes that “[s]cholars generally do not include the mother of Jesus in their negative evaluation, though she is present in 3:31-35” (27).

<sup>523</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 26. Painter also notes as examples Mark 9:19, 34; 10:37; 14:27-31; 16:7-8. However, it is not clear that Jesus is referring to his disciples in 9:19 given that in 9:28-29 a lack of faith on the part of his disciples is not the reason why they had difficulty expelling the demon. Moreover, these point to the self-centeredness and fear of Jesus’ disciples, which is far different than the insolence Painter’s reading requires.

Jesus seems unlikely to me and we would expect most if not all of them to be with him while teaching as is stated in 6:1. Moreover, the *why* of their insolence is fairly clear in these other instances. Peter does not believe the Messiah should be executed and Judas was no longer on board with Jesus' agenda. But guessing why Jesus' newly appointed disciples would think of him as being out of his mind when teaching is a difficult task. If you are new to the team and have such suspicions, why not desert him and chalk up the experience to a temporary lack of judgment? Accordingly, Painter's assertions that the usual reading—that Jesus' brothers are the hostile ones—is “improbable” and “ill founded” appear to be overstatements.<sup>524</sup>

#### 4.3.4.1.b. Mark 6:2-4, 6a

καὶ γενομένου σαββάτου ἤρξατο διδάσκειν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες· πόθεν τούτῳ ταῦτα, καὶ τίς ἡ σοφία ἢ δοθεῖσα τούτῳ, καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι; <sup>3</sup> οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτου καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος; καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ὧδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. <sup>4</sup> καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. . . . <sup>6</sup> καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν.

And the Sabbath having come, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many listeners were overwhelmed saying, “From where [did] this one [get] these things and what is the wisdom given to him and the miracles that are done by his hands? <sup>3</sup> Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they were offended by him. <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his house.” . . . <sup>6</sup> And he was marveling on account of their unbelief.

Having heard Jesus teach, those in his hometown took offense at him, to which Jesus replies that that he is without honor in his hometown, among his relatives, and even among his immediate family. Painter again takes exception with this interpretation, arguing that the statement “are not his sisters here with us” implies that his mother and brothers are not, probably because they were accompanying Jesus as his disciples. He adds that “nothing is said of the action of any member of the family of Jesus in this rejection.”<sup>525</sup> While this interpretation is possible, it seems unlikely to me. Ἐν τῇ

<sup>524</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 27. Although Bauckham sides with Painter that James was a follower of Jesus during at least portions of his ministry, he remains unpersuaded by Painter's position pertaining to Mark 3 (R. Bauckham, “James and Jesus” in Chilton and Neusner, eds. [2001], 108).

<sup>525</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 25. Bauckham in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001) argues that “Luke conveys no hint of any rift between Jesus and his family or even of misunderstanding (see Luke 8:19-21; 11:27-28)” (199). The brothers are portrayed neither as followers nor adversaries and readers are not surprised to find them as followers after Jesus' ascension. On the contrary, I think we may detect hints of a rift between Jesus and at least some of his family members in both references provided by Bauckham, although we can go no further than to say that these *may suggest* that they were not among his followers at the time. If we regard Mark as Luke's source of the former text, Luke is aware of and omits the embarrassing details but retains Jesus' preference of his spiritual family over those related to him by blood. In the latter text, he exalts those who follow God's word over his mother. Moreover, as every ancient writer selected the material in which he was interested, Luke may very well have chosen to omit reports that Jesus' brothers were non-believers during his ministry



οἰκία αὐτοῦ may indeed be inclusive of his immediate family. Moreover, the offended listeners may simply be adding Jesus' sisters to those already mentioned, namely his mother and four brothers. Finally, Jesus' reply is that a prophet does not receive honor from those in his hometown, his relatives, *and in his own house*. But who might those be in his immediate family who refuse him honor? Painter would have to answer that they were Jesus' sisters. But this is not at all clear. If the previous text considered (Mark 3:20-35) clearly referred to Jesus' disciples as those who came to seize him, then the present text may be used as support. But it is far from clear. I must admit that Painter has introduced another reading that to me seems *possible*. However, as I read these two texts, the clearer and more plausible reading of both is that Jesus' brothers were non-believers at the time.

#### 4.3.4.1.c. John 7:1-5

Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα περιπάτει ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ· οὐ γὰρ ἤθελεν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ περιπατεῖν, ὅτι ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι.<sup>2</sup> Ἦν δὲ ἐγγὺς ἡ ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἢ σκηνοπηγία.<sup>3</sup> εἶπον οὖν πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ· μετάβηθι ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ὕπαγε εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, ἵνα καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ σου θεωρήσουσιν σοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖς·<sup>4</sup> οὐδεὶς γάρ τι ἐν κρυπτῷ ποιεῖ καὶ ζητεῖ αὐτὸς ἐν παρρησίᾳ εἶναι. εἰ ταῦτα ποιεῖς, φανέρωσον σεαυτὸν τῷ κόσμῳ.<sup>5</sup> οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν.

And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee. For he was not wanting to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.<sup>2</sup> Now the Jewish Booths Festival was near.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea in order that your disciples will also behold your works which you are doing."<sup>4</sup> For no one does something in secret and seeks to be in the public eye. If you are doing these things, reveal yourself to the world."<sup>5</sup> For not even his brothers were believing in him.

This is the most explicit passage pertaining to the unbelief of Jesus' brothers. The brothers of Jesus taunt him, "If you are doing these things, reveal yourself to the world." We are reminded of similar taunting received by Jesus while on the cross, "If you are the son of God, come down from the cross." (εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, [καὶ] κατὰβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.)<sup>526</sup> Painter asserts that "[t]here is no suggestion that the brothers did not accept that Jesus performed signs. Indeed, when the brothers urge Jesus to go to Jerusalem it is 'so that your disciples may see your *works* which you do.' Here the brothers use the more positive term *works* which, in John, also covers the signs but frequently draws attention to Jesus' relation to the Father (see 5:17, 36)." Accordingly, Jesus' brothers urge him to perform his works openly in Judea in order to establish this position for all to see. Painter consequently contends that the suggestion of Jesus' brothers should not be read in a cynical sense.<sup>527</sup>

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precisely because of its embarrassing nature. In other words, Luke's apparent redaction of the Markan material may well reflect a very early understanding of Mark as reporting that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him during his itinerant ministry.

<sup>526</sup> Matt. 27:40; cf. Mark 15:30; Luke 23:37-39.

<sup>527</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 27. Who were the disciples in Judea referred to by Jesus' brothers in 7:3? They were probably followers of Jesus living in Judea and not the Twelve whom he had called, since the latter had allegedly already witnessed Jesus perform a number of miracles. In John 2:1-11, Jesus' disciples saw him turn water into wine and believed in him. In 4:43-54,

There are a number of problems with these arguments. First is Painter's noting "the more positive term *works* which, in John, also covers the signs but frequently draws attention to Jesus' relation to the Father (see 5:17, 36)." However, this term τὰ ἔργα is also frequently employed by John in a negative sense, even just a few verses later (7:7; see also 3:19, 20; 8:41, cf. 44).<sup>528</sup> Second, that Jesus' brothers are hostile toward him and speak here with sarcasm is suggested by where they encourage him to go. In 7:1 Jesus will not go to Judea since the Jews there are seeking to kill him. In 7:3 his brothers propose that he go to Judea! A third problem concerns Painter's argument that "the use of the imperfect tense with *oude* . . . lacks the definitive sense of unbelief that can be communicated with the aorist tense."<sup>529</sup> The combination of οὐδὲ plus the imperfect appears ten times in the New Testament, none of which is in John.<sup>530</sup> Of these there are eight occurrences close to John's usage, the closest are Mark 14:59 and Luke 18:13 neither of which lack a definitive sense.<sup>531</sup>

Painter then brings attention to the unbelief of Jesus' disciples. In John 14:10-11, Jesus tells Philip and the disciples that if they cannot believe that Jesus and the Father are in one another, then they should believe because of the works they have seen. In 16:29-31, after the disciples affirm their belief that Jesus is from God, Jesus asks or says to them, "Do you now believe?" or "You believe now" then adds that they will all abandon him. Based on these texts, Painter concludes that the belief of Jesus' brothers in him "was based on the works he performed but did not (according to John) penetrate the mystery of his relation to God."<sup>532</sup>

I do not see enough here for a case that Jesus' disciples shared a type of unbelief similar to that of his brothers. The former text reports the result of a theological misunderstanding while the latter results from fear. I do not see the clear indicators in John 7:3-5 Painter sees that Jesus' brothers believed in him although with an imperfect belief. In fact, when the disciples witness Jesus' turning water into wine in John 2:11, John reports, ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ (his disciples believed in him). Compare with 7:5 where John reports οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν (For not even his brothers believed in him). Painter notes Jesus' negative words to his brothers that follow in 7:6-9, but makes no attempt to explain their presence.<sup>533</sup> Jesus' words are pointed. In 7:7 he tells his brothers, "οὐ δύναται ὁ κόσμος μισεῖν ὑμᾶς, ἐμὲ δὲ μισεῖ, ὅτι ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἔστιν" ("The world is not able to hate you, but it hates me, because I testify concerning it that its works are evil"). Jesus' statement indicates that his brothers are not on board with his message. This receives confirmation from what Jesus would say to his disciples a few chapters later in 15:18-19:

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Jesus' disciples probably saw him heal the official's son, since they were with him in 4:8 when they went for food. The healing occurred several days later and we may assume that the disciples must have returned not long after their search began. In John 5, Jesus heals a sick man. While it is not clear that his disciples were with him at the time, 6:1-3 may suggest that they were. In John 6:5-21, the disciples were present when Jesus fed five thousand and walked on water.

<sup>528</sup> The term is employed in a positive sense in 3:21; 4:34; 5:20, 36 (2x); 6:28, 29; 7:3, 21; 8:39; 9:3, 4; 10:25, 32 (2x), 33, 37, 38; 14:10, 11, 12; 15:24; 17:4.

<sup>529</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 27.

<sup>530</sup> Matt. 22:46; Mark 5:3; 6:31; 14:59; Luke 18:13; John 7:5; Acts 4:32, 34; 8:4; Rev. 5:3.

<sup>531</sup> Matt. 22:46; Mark 5:3; 6:31; 14:59; Luke 18:13; Acts 4:32, 34; Rev. 5:3.

<sup>532</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 28.

<sup>533</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001): "Yet readers may point to Jesus' rather negative response to his brothers (7:6-9)" (28).

Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν. εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἦτε, <sup>19</sup> ὁ κόσμος ἂν τὸ ἴδιον ἐφίλει· ὅτι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ ἐστέ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, διὰ τοῦτο μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before you. <sup>19</sup> If you were from the world, then the world would love its own. But because you are not from the world, but I myself chose you from the world, on account of this the world hates you.<sup>534</sup>

The world hates Jesus because of his message and hates his disciples because of their relation to Jesus. However, in 7:7 the world does not hate the brothers of Jesus, with the inference that they are not bringing it the same message Jesus is bringing.<sup>535</sup>

Painter then turns our attention to similarities between John 2:1-11 and 7:3-9. Both concern family members. Both contain a request of Jesus from his family members; from Mary in the former and from his brothers in the latter. In both instances Jesus declines their request and does so using similar language (“My hour is not yet” [2:4]; “My time is not yet here” [7:6]). Finally, Jesus ends up granting both requests.<sup>536</sup> Painter concludes, “All of this suggests that the brothers were believers but their belief sought a different goal for Jesus than the one to which he was committed, according to John.”<sup>537</sup> This seems a bit of a stretch to me. Family members are not the only ones to make a request of Jesus, to have him decline it, only then to grant it. Jesus declines the request of a Canaanite woman to heal her demon-possessed daughter only to grant it a moment later (Mark 7:26-30; Matt. 15:22-28). Painter could, however, answer that the Canaanite woman was positive in her view of Jesus when she came to him, thus, indicating the positive attitude of his brothers. While this may be a difference it is hardly an important one. Coming to Jesus with a pressing personal request is not the same as approaching him as a disciple. The Canaanite woman may have been a distant disciple of Jesus after he healed her daughter. But his initial response to her as well as the desire of his disciples to send her away empty-handed makes it clear that she was not a disciple of Jesus at the time she approached him.

Painter notes Acts 1:14 where “the mother of Jesus is grouped clearly with his brothers and their place amongst the followers of Jesus is stated as a matter of course with no suggestion that this constituted a remarkable change.”<sup>538</sup> A closer look at the context is revealing. In Acts 1:1-14, it is the disciples whom Jesus had chosen to whom he gives orders (1:2), are addressed as “Men of Galilee” (1:11), and who return to the upper room in Jerusalem (1:13) where they are continually devoted to prayer

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<sup>534</sup> See also John 3:19-20.

<sup>535</sup> Painter asserts that in John 7:1-10, “it is clear that Jesus’ brothers are with him, traveling in his company” (28). I fail to see this. Although Jesus indeed goes to Jerusalem, 7:10 indicates that he went separately from his brothers and there are no indicators that he joined them there.

<sup>536</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 28. In the former he turns water to wine, while in the latter he heals a man born blind (9:1-7) and raises Lazarus from the dead (11:7-47). See John 10:30-40 where it is reported that the Jews attempted to kill Jesus for healing the blind man as he had feared in 7:1.

<sup>537</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 28.

<sup>538</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 28-29. See also Bauckham in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 109.

along with [certain] women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. Apparently Jesus' brothers and mother are not among the leadership at that point nor were they with the disciples at the ascension.

Painter contends that when Paul adds his own experience to the tradition and describes himself "as one untimely born," this indicates that James (unlike Paul) was a believer when he experienced an appearance of the resurrected Jesus, since the appearance to James is listed with the others in regular sequence and these were believers at the time of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>539</sup> This is neither necessary nor even hinted. The meaning of Paul's statement that Jesus appeared to him last of all ὡσπερὲι τῶ ἑκτρώματι ("like to one untimely born") is contested. The word ἑκτρώμα typically refers to a miscarriage.<sup>540</sup> Was Paul converted out of a traumatic experience as narrated in Acts 9? Even in Acts, the brothers of Jesus have become disciples by Pentecost whereas it is generally accepted that Paul's conversion took place approximately one to three years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, it is untimely when compared to the others.

However, Painter sticks to his hypothesis that "it seems better to speak of a deepening of belief with James, brought about by the appearance of the risen Jesus to him reported by Paul [as opposed to thinking of James as a skeptic prior to the resurrection of Jesus]. This view is what we find in the evidence outside the New Testament, in evidence reported by Clement of Alexandria, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*."<sup>541</sup> Painter notes that in the fragment from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, James is not only "the first believing witness to the risen Jesus, he is also portrayed as one who was present at the Last Supper when 'he had drunk the cup of the Lord.' . . . Thus it is clear in this tradition that James was among the followers of Jesus."<sup>542</sup>

A lot may be said of the three sources to which Painter appeals. Clement of Alexandria is perhaps the least critical of the early Church Fathers and none of the three texts provided by Painter mention whether James was a disciple prior to Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>543</sup> The *Gospel of Thomas* is held by most scholars to be a second-century text and, as we argued in the previous chapter, should be assigned—at best—a rating of *possible* in terms of the historical reliability of its contents. Although the Jesus Seminar dates the original *Gospel of Thomas* earlier than most scholars, the majority of its members do not regard the scene appealed to by Painter as historical.<sup>544</sup> The point to be made is this: Since even the Jesus Seminar, whose scholars are largely more skeptical of the canonical literature and much less skeptical of *Thomas* than the large majority of scholars, rejects the historicity of the specific text in *Thomas* to which Painter appeals, a prudent historiography must omit its use until Painter or someone else provides good reasons for regarding it as historical—and Painter does not.

<sup>539</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 29.

<sup>540</sup> See Num. 12:12; Job 3:16; Ecc. 6:3; Philo, *Leg.* 1:76.

<sup>541</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 29. The reference in *Gos. Thom.* is 12.

<sup>542</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 30; cf. 34.

<sup>543</sup> Clement of Alexandria, preserved by Eusebius in *EH* 2.1.2-5; 6.2.10; 7.2.1. Meier (1991), 151n50.

<sup>544</sup> Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 492. They maintain, however, that this passage in *Gos. Thom.* agrees with others in the New Testament that James was among the early church leaders.

The text in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* is of interest:

The Gospel that is called “according to the Hebrews,” which I have recently translated into both Greek and Latin, a Gospel that Origen frequently used, records the following after the Savior’s resurrection: “But when the Lord had given the linen cloth to the servant of the priest, he went and appeared to James. For James had taken a vow not to eat bread from the time he drank the cup of the Lord until he should see him raised from among those who sleep.” And soon after this it says, “The Lord said, ‘Bring a table and bread.’” And immediately it continues, “He took the bread and blessed it, broke it, gave it to James the Just, and said to him, ‘My brother, eat your bread. For the Son of Man is risen from among those who sleep.’”<sup>545</sup>

As Ehrman notes, this report is “highly legendary.”<sup>546</sup> No other authority cites it.<sup>547</sup> It is later than the canonical Gospels and probably all of the New Testament literature, none of which includes or alludes to it.<sup>548</sup> Allison adds that “it places James at the Last Supper, for which there is otherwise no evidence. The passage can be no guide to what really happened.”<sup>549</sup> We may also note that, as observed above, it contradicts the clear statement in the canonical Gospels that Jesus’ disciples—among whom are Jesus’ brothers according to Painter—are portrayed in the embarrassing manner of not anticipating Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>550</sup>

It is plain that Painter’s case is desperate. Not only must he assign problematic interpretations to the canonical Gospels to get Jesus’ brothers into the community of believers, he also appeals to three sources of dubious value to our investigation.

#### 4.3.4.1.d. John 19:25b-27

Εἰστήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ.<sup>26</sup> Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρὶ· γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου.<sup>27</sup> εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ· ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκεῖνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια.

And standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary of Magdalene.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Jesus seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved by her, said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son.”<sup>27</sup> Then he said to his disciple, “Behold your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

<sup>545</sup> Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 2 in Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 16, fragment 5.

<sup>546</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 15-16. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): “The legendary character of this story is patent” (261).

<sup>547</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003), 16.

<sup>548</sup> Ehrman (*Lost Scriptures*, 2003) dates its composition “probably during the first half of the second century” (15).

<sup>549</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 261. The Synoptics report that Jesus ate his last supper with the Twelve (Mark 14:13; Matt. 26:20; Luke 22:14). See where these are named in Mark 3:16-19; Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:13-16.

<sup>550</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 261.



It is the beloved disciple who is charged by Jesus with taking care of his mother. We would expect one of Jesus' brothers to have received the nod. Instead, it is the beloved disciple. We may speculate that Jesus' reason was that he desired that his mother be cared for by a member of his spiritual family.<sup>551</sup> We observed in Mark 3:31-35 that Jesus regarded his spiritual family as being more important to him than his family by blood. Had James or any other of Jesus' brothers been a member of that spiritual family at the time, surely he would have been given the responsibility for the caring of his mother. Indeed, such a charge would have been normal and probably would have gone unmentioned. It may be objected that if James and the brothers of Jesus were disciples at that time, they were probably in hiding with all of the remaining disciples. Accordingly, since the beloved disciple appears to have been the only disciple at the cross, he was the only candidate to receive the responsibility. However, it is difficult to see why a brother would have had to have been at the cross in order to know that the responsibility to care for his mother now fell upon him. Peter, who was not at the cross but in hiding, later received a charge from Jesus to feed and tend the flock (John 21:15-17).

#### 4.3.4.2. Additional Counterarguments

Aside from Painter, only a very few scholars have defended the position that James was a believer during Jesus' ministry.

Richard Bauckham asserts that John 2:12 provides "the best evidence that the brothers of Jesus were followers of Jesus during his ministry."<sup>552</sup> After the wedding in Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples. Thus, his brothers are "accompanying Jesus and his disciples in the earliest period of Jesus' itinerant ministry in Galilee."<sup>553</sup> I do not find Bauckham's "best evidence" convincing. The occasion of Jesus' miracle apparently had no relation to his itinerant ministry. Jesus was simply present as a wedding guest and is even hesitant to perform a miracle. The event is presented as a break for Jesus and his disciples from his ministry activities.

Bauckham understands the mentioning of Jesus' brothers in John 2:12 and then again in 7:10 as indicating that they were members of his entourage during the entire period in between. While this is possible, it seems implausible. When Jesus' brothers are mentioned in 2:12 and 7:10, they are distinguished from his disciples. Paul likewise makes this distinction in 1 Corinthians 9:5. Between 2:12 and 7:3, only Jesus and his disciples are mentioned (3:22; 4:2, 7-8, 27, 31-38; 6:3-24; 60-71) and there is nothing in these texts that indicate his brothers were with him during this period. If they are, they appear to be only bystanders. Thus, even this "best evidence" that Jesus' brothers were followers of Jesus is unconvincing.

James Tabor is a third modern scholar who contends that Jesus' brothers were among his disciples. He goes further than Bauckham and Painter and asserts that "the best-kept secret in the entire New Testament" is that "*Jesus' own brothers were among the so-called Twelve Apostles.*"<sup>554</sup> For Tabor, "James is none other than the mysterious

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<sup>551</sup> Shanks and Witherington (2003) make this observation (108-09).

<sup>552</sup> Bauckham in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 106.

<sup>553</sup> Bauckham in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 107.

<sup>554</sup> Tabor (2006), 165.

‘beloved disciple’ of the gospel of John.”<sup>555</sup> Rather than attempt to reinterpret John 7:5, he argues that the “spurious opinion” that Jesus’ brothers were nonbelievers during his ministry is “based on a *single* phrase in John 7:5 that many scholars consider to be a late interpolation. Modern translations even put it in parentheses.”<sup>556</sup> Tabor notes the two passages in Mark we have examined and asserts “they have been misread based on the false assumption that the brothers did not believe in Jesus.”<sup>557</sup> He explains that in these Markan passages Jesus was “showing no dishonor to Mary or to his brothers” and that the actions of his mother and brothers was “very possibly to protect him.”<sup>558</sup> Tabor remarks, “It is amazing what firm opinions have been built upon such shaky foundations.”<sup>559</sup>

I must admit that I find this last comment amusing, since it is Tabor who in the same book finds “much we can responsibly determine” about the ‘lost years’ of Jesus in the non-canonical Christian writings and finds evidence for the location of Jesus’ actual burial in the writings of the “16<sup>th</sup>-century Kabbalistic Rabbi Isaac ben Luria.”<sup>560</sup> Tabor’s actual case that Jesus’ brothers were members of the Twelve lacks supporting argumentation.<sup>561</sup> He provides no documentation of his “many scholars” arguing that John 7:5 is an interpolation. Indeed, the textual evidence is quite strong for its inclusion. And there are only three English translations placing it in parentheses: HCSB, NRSV, NET.<sup>562</sup> Most scholars are persuaded by arguments that the “Beloved Disciple” is either the apostle John or a minor disciple.<sup>563</sup> To the extent that these arguments are correct, James cannot have been the “Beloved Disciple.” We have also observed that the traditional readings of the relevant Markan and Johannine passages are to be preferred.

Let us summarize our findings thus far. We have observed four texts in the New Testament, which report that Jesus’ brothers were not among his followers during his earthly ministry. The “brothers” of Jesus are mentioned in the Gospels in three pericopes (Mark 3:31-35; Matt. 12:46-49; Luke 8:19-21/Mark 6:1-5; Matt. 13:54-58; cf. Luke 4:16-30; John 4:44/John 7:1-10). In none of these are they mentioned in a positive sense, at least not clearly. It is not until after the resurrection of Jesus that Jesus’ brothers are clearly mentioned among his followers (1 Cor. 9:5; Acts 1:14). We have also engaged with the contentions of three scholars (Painter, Bauckham, and

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<sup>555</sup> Tabor (2006), 165.

<sup>556</sup> Tabor (2006), 165.

<sup>557</sup> Tabor (2006), 165.

<sup>558</sup> Tabor (2006), 336-37n14.

<sup>559</sup> Tabor (2006), 165.

<sup>560</sup> Tabor (2006), 87, 238-40. It is also worth noting that Tabor seems to have been one of the very few scholars in support of *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* proposal advanced by Jacobovici and Pellegrino (2007) that the family tomb of Jesus had been identified along with the skeletal remains of Jesus, his wife Mary Magdalene, his son Judah, and some others.

<sup>561</sup> Tabor provides little in his 2006 book. Those interested may read his expanded case on his personal web site: <http://jesusdynasty.com/blog/2006/07/06/the-identity-of-the-beloved-disciple/> (accessed September 15, 2007).

<sup>562</sup> Daniel Wallace, a translation committee member for the NET, told me that the committee placed the text of 7:5 in parentheses because “they regard this as an editorial note, added by the evangelist. It’s not a comment about authenticity” (Personal email correspondence, 9/17/07). The following English translations do not place the text in parentheses: ESV, GWN, KJV/NKJ, NAB, NAU, NIV/NIB, NLT, RSV, RWB.

<sup>563</sup> See especially Keener (2003), 1:82-115, although he opts for Johannine authorship. Also see Blomberg (2001), 22-41; R. Brown (2003), 189-98; Witherington (*John’s Wisdom*, 1995), 11-18.

Tabor) that Jesus' brothers were indeed among his followers during most of his ministry.<sup>564</sup> However, we noted that their arguments cannot stand up to a closer examination of the texts they cite.

A majority of scholars who comment on the subject agree that the New Testament texts just examined all report that Jesus' brothers were not counted among his believers during his ministry as Bauckham admits.<sup>565</sup> I see two reasons for granting historicity. The nonbelief of Jesus' brothers is multiply attested, being found in Mark and John. Mark includes two pericopes whereas John presents one not found in Mark. The reports of their nonbelief also fulfill the criterion of embarrassment. As we will see momentarily, after Jesus' resurrection we find Jesus' brothers counted among his followers. James was counted among the top three leaders in Jerusalem and even the head of the Church located there. Why would all four canonical Gospels paint a negative picture of Jesus' brothers, writing during or after the period in which James had been a leader of the church in Jerusalem? This would only serve to undermine the church authority the Evangelists would be expected to support.<sup>566</sup> The same may be said of Peter's denial. Lüdemann asserts that "no Christian would have sullied the reputation of the leader of the Jerusalem church. . . . Therefore, the tradition of Peter denying Jesus during the latter's arrest has a solid historical foundation."<sup>567</sup> This is all the more true of the reports pertaining to the nonbelief of Jesus' brothers. The preponderance of the evidence favors the conclusion that the brothers of Jesus were not counted among his followers through the time of Jesus' execution. By all accounts, they appear to have maintained a distance from their brother's ministry.

#### 4.3.4.3. James after the Resurrection of Jesus

We are surprised to read that Jesus' brothers have become his followers shortly after his resurrection. They are among his followers in Acts 1:14. Later in Acts, James appears to be the leading spokesman and perhaps the final authority in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:1-21; 21:17-26). James' leadership in the Jerusalem church and as an apostle is mentioned even earlier in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia (Gal. 1:19; 2:1-10). Paul also mentions the brothers of Jesus as followers in 1 Corinthians 9:5.

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<sup>564</sup> While Painter and Bauckham believe Jesus' brothers were among his followers throughout most of his ministry, Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) takes a weaker position, although somewhat in empathy with Painter and Bauckham. He asserts that we cannot be certain that Jesus' brothers were *not* among his followers during that period: "Apologists for the resurrection have often emphasized that it must have been a christophany that changed James from an outsider to an insider. This is far from certain. We cannot assume that the tension between Jesus and his family was at all times the same, or that things were not better toward the end than they were at the beginning. Further, Acts 1:14 has Mary, immediately after the crucifixion, with the disciples in Jerusalem, and I am unaware of anyone who has argued that her post-Easter devotion to Jesus, if we accept it as historical, could be explained only by a resurrection appearance. The same holds for James's ἀδελφοί, brothers, referred to in 1 Cor 9:5: the plural implies that prominence of more than just James. Did they also see Jesus? Another possibility is that James joined the Christian community and only subsequently had a vision of Jesus. The frustrating truth is that we just do not know the circumstances of the postmortem appearance to James, only that, if Paul had his facts straight, it took place between the appearances to Peter and Paul; and we can guess that it was a factor in his rise to ecclesiastical power" (262-63).

<sup>565</sup> Bauckham admits that the "usual view" maintained by scholars is that Jesus' brothers were not followers during his ministry and did not believe that his mission was from God (106).

<sup>566</sup> Habermas (2003), 22; Meier (1994), 2:70; Wright (2003), 704.

<sup>567</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 162.

James' commitment to Jesus' message became so strong that it appears that he died a martyr. His martyrdom as a follower of his brother is reported by Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria. The latter two are no longer extant. However, fragments from their writings pertaining to the martyrdom of James are preserved in Eusebius.<sup>568</sup> In the first passage, Eusebius relates that Clement reported that James the Just was thrown off the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death with a fuller's club. Eusebius adds that this is the same James that Paul mentions in Galatians 1:19 as "the brother of the Lord."<sup>569</sup>

I summarize the second as follows:

"James the brother of the Lord" had the leading seat in the Jerusalem church which had been given him by the apostles. Because he was esteemed by many for his pious and just life, the Jewish leaders brought him out before all and demanded that he publicly renounce faith in his brother. To their disappointment, he did precisely the opposite and publicly confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. Since Festus had just died and there was no Roman leader in Judea at the moment, the Jewish leaders seized the opportunity and killed James. Clement of Alexandria reported that he was thrown off the pinnacle of the temple and subsequently beaten to death with a club. But Hegesippus who lived much closer to the time of the event provides the most accurate account, writing that "James, the brother of the Lord" had been known for a long time as a pious man and was highly regarded by the people. Indeed, some became Christians in spite of the Jewish authorities because of James' testimony concerning Jesus. Therefore, many of the Jewish leaders came to James and asked him to lead the people away from Jesus. They encouraged him to stand at the temple pinnacle so that all may see and hear him, for many were present at that time celebrating the Passover. They took him to the pinnacle and asked him what he thought of Jesus. But he confessed that Jesus is the Son of Man who will come in judgment. As a result of this confession, a number believed in Christ. The Jewish leaders then threw James off the pinnacle. But James did not die from the fall. So, they began to stone him at which point James prayed for their forgiveness. Hearing James' prayer, one of the priests told them to stop. But a fuller took one of his clubs and hit James in the head, killing him. James was buried on that spot. And immediately afterward, Vespasian besieged the city.<sup>570</sup>

Eusebius then reports that Josephus wrote the following about the event:

ταῦτα δὲ συμβέβηκεν Ἰουδαίοις κατ' ἐκδίκησιν Ἰακώβου τοῦ δικαίου, ὃς ἦν ἀδελφός Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ, ἐπειδὴ περ δικαιοτάτων αὐτόν ὄντα οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀπέκτειναν

And these things came about by the Jews in order to punish James the Just who was the brother of Jesus the one called Christ, because he was the most just the Jews killed [him].<sup>571</sup>

<sup>568</sup> For Clement's account, see *EH* 2.9.1-3. For Hegesippus' account, see *EH* 2.23.3-19.

<sup>569</sup> *EH* 2.1.5.

<sup>570</sup> *EH* 2.23.1-18.

<sup>571</sup> *EH* 2.23.20

It is of interest that these words are not found in any extant manuscripts of Josephus. However, Josephus mentions James' execution in *Antiquities* 20:200:

ἄτε δὴ οὖν τοιοῦτος ὢν ὁ Ἄνανος νομίσας ἔχειν καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον διὰ τὸ τεθνάναι μὲν Φῆστον Ἀλβίνου δ' ἔτι κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ὑπάρχειν καθίζει συνέδριον κριτῶν καὶ παραγαγὼν εἰς αὐτὸ τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ Ἰάκωβος ὄνομα αὐτῷ καὶ τινὰς ἑτέρους ὡς παρανομησάντων κατηγορίαν ποιησάμενος παρέδωκε λευσθησομένους

Therefore, seeing that now these things being Ananas in common [with the Sadducees who are more rough than others Jews in judging others] considered to have a suitable time because Festus had died and [his replacement] Albinus was still on his way. He assembled the Sanhedrin of judges and passed along to it James the brother of Jesus the one called Christ and some others as lawbreakers. Making accusation, he delivered them to be stoned.

Differing from Hegesippus and Clement, Josephus does not state that James was killed as a Christian martyr. However, Josephus reports that James and some others were executed as παρανομησάντων (lawbreakers). This could mean that James was executed for crimes he had committed such as robbery or murder. However, in the New Testament, Christians were often regarded as lawbreakers by the Jewish authorities because they were perceived as promoting ideas that were contrary to the Jewish Law (Acts 6:13; 18:13; 21:28).<sup>572</sup> Bock asks, “What Law was it James broke, given his reputation within Christian circles as a Jewish-Christian leader who was careful about keeping the Law? It would seem likely that the Law had to relate to his christological allegiances and a charge of blasphemy. This would fit the fact that he was stoned, which was the penalty for such a crime, and parallels how Stephen was handled as well.”<sup>573</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, with the large majority of scholars, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this passage.<sup>574</sup> Recent scholars commenting on the subject of the death of James generally regard Josephus' account as the most reliable of the three.<sup>575</sup> Josephus' account also provides the fewest details and lacks the Christological affirmations found in Clement of Alexandria and Hegesippus.<sup>576</sup> This does not necessarily mean these were embellishments that later found their way into the narrative, since Josephus may not have been interested in including them and may very well have taken liberties in his narrative for purposes of economy or for an unstated reason. I do not wish to pursue the details of James' martyrdom here. What can be said for our purposes is that all three accounts appear to report that James was executed by direction of the Jewish leadership. That he was regarded as a “lawbreaker” by Josephus suggests that the Jewish leadership believed him to have broken the Jewish Law. This is in accord with the reports of Hegesippus and Clement of Alexandria and is probably how the Jewish leadership perceived the early Christians. Moreover, James' martyrdom is multiply attested by at least two

<sup>572</sup> See Acts 23:3 where Paul refers to the high priest Ananias as παρανομῶν.

<sup>573</sup> Bock (2000), 196n30.

<sup>574</sup> See chapter 3.2.4.1.

<sup>575</sup> Painter in Chilton and Neusner, eds. (2001), 48; Shanks and Witherington (2003), 173, 192. See also Barnett (1999) who comments, “It is a measure of James's prominence in Jerusalem that his death is described at such length by the historian Josephus” (324).

<sup>576</sup> We must again note the lack of critical work often performed by Clement of Alexandria.



independent sources: Josephus and one or more Christian sources. We do not know anything about the origin of the tradition(s) from which Hegesippus and Clement drew. However, given James' status as a leader of the Jerusalem church and a brother of Jesus, there can be no doubt that his martyrdom would have been remembered from its time and passed on in tradition throughout the Christian Church. It is very doubtful that Josephus invented the event, since his account shows no signs of dependence on Christian sources, the two extant differing from Josephus in their details. Accordingly, the historian is warranted in concluding that James was probably martyred for his Christian faith.

#### 4.3.4.4. The Reason James Converted

Of course, historians want to know what it was that brought out such a significant reversal in the brothers of Jesus and especially James. In the early tradition of 1 Corinthians 15:7 it is reported that the risen Jesus appeared to James.<sup>577</sup> If a narrative of this event ever existed, it most likely has not been preserved. The only extant hint of the existence of a narrative is found in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* for which only a few fragments exist that are preserved in the writings of others and we have observed that its historical reliability is dubious. We are left with a report of an appearance to James without a narrative in 1 Corinthians 15:7.

Still, the report in 1 Corinthians 15 is early and possesses a great deal of plausibility. With the skepticism of Jesus' brothers in mind, Catchpole comments,

For James to become an integral part of the earliest community at a very early stage of its life (cf. Galatians 1:19), and moreover to become later the leading pillar-type witness (cf. Galatians 2:9), even during the period of Peter's presence within that community, is a development that requires some explanation. . . . [T]he appearance to James was therefore not one that could work from an already existing sympathy or commitment. In that respect it was not dissimilar to what happened later to Paul.<sup>578</sup>

Shanks and Witherington similarly comment,

It appears that James, like Paul, was a convert to the Jesus movement because at some juncture he saw the risen Jesus, for nothing prior to Easter can explain his having become such a follower of Jesus, much less a leader of Jesus' followers. . . . [James was not present at the cross of Jesus.] Something dramatic must have happened to James after the death of Jesus to account for his being included in Acts among the disciples and later named as leader of the Jerusalem church. It seems clear that it was Jesus' appearance to him that mainly accounts for his conversion to the movement and his rise to prominence.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Dunn (2003) comments, "No one doubts that the James of 1 Cor. 15.7 is the James of Gal. 1.19 and 2.9, 12" (862n168).

<sup>578</sup> Catchpole (2002), 157-58. See also R. Brown (1973), 95.

<sup>579</sup> Shanks and Witherington (2003), 107-09. See also Maier (1991), 204.

Habermas writes,

While we are not told that it was Jesus's appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7) that caused his conversion, we have to provide the best explanation for the change and for James's promotion as one of the chief leaders in the early church. Given his previous skepticism, the appearance to James is significant.<sup>580</sup>

I must agree that an appearance to James is a plausible explanation for his conversion. However, with Allison, I am open to the possibility that James and his brothers had heard from their mother or others of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and, having noted their sincere conviction that Jesus had appeared, it seems plausible that James and his brothers converted based on their conviction that Jesus had appeared to others and that Jesus appeared to James sometime after his conversion, either prior to or after Pentecost.<sup>581</sup>

#### 4.3.4.5. Summary and Conclusion

We may summarize our findings on James as follows:

- Jesus' brothers did not believe in him during his ministry (Mark 3:21, 31-35; 6:3; John 7:1-10).
- Jesus' brothers taunted him (Mark 6:3; John 7:1-10).
- Jesus' brothers were apparently absent at Jesus' crucifixion where Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to one of his disciples, suggesting his brothers were nonbelievers at the time (John 19:25-27).
- Jesus' brothers were in the upper room with Jesus' disciples and mother after the resurrection (Acts 1:14).
- James was an apostle and leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 12:17; 15:13).
- Paul reported his activities to James (Acts 21:18).
- It would appear that at least some of Jesus' brothers became believers (1 Cor. 9:5).
- James' transformation from skeptic to believer is plausibly explained by his belief that Jesus had been raised and by a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him (1 Cor. 15:7).
- James believed his risen brother appeared to him.

Habermas asserts that the majority of critical scholars writing on the subject grant the conversion of James as a result of what he perceived was a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him. As examples he lists Betz, Conzelmann, Craig, Davis, Derret, Funk, Hoover, Kee, Koester, Ladd, Lorenzen, Lüdemann, Meier, Oden,

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<sup>580</sup> Habermas (2003), 28. Some express more confidence than Habermas that it was Jesus' appearance to James that resulted in his conversion. See Bruce (1977): "If we look for some explanation of their [i.e., Jesus' family members] sudden change in attitude towards Jesus, we can find it in the statement that in resurrection he appeared to James" (85). See also Byrskog (2002, 88) and Witherington (2006), 175.

<sup>581</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 262-63.

Osborne, Pannenberg, Sanders, Spong, Stuhlmacher, Wedderburn.<sup>582</sup> We may add Bryskog, Ehrman, and Wright to Habermas' list.<sup>583</sup> There is significant heterogeneity within this group that includes atheists, agnostics, cynics, revisionists, moderates, and conservatives. With James, we have significant evidence that indicates he and his brothers were not among Jesus' followers. However, sometime after the crucifixion of Jesus, James became a follower of his brother, a leader in the Church he had started, and finally died as a Christian martyr. The best explanation for this change of heart is that James came to believe that his brother had risen from the dead. It is probable that James had an experience that he perceived as being a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. However, it cannot be stated with certainty whether his conversion was prior to the experience or resulted from it.

Although the majority of scholars writing on the subject of Jesus' resurrection grant the appearance to James, the number who actually comment on the matter is small. I am, therefore, reluctant to include the appearance to James in the historical bedrock. We will regard it as a "second level fact" that may be included in a hypothesis should a "best explanation" of the historical bedrock alone prove elusive.

#### 4.3.5. The Empty Tomb

The empty tomb of Jesus is perhaps the most hotly disputed of Habermas' twelve facts. Habermas claims that at least two out of three scholars (and maybe more) writing on the empty tomb since 1975 grant its historicity *with a view toward the resurrection of Jesus*. In other words, they either hold or are open to the resurrection of Jesus as the best explanation for why the tomb was empty.<sup>584</sup> Habermas' moderate-to-strong majority does not include those who grant the historicity of the empty tomb while explaining it naturally. From my research, for this category I am thinking of scholars such as Allison, Bostock, Carnley, Ehrman, Fisher, Grant, and Vermes, all of whom grant the historicity of the empty tomb while doubting that its emptiness resulted from Jesus' bodily resurrection.<sup>585</sup> When these are taken into consideration, and it is my opinion that they should, there is a degree of heterogeneity to the majority who argue for the historicity of the empty tomb, although its cause is disputed. Many of these scholars are significant. Thus, the empty tomb may be added to a collection of facts pertaining to Jesus' fate which are granted by a significant majority of scholars writing on the subject.

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<sup>582</sup> Habermas (2003), 22, 44n118-121; cf. Habermas (2006), 79. For Funk, Habermas cites *Honest to Jesus* (33). Elsewhere, Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998) collectively deny the appearance to James (454-55).

<sup>583</sup> Bryskog (2002), 85; Ehrman (1999), 229-30; Wright (2003), 325.

<sup>584</sup> In a personal telephone conversation with Habermas on April 2, 2008. Elsewhere Habermas (*Resurrection Research*, 2005) claimed that a "strong majority" of approximately 75 percent favor one or more arguments for the empty tomb while roughly 25 percent favor one or more arguments against it (140-41; cf. Habermas [2003], 24; cf. [2006], 80). In both categories Habermas is including those scholars who appear to be leaning in that direction even with an absence of a direct statement for their own position. In a personal email correspondence dated April 1, 2008, Habermas shared with me that he recently updated his database and found the number to be slightly lower than 75 percent. Waterman's (2006) published dissertation on the empty tomb tradition in Mark comments: "not a few, but rather a majority, of contemporary scholars believe that there is some historical kernel in the empty tomb tradition" (192-93).

<sup>585</sup> See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 331-32, 344; Bostock (1994), 202; Carnley (1987), 46, 60; Ehrman (1999), 229 (see Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman [2006, 21] where he may have changed his mind); Fisher (1999), 75; Grant (1977), 176; Vermes (2008), 140-41.

There are two important distinctions between the “facts” pertaining to Jesus’ fate we have discussed thus far and the empty tomb. The empty tomb does not enjoy the nearly unanimous majority agreement of the others. Numerous scholars who comprise a respectable minority argue against the historicity of the empty tomb.<sup>586</sup> Another distinction is the absence of significant heterogeneity among those who grant the empty tomb. We noted the presence of a few who grant the empty tomb while leaning toward a natural cause. But these are comparatively small. Habermas provides an alarming comment:

I have compiled 23 arguments for the empty tomb and 14 considerations against it, as cited by recent critical scholars. Generally, the listings are what might be expected, dividing along theological ‘party lines.’<sup>587</sup>

This may indicate that scholars are allowing their horizons to exert excessive influence on their historical work—an observation that does not surprise us in our investigation of the resurrection of Jesus. Although the empty tomb enjoys a strong majority, it does not approach unanimity. Nor is the majority who grant the empty tomb composed of a significant number of scholars from numerous theological persuasions, although heterogeneity among them is certainly present.

A comparison with the appearance to James may be helpful. We observed that a small group of scholars have commented on the appearance to James, among whom we found a heterogeneous and near consensus granting historicity. In contrast, a large group of scholars have opined on the empty tomb of Jesus, among whom we found a moderate-to-strong majority (rather than a near consensus) that is somewhat heterogeneous (rather than having strong heterogeneity) granting historicity. As with the appearance to James, I do not believe we have enough here to warrant including the empty tomb as part of our historical bedrock. However, we might grant it status as a “second level fact,” if we were to investigate the matter and conclude that the reasons for accepting the empty tomb significantly outweigh the reasons for rejecting it. A discussion of the empty tomb would require a great amount of space. Since, we know ahead of time that it does not qualify as part of historical bedrock, I will refrain from such a discussion in the present research and from employing it in a resurrection hypothesis in the chapter that follows.

#### 4.4. Conclusions

We began this chapter by discussing Habermas’ approach to the question of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. He lists twelve facts that he claims are regarded as historical by the majority of scholars. From these he developed a “minimal facts” approach in which he selects only four to six of the twelve facts and builds a historical case for the resurrection based only on these. Over time his approach has changed and his present contention is that the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead can be demonstrated to be superior to the others if one were to use only those facts which the vast majority of contemporary scholars grant as historical. Though his lists have varied, Habermas maintains that the following three facts

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<sup>586</sup> A few examples are Bentz-Letts (1997), 265, 268, 273-74; Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998), 469; Goulder (2005), 58, 194; Henaut (1986), 177-90; Lindars (1986), 90, 94; Lüdemann (2004), 96.

<sup>587</sup> Habermas (*Resurrection Research*, 2005), 140. See also Barclay in D’Costa, ed. (1996) who makes a similar observation (22, 23).

pertaining to the fate of Jesus are granted as historical by a nearly universal consensus of scholars writing on the subject since 1975.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.
3. Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

We discussed these three at length and saw that we are warranted in including them as our historical bedrock. We also discussed the appearance to James and took a brief look at the empty tomb, neither of which qualify as historical bedrock. It is important to note that the three facts that comprise our historical bedrock pertaining to the fate of Jesus have been arrived at through careful historical analyses and are accepted by the nearly unanimous consensus of scholars and that the membership of this group is quite heterogeneous.<sup>588</sup>

We discussed the historical bedrock pertaining to Jesus' life in order to gain an understanding of the context in which the historical bedrock pertaining to Jesus' fate appears. We observed that Jesus was a miracle worker and exorcist and that he believed he had a special relationship with God who had chosen Jesus to usher in his eschatological kingdom.

We also discussed six Pauline texts in order to ascertain what Paul believed concerning the nature of Jesus' resurrection body. I concluded that Paul certainly believed that resurrection was something that happened to a corpse. I further contended that, given Paul's high esteem of tradition that most likely came from the Jerusalem church, it is highly likely that he was teaching the same thing about resurrection as were the Jerusalem apostles. If Paul taught the resurrection of the body, so were the Jerusalem apostles. However, the nature of Jesus' resurrection does not belong to historical bedrock.

What do we do with the three facts pertaining to Jesus' fate? In the next chapter we will consider six hypotheses that purport to explain what happened to Jesus; specifically, whether he rose from the dead.

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<sup>588</sup> Baxter (1999), 20-21.



## Chapter Five: Weighing Hypotheses

[H]istorical research shows with definite clarity that Jesus was not raised from the dead. . . . For two thousand years an abiding faith in Jesus' resurrection has displayed enormous power, but because of its utter groundlessness we must now acknowledge that it has all along been a worldwide historical hoax.<sup>1</sup>

*Gerd Lüdemann*

At best the historian can say that there were men and women in the first century who earnestly believed that they had seen the raised Christ . . . . The historian cannot say that the raised Jesus was seen in a vision without himself becoming a man of faith. Nor can he account for the certainty with which the early Christians held to the conviction that they had seen Jesus. He must qua historian hold his peace.<sup>2</sup>

*Peter Carnley*

In regard to the future resurrection of the dead, I am and remain a Pharisee. Concerning the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, I was for decades a Sadducee. I am no longer a Sadducee.<sup>3</sup>

*Pinchas Lapide*

### 5.1 Summary of Where We Have Been and Our Intent

We have now arrived at the last phase of our investigation. This is a good place to review our journey thus far. We have discussed the nature of historical knowledge, what it means to know something, what steps to take in order to gain historical knowledge, and the impact miracle has on the equation. We have discussed our pool of sources and weighed them to determine which ones we may rely upon most heavily. We have discussed the knowable facts surrounding the fate of Jesus and identified our historical bedrock. In short, we have discussed our philosophy of history, our method, our relevant sources, and the knowable facts upon which hypotheses must be built and weighed.

We must take steps toward managing our horizons. We will do this by employing specific methodological considerations discussed especially in the first two chapters. I have exposed my horizon and my method to readers. The approaches I have taken and will take in this final chapter will be submitted to unsympathetic experts for criticisms should this dissertation be published. In the interim, I have presented and defended some of the conclusions contained in this research through two papers given

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<sup>1</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 190; cf. 209; (1995), 135.

<sup>2</sup> Carnley (1987), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Lapide (2002), 125.

in friendly academic settings and a public debate with agnostic Bart Ehrman.<sup>4</sup> When weighing hypotheses, we will place a premium on accounting for the relevant historical bedrock in order to place a check on undisciplined imagination. And we will work on a detachment from bias by providing due consideration of a number of recent naturalistic hypotheses.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, I have attempted throughout the duration of this research project to become personally detached. I say this only as a check for myself and cannot expect others to assign any value to my simple claim on the matter.

We realize that there will never be a consensus opinion pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, given the influence of horizons. We have sought a heterogeneous consensus pertaining to our relevant historical bedrock and arrived at three facts. Since these facts are granted by scholars from a very wide range of theological and philosophical positions, we have confidence that our historical bedrock is quite secure, since those with contrary views have arrived at the same conclusions for many of the same reasons.

Pertaining to our expectations, we recognize that all historical knowledge is provisional and, accordingly, all conclusions are subject to future revision. While absolute certainty eludes us, adequate or reasonable certainty is attainable. When we say that a hypothesis is “true,” we mean that it corresponds with a fair degree of accuracy to events and/or conditions in the past. A historical description does not provide a comprehensive description of the past but an adequate one relevant to a specific inquiry.

For assessing hypotheses, we adopted methodical neutrality to assign the burden of proof to the one who is making a proposition, be it affirmative or negative. Accordingly, no hypothesis may get the nod for being the best explanation unless its superiority to competing hypotheses can be demonstrated. Furthermore, merely stating “What if . . .” possibilities without supporting evidence does not challenge hypotheses with strong supporting evidence. “What ifs” must be supported by evidence and argumentation.<sup>6</sup> We established the following seven criteria for the best explanation (listed in descending order of importance): (1) consilience, (2)

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<sup>4</sup> Ehrman and I debated the question “Can historians prove that Jesus rose from the dead?” The debate took place on February 28, 2008 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO (USA). A DVD of the debate is available by contacting the seminary library at 816.414.3729.

<sup>5</sup> Watson (1987) asks why many still find the “so-called ‘historical evidence for the resurrection’ convincing?” He provides two answers: (1) “[T]he inconvenient necessity of taking serious account of other possibilities is simply ignored.” (2) “[There is a] very strong predisposition to accept the traditional view of the resurrection. If one finds it impossible even to imagine that the resurrection did not take place just as the New Testament says it did, one is likely to find arguments convincing which appear to confirm what one is already instinctively sure of” (371-72). In this chapter, it will be clear that we will not fall prey to Watson’s first answer. Pertaining to the second, I do not find it impossible to imagine that Jesus’ resurrection did not occur. I agree with Watson’s points. But Watson should recognize that, in addition to asking them as he does, they should also be restated to chide a lazy skepticism as follows: Why do many still not find the historical evidence for the resurrection convincing? (1) The inconvenient necessity of taking serious account of the possibility of Jesus’ resurrection is simply ignored or treated irresponsibly. (2) Some scholars have a very strong predisposition to reject the traditional view of the resurrection. If one finds it impossible even to imagine that the resurrection took place just as the New Testament says it did, one is likely to find arguments convincing which appear to confirm what one is already instinctively sure of.

<sup>6</sup> *What ifs* that are supported show us that we cannot know that Jesus rose with *absolute* historical certainty. But this is already granted, not only for the resurrection, but also for nearly every other historical conclusion.

explanatory scope, explanatory power, less *ad hoc*, plausibility (3) unlikely future disconfirmation, (4) illumination.

We constructed the following spectrum of historical certainty: certainly not historical, very doubtful, quite doubtful, somewhat doubtful, indeterminate (neither improbable nor probable, possible, plausible), somewhat certain (more probable than not), quite certain, very certain (very probably true), certain. We may conclude that a hypothesis is historical when it we can place it on the spectrum of historical certainty somewhere between a half-step under “quite certain” or better. We proposed two criteria for placing a hypothesis on the spectrum where historicity may be awarded: (1) it has to meet the seven criteria better than competing hypotheses and (2) it must outdistance competing hypotheses by a significant margin.

In our discussion of historians and miracle claims, we proposed two criteria for identifying a miracle: (1) the event is highly improbable given natural causes alone and (2) the event occurs in a context charged with religious significance. We are aware that the term *resurrection* can have theological components, such as the full eschatological properties of a resurrection body and the divine cause of a resurrection. Whatever one may believe concerning these aspects, they are beyond the scope of the historian’s work. As historians we are limited to asking whether Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Historians cannot answer whether it was God who raised Jesus or whether Jesus’ resurrection body was incorruptible, powerful, glorious, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

For our pool of sources, Paul and the oral traditions embedded throughout the New Testament literature provide our most promising material. The canonical Gospels, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, the Acts speeches, and the *Gospel of Thomas* may also be helpful on occasions. A few other sources may assist us to varying degrees.

Having examined these sources, we identified our historical bedrock:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus’ death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected.
3. Within a few years after Jesus’ death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

These three facts have strong supporting evidence and are regarded as historical by a nearly unanimous consensus of modern scholars. This consensus also possesses a significant amount of heterogeneity.

Although not belonging to our relevant historical bedrock, there are four facts we may refer to as “second-level facts.” Two of these are the appearance to James and, to a smaller degree, the empty tomb. Moreover, in chapter four we argued for the historicity of Jesus’ predictions pertaining to his violent and imminent death and subsequent resurrection by God and that the claim of the earliest apostles was that Jesus was raised bodily. While none of these four facts may be said to belong to historical bedrock, they may serve as second-level facts.

Our approach will be to weigh hypotheses using only the historical bedrock. This will serve to eliminate the weaker hypotheses. If no clear winner emerges, we will repeat the exercise with the surviving hypotheses, considering our second-level facts in addition to the historical bedrock. This will also require a thorough treatment of the empty tomb.

With this in mind, we will proceed to examine five naturalistic hypotheses that provide a sampling representative of the variety of naturalistic hypotheses presently being forwarded in academic books and peer reviewed journals.<sup>7</sup> We will consider proposals by Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, Gerd Lüdemann, John Dominic Crossan, and Pieter Craffert. We will follow these with a consideration of the resurrection hypothesis. I will abbreviate these as follows:

Vermes's hypothesis: VH  
Goulder's hypothesis: GH  
Lüdemann's hypothesis: LH  
Crossan's hypothesis: CsH  
Craffert's hypothesis: CfH  
Resurrection hypothesis: RH

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<sup>7</sup> Naturalistic explanations have, of course, been around for some time. Since the early Christians first proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, others made claims to the contrary. Matthew (28:13) and Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 108) reported that the Jewish leaders were claiming that the disciples had stolen the body. Tertullian (*De Spectaculis* or *The Shows*, 30) makes note of the claim but does not attribute it to the Jewish leaders. Tertullian also notes that it was being claimed by some that the gardener had reburied Jesus' corpse in order to avoid having his lettuce trampled upon by those coming to see where Jesus had been buried. Celsus (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.68; cf. 2.56) suggested Egyptian trickery (i.e., apparent death). These explanations were common throughout the nineteenth-century but are now rarely used. Only a handful today would suggest that Jesus may have survived crucifixion (for a few examples, see chapter 4.3.1.5) and it is rarely proposed that there was fraud or that the wrong tomb was visited (Allison [*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005], 202, 207-08; Allison ["Explaining," 2005], 119.). Davis (1999) notes that naturalistic explanations "are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence than the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead" (8, accessed online) and that "no strong new theory has emerged as the consensus of scholars who deny that the resurrection occurred" (1993, 16). The old hypotheses simply collapse under their own weight (Davis [1993], 16; Wright ["Resurrecting Old Arguments," 2005], 222).

## 5.2 Geza Vermes

### 5.2.1. Description of Vermes's View

Although Vermes jettisoned his Christian faith in 1957, his desire to study Jesus remained and has resulted in numerous books on the subject: *Jesus the Jew* (1973); *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (1983); *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993); *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (2001); *Jesus in His Jewish Context* (2003); *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (2004); *The Passion* (2005); *The Nativity* (2006); and *The Resurrection* (2008).

In *The Resurrection*, Vermes investigates the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, which he refers to as “an unparalleled phenomenon in history,” given the emphasis laid upon it and its centrality in the teachings of the early Church.<sup>8</sup> His goal is to unravel “the true meaning” behind the New Testament reports that Jesus had risen from the dead and to construct a “tenable hypothesis” of how early Christianity came to ascribe “extreme importance” to Jesus’ resurrection when there is a “very limited amount of interest in the subject discernible in the authentic teaching of Jesus.”<sup>9</sup>

Vermes argues for the historicity of the empty tomb and the visions/apparitions. In support of the historicity of the empty tomb, had the accounts been the products of wholesale manufacturing, it is highly unlikely that they would have provided female witnesses who “had no standing in a male-dominated Jewish society.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they would have gotten the number of women in the various narratives correct. In short, had the narratives been the result of complete invention, they would have been more uniform and they would have included credible witnesses.<sup>11</sup>

The visions and/or apparitions are reported by the Gospels, Acts, and Paul “in a tradition he has inherited from his seniors in the faith” (1 Cor. 15:3-8).<sup>12</sup> In terms of the nature of the apparitions, Vermes is unclear but appears to favor a form of disembodiment.<sup>13</sup> In his dialogue with the Sadducees on the resurrection, Jesus tells them that the resurrected “neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as angels in heaven.”<sup>14</sup> What does it mean to be like “angels in heaven”? Citing two Jewish writings in support (1 En. 51:4; 2 Bar. 51:5, 10, 12), he concludes that they are “purely bodiless beings.” Accordingly, his dialogue with the Sadducees implies “that in Jesus’ mind the distinction between resurrection and mere spiritual survival was minimal.”<sup>15</sup> Later on Vermes builds somewhat of a more robust case for a spiritual resurrection. Although he provides no criticisms of this explanation, it appears that he does not regard it as correct.<sup>16</sup> One must wonder why, since the arguments he had previously presented appear to point precisely in that direction.

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<sup>8</sup> Vermes (2008), x, xv.

<sup>9</sup> Vermes (2008), x-xi.

<sup>10</sup> Vermes (2008), 140.

<sup>11</sup> Vermes (2008), 140-41.

<sup>12</sup> Vermes (2008), 91-120. The quote related to Paul is on 119.

<sup>13</sup> Vermes (2008), 63-67.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:34-36. See also Nickelsburg (2006), 237.

<sup>15</sup> Vermes (2008), 66.

<sup>16</sup> Vermes (2008), 147-48.



Although the embarrassing testimony of women is enough to convince Vermes that Jesus' tomb was empty, differences in the accounts decrease their value for "legal or scientific inquiry. The only alternative historians are left with in their effort to make some sense of the Resurrection is to fall back on speculation, hopefully on enlightened speculation."<sup>17</sup> What are historians to do with the empty tomb and the appearances? Vermes asserts that these "convince only the already converted."<sup>18</sup> Since the accounts do not pass the standards of legal or scientific inquiry, we may only speculate what happened.<sup>19</sup>

Vermes notes eight hypotheses. However, he will only consider six, judging blind faith and outright rejection as the "two extremes that are not susceptible to rational judgment":<sup>20</sup> (1) a non-disciple of Jesus took his corpse; (2) Jesus' corpse was stolen by his disciples; (3) the wrong tomb was visited and discovered empty; (4) Jesus was not dead when buried and emerged from the tomb; (5) a variant of (4), adding that Jesus left Palestine and went to India (*a la* Ahmadiyya Muslims) or Rome where he married, divorced, remarried, and bore children (*a la* Thiering); (6) spiritual rather than bodily resurrection.<sup>21</sup>

Vermes asserts that none of the six hypotheses "stands up to stringent scrutiny" and then asks whether the "traditional Resurrection concept" is "doomed to failure in the rational world of today."<sup>22</sup> He answers that the evidence does not meet the standards of legal or scientific inquiry, leaving historians unable to determine whether Jesus actually rose from the dead. But they can speculate on the cause(s) behind "the birth and survival of Christianity."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Vermes does not propose what happened to Jesus but takes a position that historians cannot know (i.e., agnosticism).

Vermes proposes that the empty tomb and apparitions of the missing Jesus gave the apostles hope, although doubts continued. He does not specify who experienced the apparitions or state whether any of the apostles did. A short time after Jesus' crucifixion, at Pentecost, his disciples had "a powerful mystical experience in Jerusalem" that changed them from a terrified and cowardly group to a band of "ecstatic spiritual warriors."<sup>24</sup> When they resumed their ministry of preaching the Gospel in the name of Jesus, they realized that "his charisma was working again," felt his presence and were convinced that he truly had been raised. This conviction "accounts for the resurgence of the Jesus movement after the crucifixion."<sup>25</sup> But it was Paul's turning the resurrection into the centerpiece of Christian doctrine that prompted Christianity to grow into the powerful world religion it is today.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>18</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>19</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>20</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>21</sup> Vermes (2008), 142-48. It is of interest that all but the last of these six are naturalistic explanations for the empty tomb of Jesus, which Vermes grants.

<sup>22</sup> Vermes (2008), 148.

<sup>23</sup> Vermes (2008), 141, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Vermes (2008), 149.

<sup>25</sup> Vermes (2008), 150-51. Another Jewish scholar made a similar observation: "Without the Sinai experience—no Judaism; without the Easter experience—no Christianity" (Lapide [2002], 92).

<sup>26</sup> Vermes (2008), 151.

## A Summary of Vermes' Hypothesis (VH)

- The empty tomb and the apparitions are historical.
- The Resurrection hypothesis (RH) is doomed to fail in a rational world and is not supported by evidence that meets the standards of legal or scientific inquiry.
- Outright rejection of a supernatural event eludes rational judgment.
- Naturalistic hypotheses such as the body was stolen, the wrong tomb was visited, Jesus did not actually die, or that it was a *spiritual* resurrection all fail when submitted to critical scrutiny.
- Historians are, thus, unable to determine whether Jesus was actually resurrected (agnosticism). However, they can speculate on what caused the birth of Christianity.
- After Jesus' crucifixion, his followers had a "powerful mystical experience" in Jerusalem at Pentecost. This experience transformed them to the point that they resumed their ministry. As they did, they felt his presence and this convinced them he had been raised. Paul's emphasis on Jesus' resurrection is largely responsible for its growth.

### 5.2.2. Analysis and Concerns

Vermes narrows his options by eliminating "extremes" on both ends "that are not susceptible to rational judgment, the blind faith of the fundamentalist believer and the out-of-hand rejection of the inveterate skeptic."<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he accuses N. T. Wright's treatment on the subject of falling into the category of the former whereas treatments offered by Strauss and Price/Lowder belong to the latter.<sup>28</sup>

While "blind faith" and "inveterate skeptic[ism]" are not positions of historical argumentation, it is incorrect to conclude that members of these camps cannot or have not employed a critical approach. Indeed, the treatments by Wright and Price/Lowder include historical argumentation of greater sophistication than Vermes offers in his book. Wright is especially impressive in his case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, beginning with discussions of the philosophy of history and historical method followed by careful historical analyses and argumentation. Irrespective of whether one accepts Wright's arguments or conclusions, we can hardly accuse him of working out of "blind faith" as Vermes seems to suggest.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Vermes' writing off Wright's work as "extreme" and his refusal to interact with it on any point is disappointing. Vermes dismisses, without hearing any arguments, the very position that is the subject of his book: the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

The same may nearly be said of the work of Price/Lowder. I do not regard the hypercritical approaches taken by Price/Lowder and their contributors as responsible historiography. While their essays are—and I believe should be—treated lightly by more sober scholarship, their work cannot be simply dismissed because they are hypercritical. A number of the essays in their volume are carefully argued and

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<sup>27</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>28</sup> See Vermes (2008): "faith and disbelief" (x); naming N. T. Wright and David Friedrich Strauss as examples of "two extremes" (101); naming treatments by N. T. Wright (2003) and Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder, eds. (2005) as "two types of extreme [sic.]" (153).

<sup>29</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

warrant consideration. Vermes would have been better to propose that these have been addressed elsewhere and that since the hypercritical approach employed throughout is not embraced by the overwhelming majority of scholars, “its treatment here would be a pure waste of time.”<sup>30</sup>

This is not the only example of Vermes moving perfunctorily. He opines that the empty tomb and the appearances cannot solve the question pertaining to whether Jesus was resurrected, since they “convince only the already converted.”<sup>31</sup> Although exceptions exist, Vermes is largely correct that only Christians are persuaded by the evidence.<sup>32</sup> However, he gives no consideration to the problem of horizons. A reading through the literature on the subject of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus makes evident that no one comes to the discussion without being heavily influenced by his horizon. Everyone involved in the discussion realizes there is much on the line. Vermes’ *a priori* exclusion of the resurrection hypothesis (RH) presupposes that no case for the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection would be able to convince historians who have made a serious effort to check their horizons. Moreover, consensus, while desirable, is not a criterion for the best explanation. Otherwise, we should conclude that the evidence is meager for the existence and execution of Jesus, since hypercritical and Muslim historians remain unpersuaded.

Moreover, why must scholars abandon the resurrection hypothesis in order to remain “rational,” as Vermes seems to imply?<sup>33</sup> It is here that we get hints of Vermes’ own worldview. When scholars supporting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus such as Wright, Habermas, and Craig provide sophisticated and reasoned arguments in support, must they be regarded as irrational because they do not *a priori* exclude the possibility that God exists and may have had a reason for raising Jesus?<sup>34</sup>

Vermes too hastily rules out the testimonies that Jesus had been raised, contending that the accounts do not pass the standards of legal or scientific inquiry and, thus, we may only speculate as to what happened.<sup>35</sup> Although a woman’s testimony failed Jewish *legal* standards of the first century, the twenty-first century historian is bound by *historical* rather than *legal* standards. Even given this difference, the testimonies of the women are good enough to establish the historicity of the empty tomb for Vermes. The task of the historian is to provide the best explanation for the sincere and impassioned conviction of the earliest Christians that their crucified rabbi had been raised from the dead and had appeared to them.

Vermes at times applies exegesis that is inattentive. For example, he refers to the apparition of Jesus to his disciples in Luke and John as a “spirit” and “ghost.”<sup>36</sup> Although Jesus is able to materialize at will, that he is a “spirit” or “ghost” is clearly not what Luke and John wanted to convey. For just two verses later Luke reports Jesus himself saying he is not a “spirit/ghost” and then as proof invites them to touch

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<sup>30</sup> Vermes (2008), 158. For a critique of Price and Lowder, eds., see Davis (2006), 39-63.

<sup>31</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>32</sup> But see Lapide (2002) who did not convert to Christianity, though acknowledging the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (125).

<sup>33</sup> Vermes (2008), 148.

<sup>34</sup> See Witherington (2006), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Vermes (2008), 141.

<sup>36</sup> Vermes (2008), 146. See Luke 24:36-37; John 20:19.

him and eats in front of them (24:39-43). We find similar actions reported by John (20:20-27; implied in 21:9-15).

Vermes attempts to demonstrate that Jesus thought of ‘resurrection’ as a state similar to disembodied existence. Why are the resurrected like the angels in Jesus’ discussion with the Sadducees? The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage but the sons of God in the next age neither marry nor are given in marriage and are incapable of dying (ἰσάγγελοι γάρ εἰσιν) because they are like angels (Luke). Their likeness with the angels seems to refer to their living forever in a non-married state. Although we cannot rule out further similarities, concluding firmly that Jesus was thinking of disembodiment here seems a bit hasty. In fact, we also observe Vermes stepping up quickly in his certainty pertaining to his interpretation. He first comments that Jesus’ conflict with the Sadducees is “inauthentic and probably reflects by anticipation arguments opposing the haughty Sadducees and the representatives of the apostolic Church in the latter part of the first century.” Indeed, “[t]he tale itself smacks of fiction.” However, he adds *without argument* that “there is no reason to doubt that the ideas expressed here correspond to the eschatological thought of Jesus”<sup>37</sup> and that the pericope informs us “how some first-century AD Jews, *and possibly Jesus himself*, conceived of the state of a person raised from the dead. . . . So for Jesus, or at least for his later disciples, the sons of the resurrection had an angelic, noncorporeal quality.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, his conclusion is firm just two sentences later: “Consequently, in the eyes of Jesus, resurrected persons, or more precisely the raised just . . . were purely bodiless beings. . . . This would imply that in Jesus’ mind the distinction between resurrection and mere spiritual survival was minimal.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, we observe Vermes going from “inauthentic” to “possibly” to attributing the belief to Jesus without any supporting arguments.

Vermes defines the Jewish concept of resurrection as the reunification of the soul and revived corpse.<sup>40</sup> He then argues that this is *not* what Jesus meant by the term by appealing to a saying about resurrection that he thinks Jesus did not actually say (Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:34-36). In order to make this argument work, Vermes assigns an interpretation to the saying that contradicts not only what he defines as the Jewish view of resurrection but also another statement by Jesus on the matter that Vermes apparently deems authentic and which implies bodily resurrection in agreement with the Jewish view (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 18:8-9).<sup>41</sup> Moves like this lend the impression that Vermes knows where he wants to go and hurries there somewhat carelessly. In any sense, it lacks explanatory power in this regard.

### 5.2.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

These above concerns present only the beginning of the problems present in Vermes’ hypothesis (VH). When we assess it employing the five criteria for weighing hypotheses discussed in chapter one, the weakness of his hypothesis becomes even more apparent.

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<sup>37</sup> Vermes (2008), 65.

<sup>38</sup> Vermes (2008), 65, 66. Italics are mine.

<sup>39</sup> Vermes (2008), 66.

<sup>40</sup> Vermes (2008), xvi.

<sup>41</sup> Vermes (2008), 66-67, 70-71.

- 1) *Explanatory Scope.* VH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead, since one must first die before being raised from the dead. VH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings, regarding the experiences as visions and apparitions. VH does not attempt to account for Paul's experience. This third fact cannot be treated lightly, since Paul was a zealous enemy of the Church when the experience occurred. Because Paul was neither grieving Jesus' death nor expecting his resurrection, one would need to do violence to the data in order to argue that Paul was psychologically predisposed to have a subjective experience of the risen Jesus. Thus, VH lacks explanatory scope. However, whether it surpasses others in this area will be discovered as we examine additional hypotheses. For now I will assign it a "T" (tentative).
  
- 2) *Explanatory Power.* Jesus' followers had to have been certain of his death in order to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and his death by crucifixion is the strongest candidate as a cause for their belief that Jesus had died. However, ambiguity is present in abundance when one speaks of "visions" and "apparitions" as causes of the belief that Jesus had risen. Were these hallucinations, delusions, actual communications from the heavens by Jesus who was alive, or an actual appearance of the risen Jesus to them in space-time? Who experienced the apparitions other than perhaps the women? Given Paul's mission of crushing the Church, what was the cause behind his experience of the risen Jesus? And how could Paul's experience plausibly have led him to conclude that Jesus had been raised bodily? Unfortunately, Vermes neither asks nor attempts to answer these questions. Furthermore, Vermes grants the empty tomb as historical. Since he *a priori* rules out Jesus' bodily resurrection and summarily dismisses hypotheses that his corpse was stolen, moved, reburied, or that the wrong tomb was visited, we are left wondering what happened to Jesus' corpse and Vermes is severely depleted on his available options! Accordingly, VH is very weak in its explanatory power. Whether it surpasses others in this area will be discovered as we examine additional hypotheses. Once again, I will assign it a "T."
  
- 3) *Plausibility.* Is VH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? The apparitions and powerful mystical experiences at Pentecost followed by a sense of Jesus' presence during subsequent ministry proposed by VH is not implied by Paul's conversion or an empty tomb (which VH grants)—that is, if the experiences were natural phenomena. Although the empty tomb is included in VH, it is not part of our relevant historical bedrock. Accordingly, I will not allow it at this point to count against the plausibility of VH. Even so, the appearance to Paul remains and is part of our relevant historical bedrock. Since VH is not implied by the appearance to Paul, it lacks plausibility. VH does not speculate pertaining to whether the mystical experiences were natural or supernatural. This will render it more difficult to assess the plausibility of VH due to its very poor explanatory power. I do not wish to penalize VH for refusing to speculate beyond what Vermes believes is allowed by the evidence. However, if a competing hypothesis can account for the historical bedrock better, VH will trail it in plausibility. Since it is yet to be seen whether this will occur, we will assign VH a "T."



- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. VH does not seem to appeal to non-evidenced or baseless facts. However, its *a priori exclusion of RH without argument may be an ad hoc component*. Whether VH is less *ad hoc* than its competitors is yet to be seen. So, for the moment we will assign it “T.”
- 5) *Illumination*. Because VH possesses a great deal of ambiguity and vagueness, it does not provide illumination for solving problems in other areas where unanswered questions or tensions exist. Although Vermes gives up on adjudicating on what happened to Jesus and redirects his efforts at discovering the cause(s) behind the birth and survival of Christianity, his conclusion that it was reports of apparitions combined with experiences of the apostles of Jesus’ presence (in some manner) is widely accepted by scholars. Thus, VH provides no illumination. Since this criterion is more of a bonus rather than a positive criterion, the failure of a hypothesis to fulfill it should not be counted against it. Accordingly, we assign VH a “not met” or “-”.

VH lacks explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, and contains an *ad hoc* component. It provides no illumination for unanswered questions. The chart below provides a quick look at how VH does at fulfilling the criteria for the best explanation. The grayed column reminds us that the criterion is of lesser importance. Each grade will be updated as additional hypotheses are assessed.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	T	T	T	T	-

## 5.3 Michael Goulder

**5.3.1. Description of Goulder’s View.** Goulder appeals to the social sciences, contending that various psychological conditions brought about experiences of the risen Jesus in Peter, Paul, and the other disciples. This type of hypothesis has been the most popular naturalistic hypothesis during the last one hundred years.<sup>42</sup>

### 5.3.1.1. Peter

Goulder suggests that Peter experienced a hallucination given “the series of blows to his self-image, the guilt, [and] the bereavement” over Jesus’ death.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Peter is said to have experienced a number of visions, examples include Peter’s presence at the transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:2-7 and his trance in Acts 10:9-16. In summary, Peter’s experience was nothing more than a hallucination, the plausibility of which is confirmed by the fact that he was given to this type of experience.

Goulder cites two modern examples of others having similar hallucinations. Susan Atkins was an associate of serial killer Charles Manson. While in prison, Atkins experienced much guilt over her crimes. She viewed her options as staying in prison, attempting to escape, committing suicide, or following Jesus. One day she heard someone calling for her to make a decision. But she did not know if the voice was real or only in her thoughts. However, during the same experience she saw a door in her thoughts. She opened it and was flooded with light. Within that light was an even brighter light that took the form of a man. She knew it was Jesus who spoke to her literally, saying he was coming into her heart to stay. Her guilt and bitterness were replaced with happiness, immediately and completely.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Habermas (2003), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 51-52. See also Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 87; Goulder (2005), 193. Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) prefers “conversion vision” and avoids “hallucination,” “because it has trivializing and pejorative associations” to the non-specialist who may think of someone “seeing pink elephants after drinking or be living in an unreal world. But to a psychologist the word is value-free. It means that the vision or voices and so on are solely within the mind” (91). In order to eliminate ambiguity and vagueness and to convey Goulder’s hypothesis clearly, I will refer to his term “conversion vision” as a hallucination unless he employs it in a different sense. I do not tend to convey the “trivializing and pejorative associations” Goulder fears. By hallucination, I mean is a “sensory experience such as seeing persons or objects, hearing voices, and smelling odors in the absence of environmental stimuli” (I. Al-Issa, “Hallucination,” in Benner and Hill, eds. (1999), 538. In other words, it is a false perception of something that is not there. There are no properties outside of the mind having a direct correlation to reality in a hallucination.

<sup>44</sup> Goulder (1996), 48-49; Goulder quotes from M. J. Meadow and R. D. Kahoe, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 90. Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996) also refers to this experience as “cognitive dissonance” (50). *Cognitive Dissonance* has been defined as follows: “An individual holds beliefs or cognitions that do not fit with each other (e.g., I believe the world will end, and the world did not end as predicted). Nonfitting beliefs give rise to dissonance, a hypothetical aversive state the individual is motivated to reduce or at least not increase. The aversive stimulation initiates changes in the individual’s behavior (e.g., undoing) or beliefs (e.g., the world was saved because of our fervent prayer) or limits exposure to discrepant information. . . . Dissonance exists between two beliefs when one is the opposite of the other, yet both are held simultaneously. . . . Dissonance may be reduced by changing behavior, altering a belief, or adding a new one” (R. L. Timpe, “Cognitive Dissonance” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling* [1999], 220). In short, cognitive dissonance occurs when known conflicting beliefs are simultaneously held and a number of actions can be taken in order to ease the mental tension that results. One can change her actions, change her beliefs, or live in denial to varying degrees. Since Goulder does not describe the specifics of this, I will provide an example

The second example involves the British parapsychologist Arthur Koestler. Having just lost three months salary in a poker game and having a car that had just broken down, he spent the night with a woman for whom he did not care. In the morning while pacing the floor of his bedroom he had the impression that he was looking down on himself from above and did not like his own hypocrisy.<sup>45</sup> For Goulder, Peter's hallucination was cut from the same cloth as the experiences of Atkins and Koestler.

### 5.3.1.2. Disciples

Goulder goes on to posit that Peter shared the news of his experience with others who then had similar experiences in groups of various sizes. Modern "communal delusions" such as sightings of Mary, Big Foot, and UFOs grant plausibility to the group experiences of the disciples.<sup>46</sup>

### 5.3.1.3. Paul

This leaves Goulder to explain Paul's conversion. He proposes that Paul may have begun entertaining secret doubts pertaining to his view of Christianity and developed a growing distaste for Judaism. This is because he felt in bondage to the strict form he followed, given his later references to the Law as "yoke" that places one in "spiritual bondage" (Gal. 5:1; Rom. 8:15).<sup>47</sup> His "intense religious upbringing" as a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) also contributed to his emotional state and "we know that he was going to Damascus to persecute the Church there, and this level of intense feeling is also correlated with conversion." These factors led Paul to experience a hallucination of the risen Jesus.<sup>48</sup> As with Peter, the plausibility of Paul having a hallucination is bolstered by the fact that he testified to having experienced multiple revelations (2 Cor. 12:7).<sup>49</sup> Goulder finally adds, "My own suspicion is that Paul had had a Gentile friend in his youth, and that the connection of his conversion with his call to evangelize the Gentiles has to do with some such experience."<sup>50</sup>

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through Ehrman and Watson who do, although neither make mention of cognitive dissonance. They argue that the followers of Jesus sincerely believed that he was the Messiah who would usher in God's kingdom. Those beliefs were dealt a crushing blow when Jesus was crucified. As a result they experienced a tension between what they had believed about Jesus and what they had just observed. They could resolve this dissonance by regarding their belief that Jesus was Messiah as mistaken. They could adjust their beliefs to accommodate what they had observed: Jesus now reigns as Messiah in heaven, that is, in a sense other than they had understood. They chose the latter and this belief led to one or more hallucinations of the risen Jesus. (See Ehrman's comments in Craig and Ehrman [2006], 29, and Watson [1987], 367-68.) Also see Craffert (1989), 336.

<sup>45</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 50-51.

<sup>46</sup> M. Goulder, "The Explanatory Power of Conversion Visions," in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 103. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 53.

<sup>47</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17. He borrows these suggestions from C. G. Jung, *Contributions to Analytical Psychology* (New York: ET, Harcourt, Brace; London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1928), 257; Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (London: SCM, 1982), 232, who cites J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 237.

<sup>48</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 51-52.

<sup>49</sup> Wedderburn (1999): "one might fairly say that he shows a certain tendency to ecstatic experiences" (123).

<sup>50</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52.

Goulder contends there were “two distinct traditions of understanding the resurrection in earliest Christianity, that is, a more ‘spiritual’ transformation associated with the Jerusalem church and the bodily resurrection associated with the Pauline churches and represented in narrative form in Mk 16.1-8.”<sup>51</sup>

#### 5.3.1.4. Appearance Traditions in the Gospels

Goulder then continues that three to seven decades after Jesus’ death there were tensions between Church groups, resulting in the speculations about what else may have occurred. “When people tell an anecdote about the old times, they tend to ‘fill in the gaps.’ Questions are asked, and the answer is given, ‘It must have been like this,’ which soon becomes ‘It was like this.’”<sup>52</sup> Eventually it was suggested that a prominent figure buried Jesus’ corpse, the tomb became empty upon his resurrection, and he appeared to his disciples who touched him.<sup>53</sup> In reality, however, Jesus’ tomb contained a decomposing body.

Goulder concludes, “So there was no resurrection of Jesus. Psychological explanations are available for the early, appearance traditions; and known intra-ecclesial controversies about the nature of the resurrection explain the Gospel additions. So the Pauline, physical theory is without basis. But the psychological explanations also take the ground from under the feet of the Jewish Christian spiritual resurrection theory too—Peter and James just had conversion visions like Susan Atkins.”<sup>54</sup>

#### A Summary of Goulder’s Hypothesis (GH)

- Peter experienced a hallucination brought about by his low self-image, guilt, and grief. Peter was already inclined to have this type of experience.
- Peter shared his experience with the other disciples who then had experiences of the risen Jesus that may be called “communal delusions” and are similar to Big Foot, Mary, and UFO sightings.
- Paul may have had secret doubts pertaining both to his view of Christianity and the Judaism by which he felt bound. He may even have had a Gentile friend that motivated him to go to the Gentiles. These conditions led him to experience a hallucination.
- The original view was that Jesus’ resurrection was ‘spiritual’ (i.e., immaterial) and was the view held by the Jerusalem apostles, whereas Paul held to bodily resurrection.
- In time, speculations about what had occurred to Jesus led to embellishments that filled in the gaps with details such as the empty tomb and bodily appearances.

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<sup>51</sup> Goulder (2005), 187-88; cf. Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 57, although he does not tie resurrection belief as disembodiment to the Jerusalem church in this latter reference.

<sup>52</sup> Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 99.

<sup>53</sup> Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 103.

<sup>54</sup> Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 58-59.

### 5.3.2. Analysis and Concerns

We may applaud Goulder for his innovation. His efforts go beyond others in his attempts to explain the appearances to the disciples and Paul in psychological terms. However, his hypothesis is beset by a number of problems. It should first be noted up front that it is pure speculation, significantly lacking in evidence. It is therefore, *ad hoc*. As we discussed above, the one making the assertion bears the burden of proof.<sup>55</sup> Appealing to *possibilities* does not warrant the conclusion that it is what happened as a sort of *potest ergo est* (It is possible; therefore, it is *this way*). We may likewise note that Goulder's psychoanalysis of those who lived two thousand years ago is a highly problematic exercise. As Craig explains: "Psychoanalysis is notoriously difficult even when the patient is seated in front of you, but it is virtually impossible with historical figures."<sup>56</sup>

Goulder is often guilty of a careless use of data. He asserts that Peter experienced a hallucination at Jesus' transfiguration. But he ignores the fact that Jesus, James, and John were likewise present. This is very problematic for Goulder since collective hallucinations where every group member simultaneously experiences the same hallucination are extremely unlikely if not impossible. Hallucinations are similar to dreams in that they occur in the mind of an individual. There is no corresponding external reality. Accordingly, I could not awaken my wife in the middle of the night and tell her that I am having a dream that I am in Hawaii and then have her to go back to sleep and join me in my dream where we would enjoy a free vacation. We may both return to sleep and experience dreams of being in Hawaii in which the two of us are present. But it is highly unlikely that we will dream the same dream and have the same conversations in both dreams. In a similar way, the disciples may all have been in a similar frame of mind. They would want Jesus to return to them. They may all have seen a vague and ambiguous shade in a room that resembled that of a human figure and wondered if it was Jesus (an illusion). One or more of them may have even been so mentally stressed that they experienced a visual hallucination of a light or figure or an auditory hallucination of a voice. But it is extremely unlikely that, within a group setting, many of them simultaneously experienced a hallucination possessing both visual and auditory components that were so similar in their details that the group members were convinced they had all experienced the same event. Group hallucinations are implausible.

A similar criticism applies to Goulder's use of Peter's vision related to Cornelius. According to the passage Goulder is citing (Acts 10), Cornelius had a dream sending him to Peter who had a remarkably relevant vision without knowing of Cornelius. The point to be made is that Goulder is uncritically selective pertaining to the details he accepts. One could simply deny that the transfiguration event and Peter's dream actually occurred. But once historicity of these experiences of Peter is granted, on what basis should certain details of the reports be granted while others rejected?

Perhaps Goulder would suggest that Peter was hypnotized.<sup>57</sup> But he neither describes what this may have looked like nor provides any support for this possibility. GH, thus,

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<sup>55</sup> See chapter 1.2.10.

<sup>56</sup> Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 50.

<sup>57</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 51. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) is open to hypnosis to account for the appearances (297).



lacks explanatory power in this regard. Given methodical neutrality, his hypnosis proposal warrants no further consideration. However, I am in agreement with Goulder that a grief hallucination is a plausible explanation for an individual experience by Peter.

Another problem with the kind of speculations offered by Goulder is that the data he uses can just as easily be employed in a much different sense. These aspects of GH are ambiguous and, thus, lack explanatory power. For example, while Peter may have solved a cognitive dissonance via a hallucination of the risen Jesus, he could just as likely have concluded that he had been deceived by Jesus after all. Craig writes,

[T]he true problem Peter faced . . . was not so much that he had failed his Lord as that his Lord had failed him! . . . Any mockery and contempt he would face would be not for his failure to go to his death with Jesus—after all, everyone else had deserted him too—but rather for his having followed the false prophet from Nazareth in the first place. Some Messiah he turned out to be! Some kingdom he inaugurated! The first sensible thing Peter had done since leaving his wife and family to follow Jesus was to disown this pretender! . . . Ignoring the disaster of the cross, Goulder imagines without a shred of evidence a self-preoccupied Peter wrestling with his own guilt and shame rather than struggling with dashed messianic expectations. Lest anyone say that such shattered expectations led to Peter’s hallucinating Jesus alive from the dead, let me simply repeat that no such hope existed in Israel, either with respect to the Messiah or to the final resurrection.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, it would be easy to turn Goulder’s argument on its head by asking whether his hypothesis is the byproduct of a cognitive dissonance Goulder himself is experiencing in order to continue in his rejection of the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. In other words, Goulder starts off with a conviction that Jesus did not rise from the dead, is faced with evidence to the contrary creating a dissonance, and resolves it with a proposal using a highly speculative psychoanalysis without any direct factual support coupled with an appearance that he has limited his exposure to conflicting data. I am not actually attempting to psychoanalyze Goulder and claim that he is suspect of cognitive dissonance, but I am attempting to expose the subjective ground on which he stands.

Goulder explains Paul’s hallucinatory experience by noting that he was given to having visions. However, there is an *a priori* assumption present that these other experiences were also hallucinations rather than the real thing. And it may be noted that there is no hint that Paul had any such experiences prior to his conversion to Christianity. Accordingly, a hallucination of the risen Jesus by Paul while possible is implausible.

GH revives an old theory pertaining to a split between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership that has long been rejected. Paul asserted that he and the other apostles were teaching the same things pertaining to Jesus’ resurrection (15:3-11). If Paul was teaching a bodily resurrection as Goulder holds, the Jerusalem apostles were teaching

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<sup>58</sup> Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 194; cf. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 243.

it too.<sup>59</sup> Thus, this component of GH is dead in its tracks, since a “spiritual” or disembodied resurrection could not have been the earliest claim of the Christians if Goulder is correct about Paul.

Surprisingly, Goulder never supports his contention that the Jerusalem church taught a ‘spiritual’ (i.e., ethereal) resurrection while Paul taught a bodily resurrection. He only answers Wright’s assertion that those whom Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15 were probably those who were reverting back to pagan beliefs. In doing so, Goulder provides a number of arguments that the resurrection deniers Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 15 had a Jewish background.<sup>60</sup> But this in no way supports Goulder’s

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>60</sup> Goulder (2005), 189. (1) Goulder asserts that although there was a spectrum of Jewish views of resurrection in the first century, the “spiritual view” “is in line with Josephus and Philo” and is what at least some in the Corinthian congregation were holding. While this grants plausibility to GH, bodily resurrection was likewise on the spectrum of Jewish views to which Goulder appeals. This likewise grants plausibility to RH, which Goulder does not take into account. Consequently, (1) does not uniquely support the assertion that a “spiritual view” of resurrection was held by the Jerusalem leaders. More importantly, those whom Paul was addressing were not interpreting ‘resurrection’ differently than Paul; they were denying it (15:12). (It is unclear to me whether the Corinthian believers holding this view were thinking in terms of a disembodied post-mortem existence or of no post-mortem existence at all, such as embraced by the Sadducees, since certain statements in the text fit better with the latter [1 Cor. 15:32 and possibly 15:19 in reference to 15:27].) In response, Paul provides *kerygma* pertaining to Jesus’ resurrection, adding that he *and the other apostles* are teaching the same things in this respect (15:3-11). Goulder grants this but adds that “We should therefore have to think that both groups proclaimed that Jesus had been raised, but interpreted that slightly differently” (190). However, Goulder does not provide support that they were interpreting resurrection differently. In fact, as will be stated in the main text, Paul’s commitment to *tradition* renders it much more plausible that if Paul was teaching a bodily resurrection, the Jerusalem apostles were too. Thus, in answering the resurrection deniers, the Jewish authority to whom Paul appeals in support of his position is the Jerusalem leadership whom Goulder asserts is siding with the resurrection deniers! This completely undermines Goulder’s third argument (3). (2) Goulder asserts that there were Jews in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 7:19). But he fails to mention that there were also Gentile converts whose background must be taken into consideration. Paul’s decision to go to the Gentiles was made while in Corinth (1 Cor. 18:5-6) and Hellenistic thinking leaned strongly in the direction of a disembodied postmortem existence. (See Wright [2003], 32-84. Also see Acts 17:32. When Goulder appeals to Philo and Josephus as having a view of *resurrection* that involves a disembodied existence, it is worth noting that Philo was a Hellenized Jew and interpreting Josephus on the matter is difficult since he may be altering a Jewish view in order to make it more acceptable to his Gentile Roman readers. Moreover, Philo and Josephus do not refer to the disembodied existence they promote as *resurrection*.) Most importantly, as noted in (1) bodily resurrection was believed by many first-century Jews. Since (2) does not argue for why the Corinthian believers preferred a “spiritual view” over bodily resurrection, it does not uniquely support a “spiritual view” of resurrection on the part of the Jerusalem leadership. (3) Goulder contends that the context indicates a Jewish background since Paul cites two Jewish authorities: himself and the Jerusalem leadership (1 Cor. 15:17). Not only may this be inconsequential since the earliest Christians were Jews, it does not uniquely support the assertion that the Jerusalem leadership held to a “spiritual view” of resurrection. (4) Goulder asserts that “The deniers based their belief on an exegesis of Psalm 8” which they understood as Jesus now having “all the powers under his feet, including Death.” There is no reason why Jews who believed in Jesus’ bodily resurrection would not believe that all powers including death were now under Jesus’ control. So, this argument also does not uniquely support a “spiritual view” of resurrection. (5) Goulder argues that “[t]he discussion of the first and second man in 15.44-49 depends upon a sophisticated Jewish tradition of the double creation of man in Gen. 1.27 and 2.7.” I have argued for a different interpretation of 15:44-49 that I believe is more faithful to the text than Goulder’s interpretation (see chapter 4.3.3.9.b). (6) Goulder contends that the “boasting of men” in 3:21 and “being puffed up for the one against the other” in 4:6 refers to “Peter against Paul.” But Paul is clear that he does not approve of such divisions (1:12-13; 3:3-7), there are no indicators that the divisions resulted from rifts between the Christian leaders such as Peter and Paul, and there are no clear indicators that doctrinal differences were the reasons why some were preferring one Christian leader over another. It could have been a matter of by whom one had been baptized or of being drawn to a

contention that the Jerusalem leaders were likewise resurrection deniers. Given Paul's tenacious commitment to *tradition*, it is much more plausible that if he was teaching a bodily resurrection, the Jerusalem apostles were as well.<sup>61</sup>

Goulder asserts that the resurrection appearances of Jesus to groups are "communal delusions" and of the same nature as apparitions of Mary and sightings of Big Foot and UFOs. Goulder's analogy fails. Since people who claim to have seen Bigfoot actually *saw* a physical being and large footprints in the mud, they were neither experiencing delusions nor hallucinations. In many cases, they were deceived. Delusions are beliefs held in the presence of strong disconfirming evidence. Thus, a *communal delusion* would have occurred if a group continued to believe that Big Foot was real after learning they had been tricked. Weather balloons and hoaxes have often been mistaken for UFOs.<sup>62</sup> Again, the people involved *saw* something with their ordinary sight and mistook it for something else. So, Big Foot and UFO sightings are not of the same nature as what Goulder is claiming pertaining to the disciples' group experiences. Accordingly, experiences similar to Big Foot and UFO sightings are implausible as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Modern Marian apparitions can often be accounted for as hallucinations or optical illusions, but of course, not all apparitions of Mary are so easily explained.<sup>63</sup> Although there are many, the three most prominent cases include apparitions in Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje. At Lourdes (France), a fourteen-year-old girl named Bernadette claimed to have experienced 18 apparitions of Mary in 1858. At Fatima (Portugal), three children, aged 10, 9, and 7, claimed that Mary appeared to them while together on six occasions in 1917. No others present could see Mary while the three children experienced their apparitions. However, it was reported that on one occasion others present observed that the sun was moving in the sky. At Medjugorje (Croatia), apparitions of Mary began in 1981 and continue daily to this very day. In 1981, five of the seers were teenagers while the sixth was 10. On the third day of the apparitions, some in the group of a few thousand who had gathered for the event with

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particular personality given his temperament and speaking style. Most importantly, it provides no support for the contention that Peter or any of the Jerusalem apostles held to a "spiritual view" of resurrection. (7) Goulder finally asserts that Paul contrasts the "word of the cross" in 1:18 with the gospel of his rivals who "taught words of human wisdom" in 2:13. His rivals are those mentioned in 1:19 and those "who insisted on Jewish laws in Galatians 2 were Jewish leaders, Peter and James." Goulder ignores the immediate context. In 1:17-19 and 2:7-16, Paul is not contrasting his teachings with those of rival apostles but with nonbelievers.

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>62</sup> Some UFO reports remain unexplained. While I personally do not believe that intelligent life exists on planets other than the earth, I remain open. I would be shocked if a UFO landed on our planet in public view. But it would not cause a major shift in my worldview. Nor do I think it would provide reason for me to reexamine my historical approach.

<sup>63</sup> There have been two instances when others have sent photographs to me of what they understood as a Marian apparition. I received the first in 1996 from a friend who witnessed an interesting silhouette resembling the traditional figure of Mary on the mirrored windows of the Seminole Finance Corp Building in Clearwater, Florida. The second occurred in 2006 when a stranger emailed a few photographs to me of discoloration in a stone resembling the silhouette of a person at the location where his relative had recently committed suicide. He identified the silhouette as Mary and wondered if she was trying to communicate that his relative was okay. Although I had to admit that in both cases the silhouettes were fascinating, I thought that only wishful thinking had allowed them to see Mary in them. It is hard to imagine that silhouettes such as these are what the early *kerygma* and Paul had in mind or that Paul would have radically reversed his view of Jesus based on something of this nature.

the youth reported seeing three flashes of light in the sky just prior to the apparition to the six youth. But only the youth saw Mary. Even today, only the six seers are privy to the apparitions. Those with a seer during his or her experience will see nothing.

As of June 1, 2008, the Catholic Church has not rendered any official pronouncement regarding the supernatural nature of these three cases, although it remains open to the possibility. Kenneth Samples had the opportunity to interview a number of the seers at Medjugorje as well as a few other key figures. Although a conservative Protestant, he comments, “Any honest effort to provide a satisfying explanation for the phenomenon known as Marian apparitions will prove to be a complex and difficult task. I freely admit that I may not be able to account for everything connected to these unusual occurrences.”<sup>64</sup> Although Samples is open to naturalistic explanations, he leans more toward the opinion that they are supernatural in nature. However, for theological reasons he regards them as experiences of the demonic.<sup>65</sup>

My point here is not to adjudicate on the matter or bolster the case for Marian apparitions. I am simply summoning a minimum of evidence to suggest that the apparitions of Mary are not necessarily natural, psychological events in the minds of the seers.<sup>66</sup> Goulder must demonstrate that they are in order for his argument to work, which compares Jesus appearances to Marian apparitions and claiming they are hallucinations. He has not demonstrated this.

Goulder appears to prefer any natural explanation over one that is supernatural, because “we shall fall into superstition” if we do not.<sup>67</sup> I regard this concern as an over-reaction. Our commitment to taking deliberate actions for managing our horizons and applying method carefully are hindrances to a pseudo-critical investigation ruled by credulity. And it is appropriate to remind ourselves that credulity is not unique to believers and can be present in the historical work of skeptical scholars who uncritically accept poorly supported natural hypotheses that are terribly *ad hoc*.<sup>68</sup>

These problems vary in severity. Combined, they strongly undermine Goulder’s hypothesis. Given these and his revived nineteenth-century theory that there was a

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<sup>64</sup> Miller and Samples (1992), 129.

<sup>65</sup> Miller and Samples (1992), 126-35.

<sup>66</sup> For myself, I am not prepared to adjudicate on the matter of Marian apparitions. Because I am Protestant, I carry a theological bias against an appearance of Mary. However, I am not predisposed to reject the reality of apparitions in general. I have two personal friends who have experienced a few apparitions of the dead close to the moment of the person’s death which was unknown to them at the time. Biblical scholar Dale Allison reports of having experienced a couple apparitions of a dead friend and that some of his family members experienced apparitions of his deceased father. Although I have not had an experience of a dead person appearing alive to me, I, both of my parents, and one of my sisters have witnessed paranormal phenomena on a number of occasions, which we interpreted as demonic given our Christian worldview. They were quite frightening to all of us. I would argue that none of these appears to be the type of appearances reported by the early Christians. *I note that at this point I am appealing to a conclusion that does not belong to our historical bedrock: Paul who is our earliest known Christian author writes of Jesus’ transformed resurrection body and is consistent with the resurrection narratives.*

<sup>67</sup> Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 55.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 1.2.2 above.

major division of ideologies between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership,<sup>69</sup> it is not surprising that his hypothesis has received support from only a very few scholars.<sup>70</sup>

### 5.3.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Goulder's hypothesis (GH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.<sup>71</sup>

- 1) *Explanatory Scope*. GH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead. GH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings and the appearance to Paul, regarding the experiences as psychologically induced phenomena, such as hallucinations, delusions, cognitive dissonance, and hypnotism. GH meets this criterion nicely.
- 2) *Explanatory Power*. Jesus' followers had to have been certain of his death in order to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and his death by crucifixion is the strongest candidate as a cause for their belief that Jesus had died. However, GH sometimes pushes the facts in order to make them fit. For example, in positing that Peter experienced a hallucination of the risen Jesus, Goulder states that Peter was given to this type of an experience and cites the transfiguration as an example. As noted above, since others were present this would involve a group hallucination, a phenomenon that would not be granted by most professionals in the discipline of psychology.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, as previously noted, a number of the psychological conditions Goulder attributes to the disciples and Paul can easily be explained otherwise. A hallucination experienced by Peter as an unconscious resolution of his cognitive dissonance is faced with the equally likely possibility that he believed he had been deceived by Jesus and had left the sect upon Jesus' crucifixion. Indeed, ambiguity is easily spotted in GH. In reference to Peter's experience, Goulder writes, "Psychologists have suggested various theories to account for such conversions, the cognitive dissonance theory, for instance; but we do not for the moment need to claim that we fully understand such experiences; it is enough that we see the general thrust of what is happening."<sup>73</sup> Stated differently, their experiences could have resulted from cognitive dissonance, a hallucination, a delusion, or even a hypnotic experience. For Goulder, we may have uncertainty pertaining to how we should define the psychological experiences but we are certain that they were psychological in nature since any natural explanation is to be preferred over one that is supernatural. This ambiguity throughout GH demonstrates how much it lacks in explanatory power. We also observed that Goulder's contention that the group

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<sup>69</sup> Wright (2005), 222.

<sup>70</sup> Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 129. One scholar who finds Goulder's hypothesis somewhat compelling is Lüdemann (2004), 48, 140n18.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 1.3.2.

<sup>72</sup> This conclusion is evidenced by a lack of any empirically supported examples of collective hallucinations in the professional psychological literature. Biblical scholars such as Goulder often appeal to a specific psychological phenomenon and confuse it with another. See Habermas ("Explaining," 2001; "The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection," 2001).

<sup>73</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 50.



appearances to the disciples and others were “communal delusions” is illegitimate. Consequently, GH lacks explanatory power.

But how does it compare with VH? VH lacks explanatory power because it possesses ambiguity and vagueness pertaining to the appearances and makes no suggestions pertaining to the cause of the empty tomb (which VH grants). GH lacks explanatory power because it squeezes facts pertaining to the appearances in order to accommodate them and possesses ambiguity pertaining some of the appearances. Furthermore, GH’s employment of “communal delusions” is illegitimate. Though this is somewhat of a close call, GH appears to trail VH in explanatory power.

- 3) *Plausibility*. Is GH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? It is now generally accepted that no split existed between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership. Yet such a split is crucial to GH. A grief hallucination to Peter postulated by GH is plausible. While some Marian apparitions plausibly support an individual hallucination experienced by Peter, the three major group apparitions of Mary typically cited do not, since they have not been shown to have been hallucinations and positing that they were is speculation. Since group hallucinations are rare to impossible, a group hallucination to the disciples is implausible. That Paul hallucinated an appearance of Jesus is implausible, since he was not in a state of grief over Jesus’ death. Moreover, it seems unlikely that a hallucination experienced by Paul would have led him to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised bodily (remember GH asserts that Paul believed in Jesus’ bodily resurrection). In light of Paul’s commitment to tradition, it is implausible that the Jerusalem church believed in a “spiritual resurrection” in contrast to Paul’s belief in a bodily resurrection. Sightings similar to those that produce testimonies to Big Foot and UFOs are implausible as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, given that those reporting them probably saw something with their ordinary vision. These are more plausibly explained as mistaken identity or illusions, which GH does not claim. GH lacks plausibility.

How do GH and VH compare in plausibility? We have already observed that it is difficult to assess the plausibility of VH given its poor explanatory power. Neither would seem to be the logical outcome given Paul’s experience. But GH is implausible in a number of additional respects. Thus, it trails VH in plausibility. This means that the agnostic position posited by VH has greater plausibility than the psychohistory of GH. Stated another way, it is preferable to conclude that we do not know what occurred than to regard the psychohistory of GH as an accurate representation of what occurred.

- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. This criterion may be where GH is weakest. As previously stated, GH is entirely speculative, positing compounded psychoanalyses in order to explain the data. Peter experienced a hallucination and the groups experienced communal delusions. And there is more.

Goulder’s proposal that Paul’s conversion resulted from having secret doubts, a growing distaste for Judaism, and a friend from his youth who was a Gentile is speculation without a scrap of supporting evidence. He appears open to the

assertion that fanaticism is present only in people who secretly have doubts about their beliefs.<sup>74</sup> While this may be true of some, it is a huge leap to claim that *all* or even most fanaticism results from secret doubts. Were Hitler’s atrocities the result of his personal doubts about his anti-Semitic views? Do Muslim extremists commit violent acts including suicide because they secretly doubt their beliefs? Would Goulder suggest that anyone with a passion for his cause—whether noble or wicked—has that passion precisely because he doubts the validity of his cause?

Goulder appears to realize that his theory is on somewhat shaky grounds. However, he asserts that, since a natural explanation can account for the known data, it should be preferred over a supernatural explanation given Occam’s Razor, which states that the hypothesis importing fewer assumptions or sub-hypotheses is simpler and, thus, preferable. In other words, this criterion seeks to explain data using the least number of suppositions. Accordingly, Goulder disposes of the Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) since it must presuppose God.<sup>75</sup> I agree with Goulder’s appeal to Occam’s Razor and his contention that hypotheses “should not be multiplied beyond what is necessary.” But he appears careless in his use of it. GH certainly multiplies explanations, presupposing a psychological experience by Peter, another for Paul resulting from multiple psychological conditions present—all of which are presupposed without any evidence—and still more psychological experiences for the disciples. Whether GH is less *ad hoc* than RH will be assessed in our analysis of RH.<sup>76</sup> For the moment, I simply observe that GH is far more *ad hoc* than VH and, thus, fails this criterion.

- 5) *Illumination*. If true, GH may provide illumination pertaining to religious experiences in antiquity and today. Accordingly, GH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, GH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). It is also noteworthy that GH passes only one of the four most important criteria. Moreover, I noted that there are numerous elements to GH that render it implausible even prior to weighing it by our criteria for the best explanation.<sup>77</sup>

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P

<sup>74</sup> Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 52.

<sup>75</sup> Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 54, 55. For a similar argument, see Wedderburn (1999), 95-96.

<sup>76</sup> See section 5.7.3 below.

<sup>77</sup> Now that we have been able to compare VH with GH, I have updated the “T”s previously in VH to reflect this comparison. These updates will occur at the end of each analysis.

## 5.4 Gerd Lüdemann

**5.4.1. Description of Lüdemann's View.** Gerd Lüdemann is a New Testament scholar who converted from Christianity to atheism. He rejects attempts by others to claim that Jesus' resurrection is beyond the scope of the historian's practice.<sup>78</sup> Lüdemann sought to investigate and answer whether Jesus rose from the dead. He distinguishes himself from those who assert one can remain a Christian if Jesus did not rise from the dead or that the historicity of Jesus' resurrection is a non-issue.<sup>79</sup> Lüdemann is forthright in his objective in writing. His aim is "to prove the nonhistoricity of the resurrection of Jesus and simultaneously to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly."<sup>80</sup>

A number of his statements make public certain aspects of his worldview:

Anybody who says that he rose from the dead is faced with another problem that I shall address later—namely, if you say that Jesus rose from the dead biologically, you would have to presuppose that a decaying corpse—which is already cold and without blood in its brain—could be made alive again. I think that is nonsense.<sup>81</sup>

[A]ny historical element behind [Luke 24:44-49] and/or behind Acts 1:9-11 must be ruled out because there is no such heaven to which Jesus may have been carried.<sup>82</sup>

Lüdemann's statements inform us that his atheistic worldview will be guiding his historical investigation. As discussed earlier, biases can be helpful and a hindrance.<sup>83</sup> It is a hindrance because, left unchecked, bias will tend to cause one to see only what she wishes to see and to miss data that may disconfirm tightly held views. One might call it a response to a cognitive dissonance. But bias can also be helpful. If atheism presents the most correct worldview, atheist scholars maintain an unequivocal advantage when seeking to discover what actually happened to Jesus. By eliminating hypotheses involving a supernatural component, they may focus on finding the most plausible naturalistic hypothesis. The converse is likewise true. If the Christian worldview is most correct, an unequivocal advantage is held by those Christian scholars who attempt to verify the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, since they will tend to work harder than others in order to discover confirming data and will not tend toward credulity in accepting certain naturalistic interpretations of the data. Lüdemann has not supported his worldview and if the Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) is strong enough to be awarded historicity, Lüdemann's atheistic worldview would face a most serious challenge.

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<sup>78</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 21-22.

<sup>79</sup> For an example, see Borg (2006), 281; Borg in Borg and Wright (2000), 131. In agreement with Lüdemann that the truth of Christianity is disproved if the resurrection is falsified, see Cohn-Sherbok in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 186; Davis (1993), ix; Wedderburn (1999), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 7. Similar is Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), where he states that we should "abandon" the long held supernatural explanation for the extant data pertaining to the fate of Jesus (55; cf. 58-59).

<sup>81</sup> Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 45.

<sup>82</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 114.

<sup>83</sup> See chapter 1.2.2.

#### 5.4.1.1. Peter

Lüdemann grants all of our historical bedrock.<sup>84</sup> Like Goulder, he appeals to the social sciences with the expectation that “modern psychological studies” will assist us in understanding “the rise of Easter faith.”<sup>85</sup> Peter was a victim of “self-deception.”<sup>86</sup>

Peter’s vision would be delusion or wishful thinking. Indeed, his vision is an example of unsuccessful mourning, because it abruptly cuts off the very process of mourning, substituting fantasy for unromantic reality<sup>87</sup>. . . . By a bold if unconscious leap Peter entered the world of his wishes. As a result he ‘saw’ Jesus and thus made it possible for the other disciples to ‘see’ Jesus as well.<sup>88</sup> . . . Peter experienced Jesus’ appearance to him as reacceptance by the one whom he had repudiated; the other disciples experienced it as forgiveness for their desertion.<sup>89</sup>

Lüdemann describes phenomena affiliated with the grieving process, such as sensing, hearing, and sometimes even seeing the deceased loved one. The sounds can be as vague as creaking steps or as precise as words. The seeing can be as vague as a shadow or as precise as a clothed and smiling figure who can be touched.<sup>90</sup> He notes two women, each of whom claimed to have seen an apparition of the dead.<sup>91</sup> The experiences were very vivid and unexpected. When a person’s world is dramatically changed, resulting in grief and loss, “libidos,” “aggressive drives,” and “guilt” frequently appear. “[N]ormal reality controls” break down and the unconscious self “creates artificial fulfillments.”<sup>92</sup>

He notes research conducted at Harvard involving 43 widows and 19 widowers who were monitored during the first 13 months of their grieving periods.

Three primary factors were identified as inhibiting or preventing a successful passage through the mourning period: *first*, a sudden death; *second*, an ambivalent attitude toward the deceased, involving feelings of guilt; and *third*, a dependent relationship. In the case of all the disciples, but especially that of Peter, we should note that all three factors that inhibit grieving apply. *First*, Jesus’ death was violent, unexpected, and sudden. *Second*, even the gospel accounts offer evidence that the relationship between the disciples and Jesus was colored by a sense of guilt and profound ambivalence: only recall that Judas was involved in Jesus’ arrest and then committed suicide; that Peter denied him and wept bitterly. *Third*, the dependent relationship of the disciples to Jesus is evident in that most of them had given up their work and homes and families to be with him. This merging was clearly further

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<sup>84</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 78, 88, 107.

<sup>85</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 163.

<sup>86</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 24.

<sup>87</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 165.

<sup>88</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 166.

<sup>89</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 174.

<sup>90</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 163-64.

<sup>91</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 164-65.

<sup>92</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 165.

magnified by their status as a tiny group that had effectively cast off its religious and social moorings, withdrawing from much of the larger culture.<sup>93</sup>

In short, when Jesus had been suddenly and unexpectedly executed, Peter experienced profound sorrow and guilt for his occasional ambivalence toward Jesus on whom he had been completely dependent. Unable to cope with his loss, Peter's unconscious self created a hallucinatory experience of the risen Jesus in order to ease his intense mental anguish.

#### 5.4.1.2. Disciples

After Peter experienced a psychotic disorder that led him to believe Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to him, he informed the others of his experience. Since the early Christians were members of the lower part of intellectual culture that believed in ghosts and miracles and were not a part of the primitive scientific culture, they succumbed to group ecstasy where they actually experienced “a shared hallucinatory fantasy” which had both audible and visual aspects.<sup>94</sup> This assured them of forgiveness for their desertion of him in his time of need.<sup>95</sup>

#### 5.4.1.3. More than 500

Lüdemann understands the group appearance to the more than five hundred (1 Cor. 15:6) to be “a kind of foundation legend of the Christian community.”<sup>96</sup> It is not a resurrection appearance since “it is improbable that such an event witnessed by more than five hundred people should otherwise have left no trace.”<sup>97</sup> Rather, it derives from the event underlying Acts 2.<sup>98</sup> It is a “mass ecstasy,” stimulated by one or even a few others.<sup>99</sup> “Such an explanation fits in well with what has been worked out so far, namely, that the first appearance to Peter was the impulse to further appearances among the disciples.”<sup>100</sup>

Lüdemann cites the now more than ninety-year old work by Gustave Le Bon in support of such an experience. Le Bon writes the following:

Before St. George appeared on the walls of Jerusalem to all the Crusaders he was certainly perceived in the first instance by one of those present. By dint of suggestion and contagion the miracle signalised by a single person was immediately perceived by all. . . . Such is always the mechanism of the collective hallucination so frequent in history—hallucinations which seem to

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<sup>93</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 165-66.

<sup>94</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 166, 175, 176. In support of grief hallucinations, Lüdemann cites Spiegel (163) and Jaffé (164). In support of group hallucinations he quotes Renan (175) and Paine (177), neither of whom are psychologists and both are very dated (Renan—1886; Paine—1794-95).

<sup>95</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 174.

<sup>96</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 73.

<sup>97</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 73-74.

<sup>98</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 73.

<sup>99</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 81.

<sup>100</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 81.



have all the recognised characteristics of authenticity, since they are phenomena observed by thousands of persons.<sup>101</sup>

#### 5.4.1.4. James and the Brothers of Jesus

This mass ecstasy was so compelling that “the natural brothers of Jesus were caught up in the excitement, and went to Jerusalem. James even received an individual vision—the same James who had little to do with his brother during Jesus’ lifetime, and seems to have participated in the attempt to have his ‘crazy’ brother put away.”<sup>102</sup> James’ experience of his risen brother may have occurred during the appearance to the more than five hundred and may have been followed by an individual appearance.<sup>103</sup>

#### 5.4.1.5. Paul

According to Lüdemann, Paul, like Peter, was a victim of self-deception. Thus, the “early Christian belief in Jesus’ resurrection” is “a history of self-deception.”<sup>104</sup> He understands Romans 7 as Paul’s “unconscious conflict” experienced prior to his conversion.<sup>105</sup> This conflict consisted of two matters. The former was a tension between the Jewish God who is “a stern and demanding tyrant intent on punishing even those who could not help themselves” with the Christian God who is “a loving and forgiving leader who offered rest and peace to imperfect humans who accepted his grace.” Paul saw a different view of God in Jesus’ humility and self-sacrifice, a compassionate God also represented by Philo and later by Josephus and the Rabbinic literature.<sup>106</sup> With Goulder, Lüdemann thinks that Paul had secret doubts about the Christian teachings and his Jewish faith. His vehement response to the Christians “indicates that the basic elements of the preaching of Christians had a powerfully disturbing effect on him” and “unconsciously attracted Paul.”<sup>107</sup> At the same time he was a competitive overachiever.

[A]s a Jew he claimed to have surpassed his Jewish contemporaries in ardor, piety, and practice; the same was true for him afterward. As a Christian he claimed to have worked more than all the other apostles and to have a greater gift for speaking in tongues than any of the Corinthians. A person like Paul must always be ‘number one.’<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Lüdemann (2004) quoting Le Bon (80). Le Bon’s quotation appears in Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 41-42.

<sup>102</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 176.

<sup>103</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 82.

<sup>104</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 24.

<sup>105</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 171.

<sup>106</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 170-71.

<sup>107</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 169. Kent (1996) also sees an inner conflict in Paul: “I maintain that Paul had a very deep psychological conflict about his persecution of the followers of Jesus” (16). Paul had been a student of the Pharisee Gamaliel who “favoured leniency.” He cites Acts 5:33-39 where Gamaliel opined that the disciples of Jesus should be left alone (16). Moreover, “[t]he Pharisees, as represented by Gamaliel, saw nothing wrong in the teachings of the followers of Jesus. . . . On the other hand, Paul had changed and become a Sadducee courting and winning the support of the High Priest” (17).

<sup>108</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 171.

Paul recoiled “against his subconscious but all-consuming needs for acceptance and self-importance,” projecting these negative qualities “onto the Christians so as to justify attacking them all the more savagely.”<sup>109</sup> As he approached Damascus, the time was right. “Paul fled from his painful situation into the world of hallucination from which he soon returned to make himself the apostle to the Gentiles, commissioned by Christ himself.”<sup>110</sup> He perceived an opportunity “to assume the obviously vital role of foremost apostle to the Gentiles” and “was eager—of course subconsciously—to assume that exalted position.”<sup>111</sup>

With Goulder, Lüdemann finds a parallel to Paul’s experience in the conversion of Susan Atkins, the former accomplice of Charles Manson.<sup>112</sup> Similar experiences may be found in numerous Marian apparitions such as the story of 14-year-old Bernadette who in 1858 claimed that Mary had appeared to her in Lourdes. Although she “later admitted that she had been ‘overcome with confusion’ and now thought it was a ‘deception,’” the Catholic Church pressed on, since the words of Mary confirmed a previous papal edict and supported papal infallibility.<sup>113</sup> “Once we understand that visions commonly arise from the frustrations, the hopes, and even yearning for power on the part of both individuals and groups, we are able to examine history as well as human motivation in a more revealing light.”<sup>114</sup>

In resurrection Paul saw a corporeal continuity between our present body and the immortal one to come,<sup>115</sup> given his “inability to think of the existence of a person after death in a nonbodily form.”<sup>116</sup> He interpreted his Damascus road experience as being called by God in a manner similar to Isaiah and Jeremiah. The vision he experienced was Christ in the form of a light but was not caused by external and objective stimuli.<sup>117</sup> Paul’s vision must be interpreted like those experienced by those in the Old Testament,<sup>118</sup> other Jewish sources,<sup>119</sup> the Greco-Roman culture in which the

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<sup>109</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 169.

<sup>110</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 171.

<sup>111</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 171-72. In terms of Paul’s “Christ complex,” Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) is sympathetic to Lüdemann, mentioning the twentieth-century Hindu Sadhu Sundar Singh who, like Paul, opposed Christianity. He burned a Bible in front of his friends and threw stones at Christian preachers. Distraught over a lack of peace he planned to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a train. In a final prayer asking God to reveal Himself, Jesus appeared to Sudhu (267). Allison comments that “while Lüdemann’s story fits the facts, the facts do not demand it” (267). While I believe Allison is correct, the parallel is close enough that one must take note of it. How significant is the difference that Singh was about to commit suicide when he had the vision? Throwing rocks at preachers and burning a Bible is not as intense as arresting, imprisoning, and consenting to the execution of Christians as we find in Paul. However, I do not wish to engage in a sort of splitting hairs. Not having investigated Singh’s experience, I do not know what to make of his vision. Why must we *a priori* rule out that Jesus appeared to Singh? It may be added that Singh’s testimony is that he was suicidal prior to his experience; but Paul’s testimony is that he had been quite confident in his opposition to Christianity. In short, if we take both of their testimonies seriously (as Allison’s appeal to Singh’s story must), Singh was conflicted over his opposition to Christianity whereas Paul was not. This is perhaps the most serious disanalogy between the two stories.

<sup>112</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 140n18. Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996) understands this as an experience similar to what Paul and Peter experienced (49).

<sup>113</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 48-49.

<sup>114</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 49.

<sup>115</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 45.

<sup>116</sup> Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 151; cf. Lüdemann (2004), 178.

<sup>117</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 47.

<sup>118</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 48. Lüdemann provides the following examples: Job 4:12-16; Isa. 6; Dan. 10:4-21; Ezek. 1:1-3:15; Amos 7:1-9.

first-century Christians lived,<sup>120</sup> and the New Testament itself.<sup>121</sup> That it was “esoteric and ecstatic” is “central to any attempt to understand the nature and circumstances of the very first appearances.”<sup>122</sup>

For Lüdemann, all of the appearances were subjective experiences emerging from varying psychological disorders. There is no room for regarding them as objective in nature. The risen Jesus existed only in the minds of those who thought they saw him.<sup>123</sup> There was no corresponding external reality. The objective vision hypothesis “can be nothing more than an apologetic move, since by their very nature visions cannot be examined.”<sup>124</sup>

#### 5.4.1.6. Appearance Traditions in the Gospels

Lüdemann writes, “[S]ource criticism and tradition criticism are everything here. You have to start with Paul and see that the Gospel stories are later developments.”<sup>125</sup> Paul’s experience involved a visionary appearance of Jesus from heaven. Yet his strong view of bodily resurrection prohibited him from understanding Jesus’ postmortem existence in anything other than bodily terms. Given their Palestinian influence, the earliest Christians likewise understood Jesus’ resurrection as an event that happened to his corpse.<sup>126</sup>

Almost from the beginning, however, there were many Christians who did not understand resurrection as the transformation of a corpse. Instead, they interpreted the statement ‘God has raised Jesus from the dead’ as symbolic. Lüdemann admits that “we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus’ resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief.”<sup>127</sup> However, that many embraced a symbolic interpretation is certainly “true of Paul’s converted Gentiles and, I am tempted to say, all Christians from the first generation whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally.”<sup>128</sup>

Later on, those holding the symbolic interpretation of Jesus’ resurrection grew in number. We see this in 2 Timothy 2:16-18, where it is said that Hymenaeus and Philetus assert that the resurrection has already occurred, and in the later Gnostic literature.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the Docetists taught that Jesus only appeared to have risen bodily. Lüdemann contends that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels

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<sup>119</sup> 1 En 14; 4 Ezra 3:1-9:25.

<sup>120</sup> In support Lüdemann cites the 1927 work of Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts from the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

<sup>121</sup> NT examples are 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Acts 7:55-56; Rev. 1:13-16.

<sup>122</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 166.

<sup>123</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 176. In agreement is Lindars (1987): The appearances reported in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 “may be explained as merely subjective” (74).

<sup>124</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 196.

<sup>125</sup> Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 55.

<sup>126</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 180.

<sup>127</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 180.

<sup>128</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 178.

<sup>129</sup> Lüdemann (2004, 178-80): He provides the following as examples, *Letter to Rheginos* (NHC I.4), the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II.3, logion 90a/73.1-5), and the *Gospel of Thomas* (no references are provided by Lüdemann).

were created later in response to challenges such as the symbolic interpretation and Docetism.<sup>130</sup>

Other early Christians who had interpreted the visions of the risen Jesus in bodily terms observed that such visions are often difficult to distinguish from “apparitions of demons and ghosts.” Because their faith was rooted in Jewish thought, the visions “took on physical manifestations in different communities at almost the same time.”<sup>131</sup>

There is a final argument offered by Lüdemann. Belief in the resurrection, ascension, and glorious return of the Son of God were major interconnected elements in the earliest Christian beliefs. Remove one brick and everything collapses. According to our earliest Christian writer—Paul—Jesus’ return would occur “within the lifetime of first-generation Christians. But that return from heaven didn’t come. And the fact that it still hasn’t happened after two thousand years is a very strong argument against it.”<sup>132</sup> In other words, if the belief in Christ’s return is false, so are the beliefs in Christ’s resurrection and ascension, since they are all interdependent beliefs.

Lüdemann concludes, “The original Easter faith sprang from a visionary perception of Jesus being with God in heaven. This phenomenon is properly denominated a vision, for though seen as being alive, Jesus was and remained in fact dead. Ontologically speaking, this ‘risen Jesus’ existed only in the memory of the disciples. . . . [and was] no more than a fancy of the mind.”<sup>133</sup> It is not so much “the results of natural science as conclusions based on historical criticism and sober insight”<sup>134</sup> that show “with definite clarity that Jesus was not raised from the dead.”<sup>135</sup>

#### A Summary of Lüdemann’s Hypothesis (LH)

- Peter experienced a hallucination of the risen Jesus in order to cope with his mental anguish brought about by his profound sorrow and guilt.
- Peter shared his experience with the other disciples who were experiencing guilt over deserting Jesus. These then had experiences of the risen Jesus that may be called “a shared hallucinatory fantasy” and are similar to Marian apparitions, grief hallucinations, and ecstatic experiences.
- The appearance to the more than 500 resulted from mass ecstasy that started with one or two others.
- Hearing reports of what was occurring, the brothers of Jesus went to Jerusalem and were caught up in the group experiences. James may have been one of the more than 500 who partook of the ecstatic experience and/or had a private experience that occurred afterward.

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<sup>130</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 35, 109, 111. Carnley (1987) shares a somewhat similar opinion although he differs from Lüdemann concerning how the stories of a bodily raised Jesus developed: “We are therefore led to conclude that the first appearances took the form of ‘heavenly visions’ or Christophanies of the raised and glorified Christ and that when, in the ensuing weeks and years, attempts were made to express the ‘heavenly vision’ or ‘appearance’ in verbal form, a variety of different images was used” (242).

<sup>131</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 177.

<sup>132</sup> Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 62.

<sup>133</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 176.

<sup>134</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 203; cf. 209.

<sup>135</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 190.

- Paul was disenchanted with the God of Judaism and attracted to the Christian God in Christ. Given his need for acceptance and self-importance, he resolved his mental tension with a hallucination and seized an opportunity to assume the role of leading apostle to the Gentiles.
- Although all of the appearances were subjective visions, the strong influence of Jewish views led those who experienced them to interpret Jesus' resurrection as bodily in nature.
- A very short while later, more sophisticated Christians reinterpreted the claim that Jesus had been raised in symbolic terms. Other believers who could only think in terms of bodily resurrection created supporting narratives, some unconsciously while others as a deliberate response to those who denied bodily resurrection.
- Jesus' resurrection was one of several interconnected beliefs that made up the foundation of Christianity. Another was his imminent and glorious return. Since that did not and still has not occurred, it is dubious that any of the other foundational beliefs are true.

## 5.4.2. Analysis and Concerns

### 5.4.2.1. Psychoanalysis

Like Goulder, Lüdemann is very innovative in his attempts to explain the historical bedrock in natural terms. Because his hypothesis is similar in many respects to Goulder's, it is plagued with many of the same problems. LH is pure speculation and is not "based on any evidence whatsoever."<sup>136</sup> Psychoanalyzing persons who are not only absent but who also lived in an ancient foreign culture is a very difficult and highly speculative practice. Allison opines that Lüdemann's conjectures "are just that: conjectures. They do not constitute knowledge. In recent decades contemporary historians have been more leery than their predecessors of the viability of reconstructing and then analyzing the psycho-histories of men and women long dead."<sup>137</sup> Lüdemann appears not to recognize this. Instead, his approach is a methodical skepticism that says, "As long as I can offer a naturalistic proposal that has an ounce of being correct, I do not need to consider a supernatural one." This is where methodical neutrality places LH in check. Those making a proposal must defend it. Lüdemann must show that LH is a superior hypothesis to all others that are proposed and argued for, even supernatural ones. His methodical skepticism does not at all demonstrate his hypothesis as superior, but rather reveals that he is being guided more by his worldview than by historical method. In a sense his method is his worldview. Like VH, in this sense, LH is suspect of being *ad hoc*.

Lüdemann appeals to a "scientific view of the world" and "natural law," claiming that these render statements about Jesus' resurrection as "nonsense" and that they have "irrevocably lost their meaning."<sup>138</sup> In the 2006 Theme Issue of *History and Theory* that focused on "Religion and History," Brad Gregory comments on the approach we observe in Lüdemann.

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<sup>136</sup> Wright (2003), 20.

<sup>137</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 242.

<sup>138</sup> Lüdemann (1995), 135; (2004), 62; (2000), 45.



Consequently, spirituality, for example, can only be approached through secular psychological categories; sacraments only in terms of anthropological rituals and symbols that ostensibly construct and reinforce community identity: sin only in terms of socially and/or politically disapproved behaviors that threaten stability or some other interests. That prayer might *really* entail relationship with God, or that sacraments might *really* be channels of grace, or that sin might be an objective category of actions disapproved of *by God*, are notions that modern social-scientific and cultural-theoretical approaches to religion simply reject as incompatible with their implicit assumptions. . . . Put bluntly, the underlying beliefs of the modern social sciences and humanities are metaphysically naturalist and culturally relativist, and consequently contend that religion is *and can only be* a human construction.<sup>139</sup>

Habermas asserts that naturalists are “mistaken if they think that the advances of science make supernatural belief obsolete.”<sup>140</sup> Science is designed to explain natural phenomena and is limited in its scope. Scientific equipment such as telescopes, microscopes, and MRIs are useless in psychology, historical investigation, political science, and abstract analyses of the arts. Historical investigation cannot tell us about quasars and black holes. Historical research observes extant effects and seeks to identify the condition(s) that caused them. The hypothesis that best explains the effects is to be preferred.

Lüdemann’s allowance of his worldview to guide his historical investigation unchecked raises red flags. We have no hesitation considering the probability of his hypothesis (LH). However, “possible” and “probable” are not interchangeable terms and I reiterate that those making the assertion bear the burden of proof.<sup>141</sup> Merely stating that a resurrection is “nonsense” is an opinion rather than an argument. If that is a conclusion that results from Lüdemann’s worldview, he must defend it. Hypotheses must be weighed carefully and we must be painfully active in managing our horizons when engaging in any investigation concerning the historical Jesus. In this respect, Lüdemann disappoints.

Lüdemann is more precise than Goulder in reference to the psychological experiences he attributes to the early Christians. While this lends greater explanatory power to LH over GH, it does not come without cost. Historian Mark Gilderhaus explains that the amalgamation of psychoanalytical theory and history is psychohistory. He provides the example of “the unfortunate and much-lamented psychoanalytical biography of Woodrow Wilson by William C. Bullitt and Sigmund Freud, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study* (1967).” Bullitt and Freud “attributed Wilson’s deficiencies, notably his need to fail, to his inability as a boy to satisfy the demands of an insatiable father. . . . [S]ome individual practitioners have inadvertently produced comic consequences, for example, the claim that the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 appeared to President John F. Kennedy as a psychosexual drama in which Russian weapons, seen as phallic symbols, threatened the Western Hemisphere with penetration.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Gregory (2006), 137.

<sup>140</sup> Habermas in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 126.

<sup>141</sup> See chapter 1.2.10.

<sup>142</sup> Gilderhaus (2007), 106.

There are clear parallels to the above in the psychohistories provided by Lüdemann and Goulder.

- Paul had a childhood friend who was a Gentile and that this unconsciously contributed to his call to the Gentiles.<sup>143</sup>
- Paul maintained secret doubts about Judaism and was unconsciously attracted to Christianity.<sup>144</sup> He was consumed by a need to be important and accepted. He unconsciously projected his negative qualities on the Christians in order to fight his secret admiration for them.<sup>145</sup>
- Peter experienced Jesus' appearance to him as reacceptance by the one whom he had repudiated.<sup>146</sup>
- The appearance to the more than 500 is "mass ecstasy."<sup>147</sup> This "mass ecstasy" was so inviting that it drew in the skeptical brothers of Jesus.<sup>148</sup>

In this observation I do not mean to imply that the psychohistories proposed by Lüdemann and Goulder are *a priori* impossible. Probability must be determined by weighing hypotheses. It is clear, however, that they are so speculative in nature that I do not think it would be inappropriate to label them as *historical fiction*.

#### 5.4.2.2. Disciples

Lüdemann's appeal to Le Bon's example rests on shaky ground. The appearance of St. George to the crusaders is found only in Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (c. AD 1260):

And when it was so that they had assieged Jerusalem and durst not mount ne go up on the walls for the quarrels and defence of the Saracens, they saw appertly Saint George which had white arms with a red cross, that went up tofore them on the walls, and they followed him, and so was Jerusalem taken by his help.<sup>149</sup>

Similar reports exist pertaining to other battles.<sup>150</sup> Medieval writers viewed them as literal, metaphorical, allegorical, and mystical.<sup>151</sup> We do not have enough data to assess how the above account of St. George appearing on the wall was meant to be

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<sup>143</sup> Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52.

<sup>144</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 169; Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17.

<sup>145</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 169.

<sup>146</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 174.

<sup>147</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 73, 81.

<sup>148</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 176.

<sup>149</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* [a.k.a. *Lives of the Saints*]. First Edition Published 1470. Translated by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.) Volume 3, 58-61, archaic spelling in original.

<sup>150</sup> For a similar story, see William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen, with notes and illustrations by J. A. Giles* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 382. This work is also known as *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and was compiled c. AD 1120. Of the battle of Antioch in AD 1098 he writes, "They imagined, moreover, that they saw the ancient martyrs, who had formerly been soldiers, and who had gained eternal remuneration by their death, I allude to George and Demetrius, hastily approaching with upraised banner from the mountainous districts, hurling darts against the enemy, but assisting the Franks."

<sup>151</sup> I owe this comment to a personal email correspondence with medieval scholar Christopher Tyerman of Oxford (dated April 30, 2008).

understood by medieval readers. If other than literal, Le Bon and Lüdemann are applying psychoanalyses to a legend. This is similar to writing psychohistory detailing why the six-year-old George Washington refused to lie about chopping down a cherry tree.<sup>152</sup> It approaches explaining Fiona's decision to marry Shrek and forever remain an ogre as the consequence of a repressed disenchantment with royal life and a desire for independence from her parents.

On the other hand, it may be that the group of crusaders actually believed they had simultaneously seen St. George. Modern psychology has not come close to confirming the possibility of collective hallucinations.<sup>153</sup> As discussed in our assessment of GH, hallucinations are phenomena occurring in the mind of the individual having the experience and others may not participate in the same experience.<sup>154</sup> But collective delusions are possible and cannot be ruled out pertaining to this appearance of St. George. It should be noted that the conditions for the appearance were quite different than we have for the disciples. The crusaders were dressed up and positioned for a battle with a known severe handicap. The disciples were already in hiding and could have walked away accepting their losses, intent on finding another Messiah or finding something else to do with their lives. Lüdemann also equates the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to Marian apparitions and we have already addressed this assertion previously with Goulder.<sup>155</sup> Like Goulder, Lüdemann does not bother to argue that Marian apparitions are necessarily natural and solely psychological events.

#### 5.4.2.3. More than 500

Lüdemann is incredulous of the appearance to the more than five hundred, since "it is improbable that such an event witnessed by more than five hundred people should otherwise have left no trace" outside of 1 Corinthians 15:6. He instead understands the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 as underlying this appearance. But neither has the event in Acts 2 left any trace outside of that passage. And why must the Pentecost event reported in Acts be behind the appearance to the more than five hundred reported by Paul decades earlier? Given the form criticism approach employed by Lüdemann, we would anticipate an argument in the opposite manner: Paul reported an appearance to more than five hundred at one time. We have no narrative of this event. The number became embellished over time and we find the initial report reworked by Luke in the Pentecost event where about three thousand converted (Acts 2:41)!

Moreover, the smaller we postulate the size of the crowds, it would seem that there would be a corresponding shrinking probability that the brothers of Jesus would become attracted to the phenomena as Lüdemann proposes, since the draw would be less. He must also explain why Paul believed that some of the more than five hundred were still alive and could be examined as witnesses.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> This is a widely circulated story portraying the longstanding honest character of the first president of the U.S.A. But it is a legend.

<sup>153</sup> See Habermas ("Explaining," 2001), 30-31.

<sup>154</sup> See section 5.3.2. above.

<sup>155</sup> See section 5.3.2. above.

<sup>156</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 41.

Lüdemann argues that this appearance resulted from “mass ecstasy,” claiming he has shown how this could occur with his explanation for how Peter’s experience was contagious to the other disciples. What he has actually provided is an unverified speculation supported by the example of another unverified speculation pertaining to Peter. The group appearance to the more than five hundred is not as easy to dismiss as Lüdemann imagines.

#### 5.4.2.4. Paul

Lüdemann’s characterization of the appearance to Paul is crucial to his understanding of the appearances to Paul and the earliest Christians.<sup>157</sup> He asserts that Paul and the early Christians interpreted their visions as a bodily resurrection of Jesus, because their particular Jewish views prohibited them from thinking otherwise. I think this is also problematic. Although their Jewish views would most likely have contributed a theological component to the meaning behind ‘resurrection,’ Jews who believed in a resurrection of the dead held that resurrection occurs on the last day. Thus, if Paul and the early believers were to have experienced hallucinations, it is more likely that their background would have produced images of Jesus in an intermediate state of disembodiment since the last day had not yet come. In the end, if we understand Jesus’ resurrection in terms of a revivification of his corpse, the resurrection narratives make sense, despite the tensions that exist between them. Paul’s experience was such that he could relate both to these narratives and the Acts reports that his experience was caused by external stimuli also perceivable to some extent to his traveling companions.

Serious challenges to LH present themselves. In order to account for Paul’s conversion, Lüdemann postulates dissatisfaction with Judaism and that this is reflected in Romans 7. However, the tensions Paul discusses in Romans 7 do not hint at the struggles Lüdemann suggests.<sup>158</sup> There is no indication in Paul’s writings that he was disenchanted with the Jewish God or that he felt guilt over his actions against the Christians.<sup>159</sup> And the fact that Jews would have considered Jesus accursed by God (Gal. 3:13; cf. Deut. 21:23) complicates any suggestion that Paul was leaning toward Christianity.<sup>160</sup>

Some of the psychological conditions Lüdemann proposes may certainly have been present in the disciples immediately after Jesus’ death. But Lüdemann makes for an inept psychologist. Let us suppose that I am suffering from an upset stomach. I visit my physician who informs me that an upset stomach could be the result of too much stress, a stomach virus, food poisoning, a parasite, or stomach cancer. He proceeds to ask me a number of questions pertaining to my family history, whether I had recently

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<sup>157</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 166. cf. Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000): “source criticism and tradition criticism are everything here. You have to start with Paul and see that the Gospel stories are later developments” (55).

<sup>158</sup> Neither does Romans 7 hint at his feeling of bondage to the Law as is suggested by Goulder in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17. Paul said the Law is by no means sin (7:7). Sin, rather than the Law, was the problem (7:13, 17, 20). The Law is holy, righteous, and good (7:12). And Paul agrees with the Law and confesses that the Law is good (7:16).

<sup>159</sup> Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) offers a criticism of Lüdemann on this very point: “It is a mistake to stress [Paul’s] feelings of guilt about the law because he seems to have been proud of his success in keeping it (‘as to the righteousness in the law, blameless,’ Phil 3:6)” (95).

<sup>160</sup> Gundry in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 112.

visited a third world country, where and what I ate yesterday, and whether I am under a lot of stress. Numerous causes can be responsible for my stomach condition. It would be irresponsible of the physician to diagnose my stomach condition as the result of a parasite merely because that was the reason for the upset stomach of a patient who visited him earlier. Similarly, although Peter's experience can be accounted for by a grief hallucination or a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, the whole of the evidence should be considered prior to selecting a preferred explanation. That is accomplished by weighing hypotheses. Lüdemann never makes such an attempt.

#### 5.4.2.5. Symbolism and Doceticism

Lüdemann asserts that the earliest Christians believed and asserted that Jesus was raised bodily and that, shortly thereafter, some reinterpreted 'resurrection' as a symbol. These include Paul's Gentile converts and "all Christians from the first generation whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally."<sup>161</sup> Here Lüdemann projects his own anti-supernatural bias onto the first-century theists in a demeaning manner. One can recognize in Lüdemann "the spirit of modernity with its inability to stomach the miraculous."<sup>162</sup>

He admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief."<sup>163</sup> Despite this admission, he is certain that Paul's Gentile converts, probably those whom Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15, were among those interpreting resurrection in a symbolic manner. However, as noted in our response to Goulder, there is no hint that they were reinterpreting the resurrection; rather, they were denying it (1 Cor. 15:12). In other words, these Gentiles in Corinth who, given their culture, naturally preferred the concept of disembodied existence may have been denying that the corpse is raised. They may even have denied an afterlife altogether.<sup>164</sup>

Perhaps they reinterpreted resurrection symbolically and Paul characterized their position as denial. If we are to understand their position in this manner, Paul is correcting them by saying Jesus was raised and so shall believers be raised, too. In support, he cites what both he and the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. Responsible historians must assign greater value to the claims of the purported eyewitnesses even if they may not choose to believe their reports.

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<sup>161</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 178. We may observe Lüdemann (2004) straining in order to make his claim of symbolic interpretation fit. Having acknowledged that "the resurrection was from the very beginning understood in bodily terms," he adds, "Still, we can recognize the somewhat ironic nature of the process thus far described, since the real origin of early Christianity's resurrection belief was a vision—which, as a subjective representation of a reportedly objective 'event,' comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection" (180). Stated differently, a subjective vision prompted belief in the perceived objective event of Jesus' bodily resurrection and, thus, serves as a symbol for the latter. Lüdemann says this "comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection." This is a desperate move and does not support his contention that there were early Christians who understood Jesus' resurrection symbolically. The Gnostics of the second-century are the first clear example who regarded it in this manner.

<sup>162</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 34.

<sup>163</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 180.

<sup>164</sup> See n60 above.



It seems unlikely to me that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels are a response to docetic beliefs as Lüdemann proposes. If bodily resurrection was the original view as he acknowledges, symbolism and docetism were in response to it. If the Evangelists were responding to symbolism and docetism, it was to correct them and bring about a return to the original teaching.<sup>165</sup> They could have accomplished this either by recounting the narratives that had been passed along by the apostles or by inventing them. Although Lüdemann would hold the latter, it is by no means required and has no effect on RH, which does not depend on the accuracy of the resurrection narratives. Neither does Docetism necessarily deny bodily resurrection.<sup>166</sup> The Gnostic Cerinthus maintained Docetic views but taught that *Jesus* died and was resurrected while *Christ* remained a spiritual being.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, if Luke and John were inventing stories to combat the docetic idea of a Jesus who existed in a ‘spiritual,’ that is, an immaterial sense, why portray Jesus as appearing, disappearing, and materializing through walls at will (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26)? Why portray the appearance to Paul as a light from heaven (Acts 9:3-5)?<sup>168</sup>

Aside from Lüdemann’s speculations pertaining to communities who held to a symbolic view of resurrection, if I have argued correctly pertaining to the beliefs of Paul and the other apostles, then what we do know is profound: Paul and the Jerusalem apostles were all proclaiming that Jesus had been raised bodily and had appeared to them. At some later point, probably three to seven decades after Jesus’ crucifixion, the Evangelists wrote narratives portraying the event of Jesus’ resurrection, all of whom clearly tell of a bodily resurrection. In other words, without a single known exception, all of the original apostolic leaders and all of the relevant Christian literature strongly believed to have been penned in the first century are of a single voice in their proclamation that Jesus had been raised bodily.

There can be no doubt that this belief was challenged not only by those outside of the early Church, but also from some within it (1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). Lüdemann also cites the later Gnostic literature as examples of those who interpreted ‘resurrection’ other than as a transformed revivification of a corpse.<sup>169</sup> But this in no

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<sup>165</sup> See Craig (1989), 335.

<sup>166</sup> See Craig (1989), 336-37.

<sup>167</sup> Iren. *AH* 1.26.1.

<sup>168</sup> See Wright (2003), 606.

<sup>169</sup> Although Lüdemann (2004) cites Gnostics and others as members of the “next generation of those who denied the bodily resurrection . . . [and] belonging to the late first and early second centuries,” he admits that “we have no sound way to place [their interpretation] of Jesus’ resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief” (178). Nickelsburg (2006) has a similar thought but proceeds without caution: “The tendency [to objectify ‘Jesus’ presence by emphasizing bodily features and functions’ in the canonical Gospels] may have been a corrective to stories that were originally narrated in the tradition of angelophanies or divine epiphanies and that may have presumed that the exalted Christ appeared from heaven. This viewpoint is amply documented in second-century Gnostic sources” (247). This is a place where our discussion of sources in chapter three proves helpful. Nickelsburg here prefers second-century Gnostic sources over first-century canonical Gospels and the strong testimony of Paul, all of which regarded Jesus’ resurrection as something that occurred to Jesus’ corpse. This is a flimsy move at best and an irresponsible use of sources. When we can solidly conclude that the Jerusalem apostles and Paul were, to the best of our knowledge, teaching the bodily resurrection of Jesus, why should second-century Gnostic sources whose authorship and source material remain very uncertain be given priority pertaining to the original claims about the nature of the appearances? I hasten to add that if we do not allow Clement of Rome and Polycarp in our investigation—two sources which have more promise than any of the Gnostic sources of bringing us back to apostolic traditions, we are not warranted in allowing the Gnostic sources.

way changes the fact that the purported eyewitnesses believed that Jesus had risen bodily from the dead and had appeared to them.

Before moving on to weigh LH, I would like to address Lüdemann's accusation that, for Paul, Jesus' return would be imminent, so that the fact it has yet to occur two thousand years later argues against Jesus' resurrection, given the interconnectedness of Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and glorious return. I believe this objection can be quickly answered in its present form: Either Paul misunderstood the Jerusalem apostles or the Old Testament scriptures to which he may have appealed pertaining to the timing of Jesus' return, or Paul is himself misunderstood by some of those who read him. Neither option undermines a case for Jesus' resurrection that is built upon the relevant historical bedrock and does not depend on Paul's theology being correct. Furthermore, Jesus' death and resurrection are even more closely connected throughout the New Testament literature. If we follow Lüdemann's logic, we would have to deny Jesus' death if we were to deny his resurrection. This is something the nearly universal consensus of scholars, including Lüdemann, would rightly be unwilling to do.<sup>170</sup>

We can strengthen Lüdemann's case by including Jesus' teachings pertaining to his return as found in the canonical Gospels.<sup>171</sup> For the moment, we must assume that these reflect the authentic teachings of Jesus. Otherwise, we could only claim at most that the tradition with which the Evangelists were familiar was mistaken. The language Jesus employs is apocalyptic in genre and leaves ambiguity in the interpretation of the relevant text. A number of interpretations do not involve unfulfilled prophecy pertaining to Jesus' return. And even if we interpret certain texts in a manner that understands Jesus as mistaken, I see no reason in principle why one could not simultaneously hold that Jesus was mistaken about the timing of his return and that he was raised from the dead.<sup>172</sup>

### 5.4.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Lüdemann's hypothesis (LH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.

- 1) *Explanatory Scope*. LH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead. LH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings, the appearance to Paul, and the appearance to James to boot, regarding the experiences as psychologically induced phenomena. LH meets this criterion nicely and matches GH in this regard.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Lüdemann (2004): "Jesus' death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable" (50).

<sup>171</sup> As examples, see Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matthew 10:23.

<sup>172</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) believes that Jesus was mistaken in a number of matters and also holds that he enjoys postmortem existence and actually appeared to his disciples (146-47, 375).

<sup>173</sup> In a tie-breaker, we might introduce second-level facts such as the appearance to James and redo the exercise. In this case, LH would be superior to GH in its explanatory scope since it accounts for the appearance to James whereas GH does not.

- 2) *Explanatory Power.* Similar to GH, LH nicely explains Jesus' death by crucifixion. However, as with GH, LH sometimes pushes the facts in order to make them fit. For example, in order to get Paul into the frame of mind to experience a hallucination, Lüdemann posits a strained interpretation of Romans 7. Furthermore, although he admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief," he adds, "Still, we can recognize the somewhat ironic nature of the process thus far described, since the real origin of early Christianity's resurrection belief was a vision—which, as a subjective representation of a reportedly objective 'event,' comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection."<sup>174</sup> If I am understanding Lüdemann correctly, he asserts that the earliest Christians had subjective visions they were convinced were bodily appearances of Jesus, which in reality was a non-bodily Jesus. Thus, the early Christians came close to a non-literal understanding of resurrection! Again, *if* I understand Lüdemann correctly here, we may note that this is a desperate move of great strain on his part in order to support a component of his hypothesis lacking in explanatory power. Lüdemann could simply delete this component of LH, since its truth does not demand it. However, the lack of explanatory power in relation to the appearance to Paul is highly problematic for Lüdemann, since explaining it adequately may be perhaps the most crucial component of LH.<sup>175</sup> LH fails this criterion since it has less explanatory power than VH.
- 3) *Plausibility.* Is LH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? LH relies on collective hallucinations to account for the group appearance(s) to the disciples. But we have already seen that such an event is not supported by the professional literature in psychology and is implausible. Regarding Lüdemann's proposal that the brothers of Jesus were caught up in the "mass ecstasy" that was behind the experience of Pentecost, it seems more likely that Jesus' unbelieving brothers, especially James who was apparently quite pious about his Jewish faith, would have regarded their dead brother as a heretic rather than rush to Jerusalem and be caught up in such group ecstasy as Lüdemann would have us believe. And if the Gospels accurately report that Jesus was chided and rejected by his brothers who thought him at times crazy (which LH grants), it seems more likely that Jesus' execution as a criminal and blasphemer would have supported their continued unbelief rather than their conversion to a faith that especially pious James would have regarded as apostasy. Since all historians are selective in their content, the possibility remains that there are unknown data that would strengthen Lüdemann's view. But we do not necessarily expect these. We may also imagine some of Jesus' brothers desiring to see a way in which Jesus was not accursed by God. But this does not come close to relieving the current tension. This aspect of LH is convenient, but it lacks plausibility. Because LH and GH are based on psychohistory, it is difficult to determine which has greater plausibility. Because GH heavily relies on a position that has been largely rejected by scholars for some time (i.e., a rift between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership) and offers only a weak case for its acceptance, whereas LH does not heavily rely on such a position, LH may be said to possess greater plausibility

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<sup>174</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 180.

<sup>175</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 166.

than GH. What happens when we compare the plausibility of LH to VH? VH is so lacking in explanatory scope and explanatory power that it does not attempt to account for or describe the nature of any of the appearances. While we may fault VH for its failure in these criteria, we must not confuse that with its plausibility. Since VH does not postulate what happened to Jesus, it cannot be said to be implied to any degree by accepted truths. But it lacks plausibility in that it is not implied when Paul's experience of the risen Jesus appearing to him is taken into account. On the other hand, LH and VH could be said to be implied to a degree by the fact that religious experiences that may best be accounted for in natural terms are common. However, LH lacks plausibility since it relies on a collective hallucination(s) to the disciples, which is not in accordance with accepted beliefs among psychologists. Moreover, that Jesus' skeptical brothers and especially James were caught up in "mass ecstasy" that resulted in their belief that their brother had risen from the dead and had appeared to them is implausible. However, since the appearance to James does not belong to our relevant historical bedrock, I will not penalize LH related to it. Still, LH trails VH in plausibility.

- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. As with GH, this criterion may be where LH is weakest. LH posits many psychological conditions in so many different people, in friend and foe, in different situations, within individuals and groups, and all without an ounce of solid evidence. It possesses the appearance of being an attempt to salvage a favored but failing hypothesis. We might accept Lüdemann's explanation of hallucination if Peter was the only one to have an experience of the risen Jesus. In this case, a natural explanation would certainly be superior to a supernatural one, since it is highly plausible that the conditions existed for Peter to have a hallucination, although he could just as well have become angry with the one whom he now believed to have been self-deluded or deceptive. But Peter is not the only one to claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus. The appearances occurred in both individual and group setting, and to friend and foe. This makes it challenging for those like Lüdemann who must engage in numerous *ad hoc* constructions in order to bolster explanatory scope.<sup>176</sup> LH certainly fails to pass the 'less *ad hoc*' criterion, since it is far more *ad hoc* than VH.
- 5) *Illumination*. As with GH, I think it a legitimate claim that, if true, LH provides illumination pertaining to numerous ancient religious experiences. Accordingly, LH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, LH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). It is also noteworthy that LH fails three of the four most important criteria. Moreover, we observed that there are numerous problematic elements to LH aside from and prior to weighing it by our criteria for the best explanation.

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<sup>176</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): "The apologists for the faith say that the sightings of Jesus must, given the reports, have been objective. One person can hallucinate, but twelve at the same time? And dozens over an extended period of time? . . . These are legitimate questions, and waving the magic wand of 'mass hysteria' will not make them vanish" (269).

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P

Lüdemann asserts that his conclusions are “solidly based on historical scholarship” and “sober insight.”<sup>177</sup> My observation is that it is instead based *entirely* on numerous speculative conjectures, some of which are implausible, and presupposes an atheistic worldview that he fails to support.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 209, 203.

<sup>178</sup> For what I regard to be a far more fair and sophisticated use of psychological speculations that bespeak of significant reflection on the impact of his own bias, see Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 213-28 (on bias); 269-99 (on the appearances).



## 5.5 John Dominic Crossan

**5.5.1. Description of Crossan’s View.** The works of John Dominic Crossan have received more attention than perhaps those produced by any other member of the Jesus Seminar. His kind demeanor and quick wit makes his writing enjoyable reading. When discussing the resurrection of Jesus, Crossan is far more interested in discussing its meaning and our response than he is the question of historicity. The historical question is “not invalid,” but is “simply less important than the question of meaning.”<sup>179</sup> Because the historical question has been debated for so long with few minds changing in the process, Crossan says we are at an impasse in this “irreconcilable debate”<sup>180</sup> and that the historical question “is probably unanswerable.”<sup>181</sup>

**5.5.1.1. Six Problems.** Crossan names six problems that are present when proposing a literal resurrection. First, it *requires a theistic worldview*. An approach to the resurrection that views it as a historical event “requires a ‘supernatural interventionist’ understanding of the way God relates to the world.” But do we see God acting in the world in this way?<sup>182</sup> Crossan does not think so. “I have made certain judgments about what I’m going to call ‘divine consistency’—how God works in the world. Not what God ‘can’ do—that I bracket completely—but what God ‘does’ do. I don’t think it was different in the first century from the twentieth.”<sup>183</sup>

Second, the literal view *lays down a stumbling block for non-theists*. The debate over historicity is “a stumbling block for people who have difficulty believing that these stories are factual. If these think that believing these stories to be historically factual is essential to being Christian, they think they can’t be Christian.”<sup>184</sup>

The third objection is *ethical* in nature. The view that God has raised only Jesus “privileges Christianity as the only true or ‘full’ revelation of God, the ‘only way.’”<sup>185</sup>

Fourth, arguments that approach Jesus’ resurrection literally, whether for or against its historicity, fall prey to *cultural misunderstanding*. The conservative cannot argue that Jesus’ resurrection was unique, since similar accounts existed in antiquity. And skeptics who argue that these kinds of things simply do not happen are not dealing

<sup>179</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185; cf. 29.

<sup>180</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 173.

<sup>181</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185; cf. 29.

<sup>182</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18.

<sup>183</sup> Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 515; cf. Crossan (1995), 215. Crossan in Halstead (1995-96): “I am completely, totally convinced that reason and revelation cannot contradict one another unless we’re misreading one or the other or both. That’s absolutely rock bottom for me. In the realm of theory, I would say that revelation surely rules reason. In the realm of practice—I would have to tell you, if you had a vision and you were going, like Abraham, to execute your son, I would call the police. Even if I was completely convinced that you were convinced that you weren’t lying, I would call the police. Reason and revelation work in tandem for me” (513; cf. Crossan [1995], 214). Crossan’s example is stacked to gain emotional assent. What if Crossan had lived in Nazi Germany and one of his colleagues informed him that he had a revelation that he was to assassinate Hitler, would he still call the police?

<sup>184</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 191-92.

<sup>185</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18.

adequately with a pre-Enlightenment worldview held by the ancients who believed that they did.<sup>186</sup>

Fifth, the literal view does not adequately take into account the *difficulty in the sources*. There are differences among the resurrection narratives that are difficult to reconcile and the language that is employed to report them often does not seem to be what is commonly employed to report historical events.<sup>187</sup>

Finally, the focus on a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection *neglects meaning*. Crossan (and Borg) distinguish between viewing Jesus' resurrection as *history* and *parable*. By *history*, they mean that Jesus' resurrection and appearances could have been photographed or videotaped.<sup>188</sup> By *parable*, they mean that the meaning or truth behind the resurrection "is not dependent upon whether they are historically factual."<sup>189</sup> And to argue over whether a parable is historical "misses its point."<sup>190</sup> Since scholars rarely get beyond the question of historicity, the question of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is usually neglected.<sup>191</sup> For Crossan and Borg, focusing on the meaning behind the resurrection stories "is always the most important question. The alternative of fixating on 'whether it happened this way' almost always leads one astray."<sup>192</sup>

Although I am in full agreement with Crossan that the question of meaning is as important today as it was in the first century, the present research focuses on the question of historicity and we will assess Crossan's hypothesis (CsH) on those terms.

### 5.5.1.2. The Appearances

Crossan acknowledges that the apostles believed Jesus had risen from the dead. He explains the appearance traditions in a number of ways. Starting with Paul, Crossan contends that his experience of the risen Jesus occurred while in a trance, since Luke's three accounts in Acts all agree on its "dissociative" and "ecstatic" character.<sup>193</sup> Relying on the work of Erika Bourguignon and a few of her doctoral students, Crossan explains that "*ecstasy, dissociation, or altered states of consciousness*" occur when brain chemistry moves critically above or below its normal range. "Trance, therefore, can be produced by any critical change, be it decrease *or* increase, in the external stimulation of the senses, internal concentration

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<sup>186</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185.

<sup>187</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.

<sup>188</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.

<sup>189</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 192-93. Elsewhere Crossan (1995) refers to the empty tomb and appearances as parables (216).

<sup>190</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 193.

<sup>191</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 192; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 173.

<sup>192</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 194. Elaborating in an endnote, they contend that disputes over creation and evolution, intelligent design and random evolution "would not have occurred without the modern (Enlightenment) conviction that truth equals factuality" (219n19). Although Crossan is in agreement, these thoughts appear to be primarily those of Borg. See Borg (2006), 281, 333-34n24.

<sup>193</sup> Crossan (1994), 88, 167, 168; cf. Crossan (1995), 204. Crossan and Reed (2004) bracket the "blinded-by-light sequence and imagine instead a vision in which Paul both *sees* and hears Jesus as the resurrected Christ, the risen Lord. It need not be added that, then as now, dreams and visions are hard-wired possibilities of the human brain. But, of course and always, their value depends on contents and results, purposes and intentions, means and ends" (8).

of the mind, or chemical composition of the brain's neurobiology."<sup>194</sup> The content of these psychological phenomena is guided "by cultural training, control, and expectation." As a result, those having the experiences may only borrow from what they already know.<sup>195</sup> "[T]he *what* of trance, is absolutely psychosocially conditioned and psychoculturally determined."<sup>196</sup> Pre-Christian Paul must have known at minimum certain contents of the Christian *kerygma* that he opposed. Crossan thinks that "it was their opening of Judaism to paganism and their willingness to abandon any ritual tradition standing in their way that had caused his initial persecution of Christianity, and it was precisely what he had persecuted them for that he now accepted as his destiny."<sup>197</sup>

Crossan presumes (cautiously) that Paul's trance in which the risen Jesus appeared to him was the only actual appearance and was the dominant experience of the risen Jesus.<sup>198</sup> How then are the appearances to the others reported in the early *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 and the resurrection narratives to be understood? Crossan says the experiences of the risen Jesus involved "different options and combinations [of "*trance, life-style, and exegesis*"] for different followers and different groups within earliest Christianity."<sup>199</sup> There were other visions, but they were not the only way in which the continuing life of Jesus was acknowledged and came *after* their belief in God's continuing power and presence through Jesus rather than serving as the cause of it.<sup>200</sup> Accordingly, Paul listing his experience on par with the others equates "its validity and legitimacy but not necessarily its mode or manner. Jesus *was revealed* to all of them, but Paul's own entranced revelation should not be presumed to be the model for all others."<sup>201</sup>

Approaching the resurrection narratives, Crossan contends that Mark invented his story of the empty tomb.<sup>202</sup> The original passion narrative was to be found in a hypothetical *Cross Gospel*, which Crossan dates to the 40s and contends was "the

<sup>194</sup> Crossan (1994), 87. Like Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000, 91), Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) denies that this type of experience is a hallucination (33). As with GH, in order to eliminate ambiguity and vagueness and to convey CsH clearly, I will refer to Crossan's description of Paul's "trance" as a hallucination.

<sup>195</sup> Crossan (1994), 87, 168.

<sup>196</sup> Crossan (1994), 88.

<sup>197</sup> Crossan (1995), 204.

<sup>198</sup> Crossan (1994), 169; Crossan (1995), 209.

<sup>199</sup> Crossan (1994), 169. In support of seeing Jesus in an exegetical experience, see Pierce (1995), 140.

<sup>200</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 34; Crossan (1995), 209, 216. See also Koester (2007), 244. Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005) thinks that an interpretation of Jesus' resurrection as "essentially a state enjoyed inwardly" may have been quite early (207). Elsewhere (*LJC*, 2003) he comments that Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim. 2:16-19 may have taught such a view and if 2 Timothy is dated between AD 70-100, it was held by some long before Valentinus (530).

<sup>201</sup> Crossan (1995), 204; Crossan (1994), 169. In Borg and Crossan (2006), an appeal to Paul's Damascus road experience as reported in Acts is made: "Those traveling with Paul did not share the experience, indicating that it was a private and not a public experience. In short, it was what is commonly called a vision. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that Paul thought of the appearances of the risen Jesus to Jesus's other followers also as visions. In the list of appearances in 1 Corinthians, he uses the same verb, 'appeared,' for their experience and for his own" (206-07; cf. 277). "Moreover, the fact that [Paul] includes his experience in this list [i.e., 1 Cor. 15:3-8] suggests that he saw it to be like theirs. Thus Paul provides reason to think of the Easter appearance stories in the gospels as visionary in nature" (207). We are probably reading Borg rather than Crossan in this matter, since it is contrary to what Crossan has earlier written (1994, 169; 2004, 8). Accordingly, I have not employed it here.

<sup>202</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 33.

original passion narrative” and “is the single source of the intracanonical passion accounts.”<sup>203</sup> Although now lost, he adds that we are reading a redacted form of it in the *Gospel of Peter* and even find traces of it in the canonical Gospels. Despite all this, none of the reports is historical. They presume the appearances in Paul’s list but completely reformulate them.<sup>204</sup> Since Jesus’ disciples had fled, no one would have known where his corpse had been placed. They could only hope that Jesus had received a proper burial according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23.<sup>205</sup> “[B]y Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care.”<sup>206</sup>

Crossan notes that the appearances in the resurrection narratives differ from Paul’s experience. There is no blinding light, no voices, no falling to the ground. Instead, they are “profoundly political” and “have nothing whatsoever to do with ecstatic experiences or entranced revelations,” but are instead interested in “authority, power, leadership, and priority.” Presuming the Christian community, “they detail the origins of Christian leadership, not the origins of Christian faith.”<sup>207</sup> They do this just as Jesus’ nature miracles speak about “the apostles’ spiritual power over the community” rather than “Jesus’ physical power over the world.”<sup>208</sup>

Crossan observes this occurring in the story of the appearance to the Emmaus disciples.

What we have here is not an event from Easter Sunday but a process that happened over many years. The presence and empowerment of Jesus remain in the community as it studies the scriptures ‘about’ him and shares a meal of bread and fish together. This is not trance but exegesis, not ecstasy but eucharist. Luke, however, has broken up that eucharist of bread and fish so that now only the bread is a eucharist while the fish is a remarkably crude proof that Jesus is not a ghost. . . . But you can still see what was there before Luke started work on it: two missionaries leave Jerusalem, experience the full presence of Jesus through Scripture and especially Meal, most probably of bread and fish, and return to Jerusalem to report.<sup>209</sup>

Crossan notes the “awkward syntax of 24:33-35” where it is said, “The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.”<sup>210</sup>

But that awkward syntax is quite deliberate. We have just seen those two followers encounter Jesus, but *before* they can tell the others, the others tell

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<sup>203</sup> Crossan (1991), 385, 429. Crossan (1995), 223. Koester (1990) asserts that the *Gospel of Peter* preserves the original resurrection narrative that was redacted by the Evangelists (240).

<sup>204</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.

<sup>205</sup> Crossan (1991), 387, 392. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 128 and Lüdemann (2004), 97.

<sup>206</sup> Crossan (1991), 394.

<sup>207</sup> Crossan (1995), 203, 208; Crossan (1994), 169, 170; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.

<sup>208</sup> Crossan (1994), 170. For examples, see 174-78; 182-86 and Crossan (1991), 396-410.

<sup>209</sup> Crossan (1994), 172; cf. Crossan (1995), 205-05. That *resurrection* means the continued power and presence of Jesus, see also Borg in Borg and Wright (1998), 135; Wedderburn (1999), 147-48. Harrington (1986) asserts that, for the early Christians, the resurrection of the body simply referred to belief in life after death (99).

<sup>210</sup> Crossan (1994), 172; cf. Crossan (1995), 207.

them about Simon Peter. Only then do they get to recount their story. Peter's witness preempts theirs: *specific leader over general community*.<sup>211</sup>

One may also observe a discussion over the priority of leadership in John 20:2-8 where Peter and John run to the empty tomb upon hearing Mary's report. This "race" between Peter and John illustrates "a duel over authority" in the early Church.<sup>212</sup> Since apparitions in the resurrection narratives are designed to confer authority on the recipient, arguing over the historicity and nature of the appearance misses the point. "The point is that here, unlike with Paul, we are dealing with quite a different phenomenon. These are dramatizations of power and visualizations of authority."<sup>213</sup> Given this, the first Christians would have been insulted had someone suggested that their lost faith was restored on the first Easter after experiencing a number of apparitions.<sup>214</sup> They may have lost their nerve and fled but they did not lose their faith and quit.<sup>215</sup>

### 5.5.1.3. The Meaning of Resurrection

What did the earliest Christians mean when they proclaimed that God has raised Jesus from the dead? If the appearances were visions experienced while in a trance (e.g., Paul), communal experiences of ecstasy (e.g., the appearance to the more than 500), or created from exegesis to be symbolic of Jesus' continuing power in the Church and felt presence in the eucharist, how did Paul, the Evangelists, and many of the earliest Christians come to claim that Jesus had risen bodily from the grave?

For Crossan, the answer is an equation: apparitions plus eschatology equal bodily resurrection. Crossan disagrees with Wright's contention that an empty tomb and apparitions get one to a belief in bodily resurrection. Because an individual bodily resurrection ahead of the general resurrection was such a large mutation of the existing Jewish doctrine, an empty tomb and apparitions are not enough. They could only get one to "an *absolutely unique assumption* or *extraordinary heavenly exaltation* of Jesus as Christ, Lord, and son of God." From this we would expect to find appeals to Psalm 2 and 110 and early Christian hymns such as Philippians 2:9-11.<sup>216</sup> To get bodily resurrection, in addition to the apparitions, the early Christians must also have had an understanding of Jesus' statements that the kingdom of God had already come and was present, even if not fully consummated.<sup>217</sup>

For Crossan, the Christians understood that God's "Great Clean-Up" of the world had begun. This was not the end of the world but its "cosmic transformation" from evil, injustice, impurity, and violence into a world of justice, peace, purity, and holiness.<sup>218</sup> They mutated the Jewish concept of the general resurrection, which was not only imminent, it had already begun.<sup>219</sup> Each person has two programs from which to

<sup>211</sup> Crossan (1994), 172-73; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 200-01, which appears to be primarily the words of Borg. See Borg (2006), 281, 286.

<sup>212</sup> Crossan (1995), 207.

<sup>213</sup> Crossan (1994), 170; cf. Crossan (1995), 206.

<sup>214</sup> Crossan (1995), 209-10.

<sup>215</sup> Crossan (1995), 209.

<sup>216</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.

<sup>217</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 26, 38; cf. 33.

<sup>218</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 24, 25.

<sup>219</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 25-26.



choose: the power of Rome that conquers to gain peace or the humble program of Jesus that seeks justice in order to obtain peace.<sup>220</sup>

While the Romans were proclaiming the deity of Caesar, Christians were proclaiming the deity of Christ. Crossan says we cannot know whether the Romans or the Christians actually believed, in a literal sense, the deity of Caesar and Christ. We do know that a confession of deity was meant in a “programmatically” sense. To confess that Caesar or Christ is Lord meant that you were *getting with their program*.<sup>221</sup> The Christian program included God’s vindication of Jesus who, as risen Lord, is in opposition to the thugs of this world like Caesar. It also included eschatology: The kingdom of God had come.<sup>222</sup>

There were numerous ways to say that God’s Great Clean-Up had begun. Resurrection was just one of them. Crossan asserts that the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* “were concerned with departure and return, passion and parousia, not death and resurrection. They could imagine Jesus being with God and returning in triumph but never have to mention resurrection at all. Where, then, did all the emphasis on resurrection come from? In a word, from Paul.”<sup>223</sup>

If God’s program is to clean up this world rather than shut things down and escort the righteous to heaven, the clean-up must involve “transformed physicality.” All of creation must be renewed, including bodies. Furthermore, God’s justice must redeem the tortured bodies of the martyred, such as those killed during the Seleucid persecution described in 2 Maccabees 7.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, understanding that God’s kingdom had come, Paul and some other Christians concluded that “God’s Great Clean-up” began with the general resurrection of which Jesus was the “firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:12-13). Since there was a backlog of martyrs to be vindicated, Jesus could not have received a privileged position over them in resurrection. His resurrection was not God exalting Jesus as supreme over all others.<sup>225</sup> It was about the commencement or inaugural event of God’s Cosmic Clean-Up. As the liberator, he was resurrected with them, so that divine justice came first to the past in preparation for the present. This corporate rather than individual resurrection event is portrayed in the harrowing or robbing of hell which will be discussed immediately below. The remainder of the general resurrection of those still alive would occur within the imminent future.<sup>226</sup>

Paul did not literally mean that Jesus’ corpse was resurrected leaving behind an empty tomb, but wrote in poetic terms. Jesus lived, died, and is still alive. Accordingly, resurrection did not involve Jesus’ corpse, which had become food for scavengers.<sup>227</sup> Paul is employing metaphors. Jesus is God in the sense that he represents God’s program. Jesus is risen in the sense that “people are experiencing the power of God

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<sup>220</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 28.

<sup>221</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 28, 128.

<sup>222</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 208.

<sup>223</sup> Crossan (1994), 163. See his comments on the *Epistle of Barnabas* (149-52).

<sup>224</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 25, 175-76; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 172-73.

<sup>225</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) refers to such an interpretation as “impossible” (181); cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 173-74.

<sup>226</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 27, 176, 180-81; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 208-09.

<sup>227</sup> Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 520. See also Crossan (1994), 126-27; Borg (1999), 131; Craffert (2002), 98.

through Jesus all over the Western Mediterranean world. That's how we know he's risen."<sup>228</sup> Paul would regard a belief in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus as theological "Yuk."<sup>229</sup> For him, *resurrection* was "the only possible way" to express Jesus' continuing presence and is tied to an imminent general resurrection. However, since the end did not come and still has not, today we may ask if *resurrection* is the best way to describe what was being experienced and believed by the early Christians.<sup>230</sup>

#### 5.5.1.4. The Harrowing of Hell

Crossan admits that what persuades him most to go with a metaphorical understanding of *resurrection* is the harrowing (or robbing) of hell theology found in a hymn (*Odes of Solomon*), images (found in two ancient churches), a narrative (*Gospel of Peter*), two texts in 1 Peter (3:18b-19; 4:6), and a "weird residual fragment" in Matthew (27:52-53).<sup>231</sup> If taken literally, there would have been many, perhaps hundreds, of empty tombs around Jerusalem on that first Easter.<sup>232</sup>

The harrowing of hell is clearly presented in the *Odes of Solomon* (42:10-20; end of first century or early second century AD). The relevant statements in the text are as follows:

Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me.

And I made a congregation of living among his dead; and I spoke with them by living lips.

And those who had died ran toward me; and they cried out and said, 'Son of God, have pity on us. And deal with us according to your kindness, and ring us out from the chains of darkness. And open for us the door by which we may go forth to you, for we perceive that our death does not approach you. May we also be saved with you, because you are our Savior.'<sup>233</sup>

The harrowing of hell appears in the iconography of the Greek Orthodox Church. The first appears in St. Sargius Church in Old Cairo while the second in the Chora Church in Istanbul.<sup>234</sup>

The harrowing of hell is likewise found in the *Gospel of Peter* (10:39-42). In this text, Jesus emerges from the tomb being carried by two angels. While the heads of the angels extend to the clouds, Jesus' head extends above the clouds. Following them out of the tomb is a cross. Crossan imagines a procession in the shape of a cross rather than a "walking and talking wooden cross." A voice is heard from the heavens

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<sup>228</sup> Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 521.

<sup>229</sup> Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 521.

<sup>230</sup> Crossan (1994), 164-65; cf. Crossan in Copan, ed. (1998), 53; Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 178.

<sup>231</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 181; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

<sup>232</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 182; cf. 27.

<sup>233</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181; Crossan (1995), 196-97. The English translation is the one provided by Borg and Crossan (2006), 179.

<sup>234</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 180-82; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

asking whether those who sleep have been preached to. The procession answers, “Yes.”<sup>235</sup>

Although the harrowing of hell does not fit into a more historically sounding narrative as we find in the canonical Gospels, it fits “with moving beauty into the poetic language of hymn and chant.”<sup>236</sup> Crossan and Borg provide additional Petrine texts as examples: 1 Peter 3:18b-19 and 4:6.<sup>237</sup>

1 Peter 3:18b-19: θανατωθείς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν <sup>19</sup> ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν

having been put to death in the flesh but made alive in spirit <sup>19</sup> in which also he went *and* preached to the spirits in prison<sup>238</sup>

1 Peter 4:6: εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη, ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι.

For this reason, the gospel was preached even to the dead, in order that they may be judged in the flesh *as before men* and that they may live in the spirit *as before God*.<sup>239</sup>

Crossan contends that those coming out of a Pharisaic understanding of the general resurrection would have to be thinking in terms of something like the harrowing of hell, which must be “very, very early.”<sup>240</sup> But in time, four reasons contributed to its

<sup>235</sup> Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 389; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 176-77.

<sup>236</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 178.

<sup>237</sup> Crossan (1991) stated that the harrowing of hell “may not even be mentioned in the New Testament” (388) and did not appeal to the two texts in 1 Peter until his book co-authored with Borg in 2006. Realizing that authors do not always agree on everything in a book they co-author, I asked him if he had changed his opinion on the matter pertaining to 1 Pet. 3:18b-19 and 4:6. In a personal email to me from Crossan dated May 21, 2008, he stated that he had, indeed, changed his mind and was convinced that the harrowing of hell is present within hymn fragments in these texts.

<sup>238</sup> My translation. This text contributes to the discussion pertaining to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body taught by the early Christians. Peter makes no other comments pertaining to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body. Accordingly, he could here be referring to Jesus’ being put to death in his physical body but raised in his spirit only (i.e., a *spiritual* or *ethereal* resurrection). This seems to me to be the easiest translation. However, the datives may be rendered as locatives of sphere: “having been put to death *in the sphere of the flesh* but made alive *in the sphere of the spirit*.” In other words, Jesus was killed within the sphere of earthly existence (or in a body animated by the flesh) and made alive within the sphere of heavenly existence (or in a body animated by the Spirit). This interpretation would resemble Paul’s thoughts in 1 Corinthians 2 and 15. See also Romans 1:3-4. The NET provides a translation of 1 Peter 4:6 that also seems plausible to me: “Now it was for this very purpose that the gospel was preached to those who are now dead, so that though they were judged in the flesh by human standards they may live spiritually by God’s standards.” Moreover, I have argued earlier (chapter 3.2.3.4.d; 4.3.3.9) that it is very probable that the Jerusalem apostles—of which Peter was a member—were reporting that Jesus had been raised bodily. If I am correct, an interpretation of 1 Peter that regards Jesus’ post-resurrection state as one of disembodiment is unlikely in so far as either 1 Peter is Petrine in authorship or it reflects his thoughts.

<sup>239</sup> My translation. It is initially tempting to render κατὰ ἀνθρώπους as “as men.” However, it then becomes difficult to translate the parallel κατὰ θεὸν (“as god”). See Ramsey, M. J., *1 Peter in the Word Biblical Commentary* series (Dallas: Word, 2002), 238.

<sup>240</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 388; cf. 27; Crossan (1995), 197; Borg and Crossan (2006), 182.

marginalization.<sup>241</sup> For one, it was an “intensely Jewish-Christian” tradition “and the future did not lie with that stream of tradition.”<sup>242</sup> Second, it is “serenely mythological.”<sup>243</sup> Jesus was killed by demons, descended according to plan, and emerged victoriously.<sup>244</sup> Third, it created numerous doctrinal problems: Did those whom Jesus led out of hell need to become Christians prior to their release? Did they need to be baptized? Who was freed—everyone or just the righteous?<sup>245</sup> The fourth reason was the most potent: How could Jesus have led forth the corporate resurrection of the just straight into heaven and have appeared alone to his disciples prior to his ascension?<sup>246</sup>

Crossan thinks that a trace of the harrowing of hell appears in Matthew 27:52-53, which may have been an attempt to solve this fourth problem that eventually brought about its marginalization.

καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, <sup>53</sup> καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had been sleeping were raised, <sup>53</sup> and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, went into the holy city and showed themselves to many.

This strange report in Matthew 27:52-53 attempts to retain the corporate harrowing of hell and the individual pre-ascension appearances. However, “the magnificent harrowing of hell is already lost in that fragment’s present redaction.”<sup>247</sup> A later attempt has the apostles and teachers leading the harrowing of hell after their deaths.<sup>248</sup> For Crossan the marginalization of the harrowing of hell is “one of the most serious losses from earliest Christian theology.”<sup>249</sup>

#### A Summary of Crossan’s Hypothesis (CsH)

- A literal interpretation of Jesus’ resurrection is confronted with six problems: It requires a theistic worldview, which goes against our observation. It sets up a stumbling block for non-theists who may otherwise become Christians. It privileges Christianity as the only true religion. It misunderstands the culture in which the stories of Jesus’ resurrection appear, since similar stories are present in other religions. Numerous theological and textual problems surface when Jesus’ resurrection is interpreted literally. Finally, a literal interpretation tends to neglect the meaning behind Jesus’ resurrection.
- Paul experienced a hallucination of Jesus while in a trance. This was the only actual appearance of Jesus to someone.

<sup>241</sup> Crossan (1991), 388-89; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 182-84.

<sup>242</sup> Crossan (1991), 388.

<sup>243</sup> Crossan (1995), 197; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 182.

<sup>244</sup> Crossan (1991), 388.

<sup>245</sup> Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 388.

<sup>246</sup> Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 388.

<sup>247</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

<sup>248</sup> *Similitudes of the Shepherd of Hermas* (9:16:5-7). See Crossan (1991), 388-89; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 183-84.

<sup>249</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

- Other Christians perceived that God’s kingdom was still present and operating after Jesus’ death. These perceptions came through exegesis, visions, and both corporate and individual psychological experiences of ecstasy, all of which occurred *after* they were convinced that Jesus was still alive in some sense and that God’s kingdom was still present among them.
- *Resurrection* was only one way the early Christians expressed the presence and power of God’s kingdom through Jesus.
- The *Cross Gospel* was the original passion narrative and has been partially preserved in the *Gospel of Peter*, which predates the canonical Gospels, although its present form reflects redaction. That is, the *Gospel of Peter* in its present form postdates the canonical gospels.
- The empty tomb narrative in the canonical Gospels was invented by Mark.
- The appearances reported in the canonical Gospels differ significantly from Paul’s entranced visionary experience. They have nothing to do with actual appearances but rather are expressions of authority and priority within Church leadership. The early Christians would have been insulted by those who interpreted the resurrection narratives in a literal sense.
- The early Christians understood that God’s “Great Clean-Up” of the world had begun and that the final consummation of God’s kingdom would soon occur. Some of them did not think in terms of Jesus’ resurrection (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Letter of Barnabas*). Others, of whom Paul is most prominent, mutated the existing Jewish concept of the general resurrection on the last day. God had started the general resurrection through Jesus who led a procession of dead saints with him. It was a corporate rather than an individual resurrection.
- Paul did not believe in the literal bodily resurrection of the corpses of Jesus and those he had liberated from hell. *Resurrection* was the metaphor he used. He believed that Jesus lived in an embodied existence, but it was a body with no continuity with his corpse, which still lay in a spot unknown to the Christians, decomposing and being devoured by scavengers.
- The harrowing of hell theme present in the *Cross Gospel* and the *Gospel of Peter* (i.e., the earliest Gospel traditions) is very early and demanded by the same background beliefs that brought about the belief that Jesus had been resurrected. In time this theme was marginalized.

### 5.5.2. Analysis and Concerns

Crossan offers a unique view of Jesus’ resurrection that is unsurpassed in its innovation. Far from the standard naturalistic hypotheses we have thus far examined, Crossan takes us onto new ground. And we admire the winsomeness and humility with which he asks us to consider his proposal while acknowledging its weaknesses.

#### 5.5.2.1. Crossan’s Six Initial Concerns

Crossan provides six initial concerns that present themselves when proposing a literal interpretation of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. His first concern is that it requires a theistic understanding of the world and he does not see God acting in the world in the manner portrayed in the Gospels. We have already discussed the problems with this objection,<sup>250</sup> but two may be noted here. While Crossan has not observed God’s open

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<sup>250</sup> See chapter 2.2.2.



and miraculous activities in the modern world, many others claim that they have.<sup>251</sup> Thus, the pool of experience from which Crossan draws is quite limited. Second and more important, if God's Son had actually visited the earth, reports of phenomena not normally observed in his absence would be of no surprise.

Crossan's second concern with a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection is that it may thwart non-Christians from embracing the Christian faith. This objection is a *red herring*, since it distracts from the issue of historicity with another issue that is not logically related. It needs to be noted that this objection does not in any sense address the *historicity* question. Rather, it is a pragmatic concern for those interested in evangelistic efforts. Crossan may want others to identify themselves as Christians in the sense he promotes. But would his definition of *Christian* be recognizable to the early Christians? And has Crossan considered that many who presently embrace the Christian faith might become uninterested in it if Crossan's definition is what it actually means to be a Christian? If he is truly interested in removing a stumbling block, he must recognize that in doing so he places a new one that may be even larger.<sup>252</sup> The belief that Messiah was crucified and risen was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles in the first century (1 Cor. 1:23; Acts 17:32) and Crossan's objection is a reminder that it remains so to this very day. Regardless of how we tally the net gain or loss of Christian church membership, how the faith is best marketed is not a concern for the historian.

Crossan's third concern is *ethical* in nature: the view that God has raised only Jesus sets up Christianity as the only true religion. This objection is likewise a *red herring*, irrelevant to historical inquiry. It ignores truth, being concerned with the 'what now?' rather than the 'what occurred?' What if following Jesus' teachings *is* the only way to please God while other religions fall short in this regard? Crossan's proposal would actually lead many away from the truth.

In July 2007, my mother discovered a lump on her right breast. She was 67 years old at the time and had not had a mammogram in more than five years. She quickly scheduled an appointment with her physician. After running a number of tests, the physician called with sobering news. She had stage four breast cancer that had spread to her lymph nodes and back. The physician recommended several months of chemotherapy, followed by surgically removing her right breast and lymph nodes, followed by seven weeks of radiation, followed by a few more months of special medications. My mother was told that it would be a difficult process. She would feel sick and fatigued, would lose her appetite and her hair, and would age. However, this was a necessary course if she wanted to have a chance of surviving cancer. What if her physician had then added the following: "Of course, there are others who would contend that there are no guarantees that all that I have recommended will work and that you should instead increase your vitamin C intake, frequently eat chicken soup

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<sup>251</sup> For examples of scholars, see, Dale Allison, Gary Habermas, Craig Keener, and J. P. Moreland.

<sup>252</sup> Recent data reveals that there is a general trend among North American Christian churches. Those moving to the left are losing members while those taking firmer orthodox positions are gaining members. See Eileen W. Lindner, ed. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches: When Did We See Thee Sick: Congregations Respond* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2008). See also the 2007 results at "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" by The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life located at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> (accessed May 28, 2008). This report shows that Evangelical Protestant (26.3%) and Catholic churches (23.9%) attract more U.S. adults than Mainline Protestant churches (18.1%).

and think positively. While I would not recommend such a course, who am I to say that they are wrong and, thus, privilege my opinion?”

We would regard such a statement from a medical professional to be absurd. Why then is it acceptable from a religious scholar such as Crossan? It must be that he is indifferent to or does not regard as true the particular religious claim in question, such as Jesus’ resurrection. But he *a priori* excludes this possibility before an examination of the data. The ethical objection should be offered only after a close examination of the data and a firm conclusion that Jesus did not rise from the dead has been made. Crossan’s ethical objection is an emotional, even political, appeal that says, “Can’t we all just get along?” But it is not historical. He has put the cart of theological implications before the horse of historical truth.<sup>253</sup>

The ethical objection is also culturally insensitive, since it favors one cultural attitude over another. As previously noted, while Crossan’s ethical objection may appease those who do not possess strong convictions toward a particular religious tradition, it may tend to alienate those who do. Accordingly, if one of the purposes of Crossan’s proposal is to unite, it is bound to fail in that respect.

Amy-Jill Levine provides a strong counter-argument against contentions articulated by those like Crossan in his second and third concerns:

We are not inevitably directed [towards pluralism], as the continuing publication of parochial materials demonstrates. Nor is a non-pluralistic approach necessarily a betrayal of cultural awareness, of scholarship, or of ‘theology.’ Scholars should be free to choose their audiences, and a non-pluralistic reading can have claims to historical credibility. A better case will need to be made that we should sacrifice parochial values to the idol of pluralism or cultural sensitivity. Exclusivism should not be ‘morally dubious,’ as the blurb claims. One may disagree with the biblical text, or a reading of it, but that disagreement should not prevent others, individuals or churches, from holding exclusivist interpretations. What I would find more ‘morally dubious’ is my insisting to another that his or her reading or presuppositions, because they are not pluralistic, are somehow wrong. In some contexts, a parochial reading may be warranted. The evangelical Christian should be free to try to seek to convert me to Christianity: such an attempt is biblically warranted and consistent with evangelical (exclusivist) theology. I remain free to say ‘thank you, but no thanks.’ I would not want someone telling me that my ‘cherished confessional traditions’ have only limited value. I would not presume to do the same to another.<sup>254</sup>

A few years ago I had a public discussion with a Muslim professor on the campus of Old Dominion University. During the question and answer period one of the audience members asked me why the Muslim professor and I hated one another. Now we had been very collegial to one another during the evening’s event. I responded that I did not hate him and did not sense that he hated me. If I were to say that his views were as valid or as factually true as my own, he would not respect me and regard me as weak

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<sup>253</sup> A problem of which Ehrman is likewise guilty. See chapter 2.5.3.

<sup>254</sup> Levine, A-J, “Homeless in the Global Village” in Penner and Stichele, eds. (2005), 195-96.

and lacking in religious convictions. This is especially true in Middle Eastern culture. I added that such a comment would be rather insulting, since both of us are strongly persuaded that our own religious tradition is true to the exclusion of the other. Accordingly, if I were to assert that the Muslim view is as valid as the Christian view, he would understand my comment as a significant demotion of Islam. I ended by stating that it is certainly possible for us to disagree in the strongest sense with the other's cherished views while acknowledging and even defending the right of the other to have them. We do no less in the political arena.

Crossan's fourth concern contends that cultural misunderstanding occurs when it is debated whether Jesus rose literally from the dead. For example, the conservative fails to recognize that similar traditions exist in other religions and, thus, are not meant to be interpreted in a literal sense. Crossan's concern is valid to an extent, since there were a few myths of dying and rising gods that predate Christianity. However, their impact is significantly trimmed when we are reminded that none of these provide a clear parallel to Jesus. In fact, the first clear parallel is not until at least a hundred years after him.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, the number of miracles ascribed to anyone within two hundred years before and after Jesus is very small in comparison.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the nearly unanimous consensus among historical Jesus scholars is that the evidence warrants the conclusion that Jesus performed amazing deeds both he and his followers regarded as miracles and

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<sup>255</sup> See Habermas (2003), 30; Habermas ("Replies," 2001), 78; Mettinger (2001), 221; Montefiore (2005), 114; Wagner (1968), 269; Wright (2003), 36. Perhaps the most recent thorough treatment on the subject of dying and rising gods in the ancient Near-East is that of T. N. D. Mettinger (2001). Mettinger states that the scholarly consensus lay with the position that there was no clear motif of the dying and rising god in antiquity. However, he takes issue with the consensus and argues that his recent research has led him to a different conclusion: "There is now what amounts to a scholarly consensus against the appropriateness of the concept [of dying and rising gods in the ancient near-eastern world]. Those who still think differently are looked upon as residual members of an almost extinct species. The results of my investigation led me to challenge this scholarly consensus and to disagree with a number of colleagues whom I greatly esteem" (7). Mettinger's work is impressive. He argues there are three fairly clear examples of a dying and rising god in the ancient Near East (Dumuzi, Baal, Melqart) and possibly two others (Eshmun and Adonis) (218). Mettinger arrives at four conclusions as a result of his research: (1) "The world of ancient Near Eastern religions actually knew a number of deities that may be properly described as dying and rising gods" (217). (2) These examples existed "long before the turn of the era, in pre-Christian times" (217). (3) "One should not hypostasize these gods into a specific type '*the dying and rising god*.'" On the contrary, the gods mentioned are of very different types, although we have found tendencies to association and syncretism" (218). (4) "The gods that die and rise have close ties to the seasonal cycle of plant life. The summer drought is the time when their death may be mourned ritually. The time after the winter rains and floodings may provide the occasion for the celebration of their return" (219). What about Jesus as a dying and rising god? Mettinger says that the answer is beyond the scope of his study. However, he makes the following notes: (1) For the earliest Christians "the resurrection of Jesus was a one-time, historical event that took place at one specific point in the earth's topography. The empty tomb was seen as a historical datum" (221). (2) Whereas the dying and rising gods were closely connected to the seasonal cycle with their death and return reflected in the changes of plant life, the death and resurrection of Jesus "is a one-time event, not repeated, and unrelated to seasonal changes" (221). (3) "The death of Jesus is presented in the sources as vicarious suffering, as an act of atonement for sins. The myth of Dumuzi has an arrangement with bilocation and substitution, but there is no evidence for the death of the dying and rising gods as vicarious suffering for sins" (221). (4) "There is, as far as I am aware, no *prima facie* evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions. The riddle remains" (221).

<sup>256</sup> Twelftree (1999), 247.

exorcisms.<sup>257</sup> The same may not be said of many other ancient figures, since wholesale legendary influence and other naturalistic explanations are more probable in many instances.<sup>258</sup>

Crossan also chides skeptics who argue against these kinds of events occurring, since they do not adequately deal with the worldview held by the ancients who believed they did. However, skeptics existed in antiquity as today.<sup>259</sup> So, not all of the ancients would have believed that the sort of actions attributed to Jesus actually occurred. Moreover, skeptics interested in the historical question of Jesus' resurrection should not be prohibited from such an investigation because they have a different worldview. Historians need to comprehend the worldview of those they are investigating in order to have a better understanding of the things they describe. Notwithstanding, all historians are inevitably going to judge the historicity of ancient reports according to their own worldview. In fact, we observed in his first concern that Crossan himself is guilty of this very practice. Crossan today does not see God acting in the manner described in the Gospels and concludes that he did not act that way in the first century.<sup>260</sup>

Crossan's fifth concern is that a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection introduces a number of difficulties related to the sources. There are irreconcilable differences in the narratives and the language employed does not appear historical. This has already been addressed above and will be addressed further below.<sup>261</sup> For here, we only need remember that conflicting accounts do not warrant the conclusion that *both* are mistaken. Moreover, the differences among the accounts occur mostly in the peripheral details and a core may be easily identified. Furthermore, the language employed concerning Jesus' resurrection is much more at home when taken in a literal rather than metaphorical sense (more on this below).

Crossan's sixth and final concern is that those who focus on a literal understanding of Jesus' resurrection often neglect the meaning it conveys. I agree with Crossan. But this only reminds scholars that there are practical applications to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. This is not a reason to abandon the historical question. In addition, if scholars abandoned the historical question and focused only on meaning, their

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<sup>257</sup> See chapter 4.2.1.

<sup>258</sup> See chapter 2.5.4.

<sup>259</sup> Davis (1993): "The record of Thomas's reaction to talk of the resurrection in John 20 and the record of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers' reaction in Acts 17 would seem to suggest that the idea of a dead man living again was no less intellectually scandalous to first-century people than it is to us. On the whole, I believe first-century people were no more superstitious, credulous, or just plain stupid than we are" (37-38). Although many ancient historians did not *a priori* dismiss the possibility of miracles on philosophical grounds as many do today, they viewed such stories with skepticism. Hemer (1990) notes "the fluctuation and ambivalence between skepticism and credulity which characterizes many of [the ancient] writers. In any case the supernatural is little more or less than an anomalous curiosity" with historians in antiquity (428-29). He goes on to say, "It is clear that ancient writers were not completely naïve or gullible, but accepted or rejected miraculous stories on the basis of their regard for the evidence, albeit differently weighted than modern historians. See for example Herodotus (2.73) on the story of the Phoenix" (441). For examples of historians of the period closer to the time of Jesus and who did not accept miracle claims uncritically, see Tacitus, *Annals* 1.28, and Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, e.g., Nero 56 and Vespasian 4.

<sup>260</sup> Crossan (1994): "I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life" (95).

<sup>261</sup> See chapter 2.5.1 and section 5.7.2.4 below.

opinions would collide on the meanings they ascribed to *resurrection*. The impasse Crossan dislikes would not be eliminated. Crossan might answer that at least we would be discussing how to fight social injustice. While that would certainly yield benefits, it may reveal that Crossan is more interested in anthropology and theology than in history. We may admire a historian who works to reduce social injustice in his off hours. However, this should not be his primary concern when acting within his professional capacity as a historian. When it is, the integrity of his historical work is in danger of being compromised.<sup>262</sup>

It is likewise important to observe that Crossan's interpretation of the meaning of resurrection is inextricably linked to his historical conclusion: "By *resurrection*, the early Christians did not mean a crude literal understanding that Jesus' corpse had been raised but rather that God's power and presence in Jesus can still be experienced in his absence." A similar meaning can be seen in a literal understanding of resurrection: "Because Jesus literally rose from the dead, his claims that God's kingdom had come were true. Forgiveness of sins is available allowing God's power and presence in Jesus to be experienced even by those who never met him." A skeptic may come to an opposite historical conclusion and meaning: "Jesus did not rise from the dead. The experiences of Paul and the early Christians involved only natural phenomena such as hallucinations, group ecstasy, and political polemic. Although they sensed God's continued power and presence in their fellowship, it was all a delusion, since I do not see an actual God acting in this way today. Contemporary experiences of a similar kind are likewise delusional. Although this may bring comfort and direction to some, we may ask whether it better to live a life of delusion or face and deal with reality. And what are the potential dangers to the prosperity and safety of our nation and world when someone choosing delusion is calling the shots?" I also find myself in agreement with atheist Gerd Lüdemann who comments that "it is meaningless to write anything about the 'reality of the resurrection' if its nonhistoricity is certain."<sup>263</sup>

Crossan may reiterate his contention that the historical question pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus is "probably unanswerable" in this "irreconcilable debate." However, in doing so he would fail to recognize that the impasse is largely a result of the conflicting horizons of the historians participating in the debate. Since this problem is not unique to historical questions of a religious nature, many historical questions in non-religious matters would likewise need to be abandoned if Crossan's concerns were to be applied consistently.

In summary, three of Crossan's six concerns with focusing on a literal understanding of Jesus' resurrection are not historical in nature and need not be of concern in our present investigation. Crossan is certainly free to go beyond the historical question and ask how his historical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection may apply to our

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<sup>262</sup> The same principle applies to those who set out to confirm the historicity of Jesus' resurrection using historical method. That is why the careful and persistent application of controls throughout an investigation is essential.

<sup>263</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 17; cf. R. Brown (*Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 1994), 165. Another point is worthy of consideration. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) notes that the early Christians were off regarding their timing of the future consummation of God's Great Clean-Up by 2,000 years and counting (178). What then are we left with according to CsH? Did the Great Clean-Up not begin after all or were the early Christians only wrong about a future consummation?



present situation. But he is then acting more in the capacity of theologian and anthropologist than historian. His other three concerns provide welcome warnings that historians should proceed only with great caution.

### 5.5.2.2. Sources

There are serious challenges to the attempt to identify hypothetical earlier strata in the relevant written sources as Crossan does. For one, direct evidence is absent and the indirect evidence offered is matched by counter-evidence that is usually at least equal in strength.<sup>264</sup> Second, since horizons have tremendous influence in historical investigation, and especially the one on which we have embarked, historians must proceed with great caution. Crossan appears negligent in this respect. His portrait of the historical Jesus largely depends on sources he regards as early (*Cross Gospel*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Secret Gospel of Mark*, *Gospel of Thomas*, and the Egerton papyri). But they are regarded as late and of dubious value for the task by most scholars.

The same approach occurs when Crossan postulates on Jesus' resurrection. He claims to be able to extract from the *Gospel of Peter* (the relevant text is represented only in the Akhmîm fragments from the seventh-ninth centuries) a passion and resurrection narrative from a hypothetical *Cross Gospel* (which he dates from middle of the first century) that predates the canonical Gospels.<sup>265</sup> Stated another way, CsH is founded upon a hypothetical source that, after being redacted, is detected primarily and most accurately in a single source of uncertain origin and character and is attested in only a single late manuscript.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>264</sup> C. A. Evans, "In Appreciation of the Dominical and Thomistic Traditions: *The Contribution of J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright to Jesus Research*" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 56. During a discussion between John Dominic Crossan and Charles Quarles at the 2004 Synoptic Gospels Study Group for ETS, Quarles provided counter-arguments that challenged Crossan's arguments for the priority of the *Gospel of Thomas*, contending that they were equally if not more plausible than Crossan's. Crossan replied that he thought Quarles' analysis of the parable of the wicked tenant "is much better" than his own (approx. 2 minutes into Crossan's reply to Quarles). Crossan went on to say that he had wrestled with the pro and con arguments for the independence of the *Gospel of Thomas*. Although he had chosen to accept the priority of the *Gospel of Thomas*, he admitted of the competing arguments, "I do appreciate that many of them come out even" (approx. 21:30 into Crossan's reply to Quarles).

<sup>265</sup> Crossan (1994) also asserts that the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* were concerned with passion and parousia without any thought of death and resurrection (149-52, 163). But the *Gospel of Thomas* is somewhat Gnostic in its teachings, including a disembodied postmortem existence, while *Barnabas* does mention death and resurrection, contrary to Crossan's claim (see *Barnabas* 5).

<sup>266</sup> Nickelsburg (2006) makes a similar move: "In 28:1-10, Matthew combines Mark 16:1-8 with another story about the empty tomb, which is independently attested in *Gos. Pet.* 35-44, and which plays up miraculous elements that Matthew has dampened" (237). As previously stated, while most scholars propose that we can be assured we are reading earlier tradition when it is simpler and appears less embellished, this principle apparently will not do for Nickelsburg when it comes to the *Gospel of Peter*, which appears far more mythical than the canonical Gospels. In order to get around this, Matthew has "dampened" the narrative found in the *Gospel of Peter*! But Nickelsburg's imagination does not stop there. He argues that an ambiguity is present in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that renders a bodily resurrection interpretation difficult, even in the presence of an empty tomb. "Jesus materializes and disappears suddenly (Luke 24:31-32, 36; John 20:19, 26); he is mistaken as a mysterious stranger (Luke 24:31-32) or a gardener (John 20:15); he is thought to be a spirit, that is an angel or a ghost (πνεῦμα, Luke 24:37) or is simply not recognized (John 21:4); the disciples disbelieve (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:38-41; John 20:24-29). This suggests an apologetic tendency in the tradition that objectified Jesus' presence by emphasizing bodily features or functions (Luke 24:35-43; John 20:24-27) or, later, by citing neutral or antagonistic witnesses. The tendency may have been a corrective to stories that were originally narrated in the tradition of angelophanies or divine epiphanies and that may

It is difficult to see how this may be regarded as a sound approach. Even a cursory reading through the *Gospel of Peter* suggests that the canonical Gospels present much more subdued versions of Jesus' resurrection. Although Crossan assigns a mid-second century dating to the extant text of the *Gospel of Peter*, he believes that it derives from a *Cross Gospel* which he dates to the 40s. Crossan's assigning of an earlier date to the resurrection narrative employed by the *Gospel of Peter* an earlier date is a reverse of the current scholarly assumption that sees the more extraordinary reports as reflecting legendary additions and which Crossan employs consistently with the canonical Gospels. Crossan may contend that the canonical Gospels have recast the resurrection narrative to read as history rather than poetry. But he has not shown that this is more plausible than the opposite which normally occurs; poetry is created in honor of historical events. And if the earliest Christians did not intend for Jesus' bodily resurrection to be understood in a literal sense, why write in a genre that would encourage such a misunderstanding when the present poetic one will do? Quarles notes that the *Gospel of Peter* contains features not found until later Christian literature. The cross appearing with Jesus is also found in the *Epistle of the Apostles* (16) and the *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter* (1), both of which probably belong to the second century. An oversized Jesus is also present in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (83:1) and 4 Ezra (2:43).<sup>267</sup>

We have resisted the temptation to employ sources of uncertain value as well as potential facts that would certainly bolster the Resurrection hypothesis (RH).<sup>268</sup> In our assessment of the relevant sources in terms of their ability to yield valuable data for our investigation, we noted that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels may be useful. However, because of unknowns, such as the amount of liberty the Evangelists may have taken in their reports, as well as the sharp disagreement among scholars pertaining to their reliability, we have chosen to use them only when necessary and to rely more heavily on earlier sources about which more is known and a greater agreement exists within a heterogeneous majority of scholars. We rated both *Gospel of Thomas* and *Gospel of Peter* as *unlikely* in terms of their ability to yield valuable data for our investigation. The speeches in Acts and Polycarp's letter to the Philippians were both rated *possible* while Clement of Rome

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have presumed that the exalted Christ appeared from heaven. *This viewpoint is amply documented in second-century Gnostic sources*" (246-47, ital. mine). The problems with Nickelsburg's conclusions are numerous. First, if the empty tomb and physical tendencies in the accounts were apologetic as Nickelsburg suggests, why would the Evangelists retain supposedly contrary elements, such as Jesus' ability to appear and disappear at will? Why not simply omit them? Second, details regarded as difficulties by Nickelsburg are easily resolved if we allow the Evangelists to speak for themselves, assisted by Paul, rather than look for conflicting layers of tradition that the Evangelists were frantically attempting to reconcile. The Evangelists report that Jesus was resurrected in a corpse that had been transformed into an imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spirit-empowered body. With such a body it is not at all difficult to imagine an empty tomb, eating food and being touched, appearing and disappearing at will, and keeping others from recognizing him at times. The disbelief of the disciples upon seeing Jesus is explained elsewhere (see chapter 4.3.2.6). And third, in a sense more shaky than Crossan, Nickelsburg appears to place an unwarranted amount of weight in the "second-century Gnostic sources." This is flimsy at best and an irresponsible use of sources.

<sup>267</sup> C. L. Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 117. For the more detailed critique, see 106-20.

<sup>268</sup> Examples of sources include the Speeches in Acts, *1 Clem.*, *Pol. Phil.*, and the canonical Gospels to a large extent (chapter 3.2.1; 3.2.3.3; 3.2.5.1-2). Examples of potential facts include Jesus' predictions of his violent death and subsequent vindication by God (chapter 4.2.3), the appearance to James (chapter 4.3.4), and, possibly, the empty tomb (chapter 4.3.5).

received a rating of *possible-plus*. Accordingly, Crossan has based a significant portion of his hypothesis on sources having a far more questionable pedigree than those we have restrained ourselves from using.<sup>269</sup>

### 5.5.2.3. Metaphor

Can modern historians know whether a report or claim was intended to be interpreted literally or metaphorically? Crossan answers that it is nearly impossible. He asks whether the Romans and Christians literally believed in the deity of Caesar and Christ. He answers, “I think the honest answer is: we do not have the faintest idea, and we do not even know how to figure it out.”<sup>270</sup> For the first Christians and for us today, “Jesus was and is divine for those who experience in him *the* manifestation of God.” For Crossan, the word of great importance here is “*the*.” When a husband says that his wife is *the* most beautiful woman or his newborn daughter is *the* most beautiful baby in the world, he and everyone else recognize that his claim is not meant to be understood in the strictest literal sense. In reality, she is *a* beautiful woman or baby. It is the same with one’s claim that Jesus is *the* way rather than *a* way. Problems only appear when someone understands such a statement literally so that it negates similar statements by others.<sup>271</sup>

This does not appear to be an accurate reading of the early Christian texts. In Romans 10:1-4, Paul asserts that his fellow Jewish countrymen have an unenlightened zeal for God. In light of this, he regards them as condemned and needing salvation.<sup>272</sup> While granting the status of deity to an emperor may have originally been intended to be interpreted honorifically rather than ontologically, it seems clear that a number of Roman emperors actually believed themselves to have been divine. Many of the people may not have taken those claims seriously and merely worshiped them out of respect—and fear. But it appears that some of the emperors actually believed themselves to be a god.<sup>273</sup>

Is the language of resurrection found in the Gospels of a historical genre? Crossan answers in the negative.<sup>274</sup> He sees a development in Matthew over Peter when reading about the presence of guards at the tomb.

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<sup>269</sup> Crossan’s approach has received criticism for this approach. The following are a few comments offered regarding Crossan’s source hypothesis: Bauckham (2002): it is “largely unconvincing, at best unverifiable” (262); Evans (2006): it “completely lacks a critical basis” (98); Johnson (1996): it uncritically accepts dubious sources while being overly critical of more promising ones (47-48, 50); Wright in Borg and Wright (1998): “Despite frequent claims, a century of research has failed to reach anything like consensus on a single one of the stages in question, let alone on the hypothetical developments in between” (20-21); cf. Stewart in Stewart, ed. (2006): “More and more, awareness is increasing among Jesus scholars that the time-tested methods of source, form, and redaction criticism, apart from some other methodological ingredient, are not up to the task” (14).

<sup>270</sup> Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 182.

<sup>271</sup> Crossan (1995), 216.

<sup>272</sup> Rom. 10:1-4; cf. 2 Thess. 1:8.

<sup>273</sup> On Caligula see Philo of Alexandria, *On the Embassy to Gaius* XI-XV; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.20; 59.26, 28; Suetonius, *Gaius (Caligula)* 4.19.2-3; Josephus, *Ant.* 19:1:6.; John Sanford, “Did Caligula have a God complex?” *Stanford Report*, September 10, 2003, reports of archaeologists from Stanford and Oxford who discovered that Caligula annexed a sacred temple to his palace. This article may be accessed at <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2003/september10/caligula-910.html> (accessed May 28, 2008). On Nero see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 63.20.5.

<sup>274</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.

A guard for three days now comes from Jesus' prophecy [instead of requiring three days to elapse in order to know the corpse of Jesus had not returned to life as we find in *Peter*]. Thereafter, no guard is necessary because Jesus will have been proved wrong. I find Matthew a development over Peter and not the reverse in that case.<sup>275</sup>

Behind the guards at the tomb . . . lie apologetics and polemics along the line from Peter to Matthew. *Christians*: Jesus rose from the dead. *Opponents*: he did not, you stole his body. *Christians*: no we did not; you had guards at the tomb who know the truth, but you told them to lie.<sup>276</sup>

Here we find a troublesome tension in CsH: If the Evangelists and early Christians would have been insulted by a crude literal interpretation of bodily resurrection as Crossan claims, would it not be strange, even counterproductive, for those Christians to defend that very view in their polemic with opponents and by Matthew who reports it without corrective comment? In other words, if these early Christians did not believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus' corpse, why are they defending it by saying they could not have stolen the corpse since the tomb was guarded? When their opponents interpreted them as claiming Jesus' corpse had been resurrected, why not instead answer, "You misunderstand us. We don't mean Jesus' physical corpse. We are simply proclaiming that the general resurrection has begun and my fathers and yours have been rescued from hell. God's kingdom is present among us. Come and see!"

This problem becomes even clearer when 1 Corinthians 15 is given full consideration. Crossan does not venture in any detail beyond 15:7. But, as discussed at length earlier, in 15:35ff. Paul is answering the questions of those who either prefer disembodied post-mortem existence and deny bodily resurrection, believe in a postmortem existence involving a new body sharing absolutely no continuity with the present one, or deny an afterlife altogether.<sup>277</sup> If a literal bodily resurrection would have been theological "Yuk" to Paul as Crossan asserts, why provide comments that tend to support bodily resurrection, especially those in 15:53-54?<sup>278</sup>

Moreover, we certainly know that the canonical Evangelists and Paul intended their statements regarding Jesus' *death* by crucifixion to be interpreted literally, in spite of the fact that they are theologically adorned, contain differing details, and report phenomenal events such as darkness and the tearing of the temple veil (at minimum). In what sense may their statements concerning Jesus' resurrection be regarded as differing in genre?

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<sup>275</sup> Crossan (1995), 180.

<sup>276</sup> Crossan (1995), 181. Craig (1989) also notes that the apologetic purpose behind the text indicates "a tradition history of Jewish/Christian polemic" (207) but offers a number of reasons for why the story may reflect history rather than legend (211-21). He then concludes, "So although there are good reasons to doubt the existence of the guard at the tomb, there are also weighty considerations in its favor. It seems best to leave it an open question. . . . [T]he real value of Matthew's story seems to be the incidental information that Jewish polemic never denied that the tomb was empty, but instead tried to explain it away" (221-22).

<sup>277</sup> See chapter 4.3.3.9.b.

<sup>278</sup> Crossan in Halstead (1995) does comment on 1 Cor. 15:50 (521). However, we have observed that his interpretation is mistaken (chapter 4.3.3.9.b).

To be sure, *resurrection* is employed occasionally as a metaphor. It refers to leaving a sinful life in darkness for one that is centered on the light provided by Christ (Eph. 5:14), to our relation to Christ (Col. 2:13; 3:1-3), and to the spiritual life of the believer (2 Cor. 4:10-13; Rom. 8:11). But Paul also employed *resurrection* in a literal sense (1 Cor. 15:53-54; Rom. 8:11, 23; Phil. 3:21). In Romans 8:11, both metaphorical and literal senses are present: The *resurrection* of our bodies can refer both to a present process and a future event (8:11, 23).

It is difficult to read the biblical texts and walk away with Crossan's interpretation without doing great violence to them.<sup>279</sup> After citing proposals by six scholars who interpret *resurrection* in a metaphorical sense, among whom are Bultmann and Marxsen (and we may add Crossan), the Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide commented that these proposals "strike me as all too abstract and scholarly to explain the fact that the solid hillbillies from Galilee who, for the very real reason of the crucifixion of their master, were saddened to death, were changed within a short period of time into a jubilant community of believers. . . . I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material fact of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way."<sup>280</sup> Davis contends rightly I think when he asserts that "an enormous burden is placed on the shoulders of anybody who wants to interpret the text in a way that cuts against the grain of that text's plain sense and that overturns the way that it has always been interpreted."<sup>281</sup>

#### 5.5.2.4. The Harrowing of Hell

Since the harrowing of hell is what most strongly persuades Crossan to go with a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection, it may be beneficial to spend some time taking a further look at this Christian theme. We may first note that *all* of the references to the harrowing of hell which Crossan cites *post-date* our known earliest Christian sources, Paul and Mark, who not only appear to speak of Jesus' resurrection in physical terms but the harrowing of hell is nowhere to be found in them.<sup>282</sup>

Crossan's date for the *Odes of Solomon* is sometime between the late first and early second centuries. The images portraying the harrowing of hell are also late. The

<sup>279</sup> Davis (1993), 40; Harvey (1989), 339; Lüdemann (2004), 180.

<sup>280</sup> Lapide (2002), 128, especially, 129-30. The appearance of subterfuge is readily seen in the proposal of Bentz-Letts (1997): "Far from undermining the Christian affirmation of Christ's resurrection, I believe an acknowledgment of the decomposition of Jesus' body after death is compatible with that affirmation and may endow it with added power and vitality for our post-modern age. The tomb of Easter Sunday morning is indeed empty, not in the sense that Jesus' body did not return to the earth, but in the sense that we are no longer captive to those demonic forces which are leading us to emotional, social and ecological death. So with the church throughout the ages we too cry: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed" (273-74; cf. 268)!

<sup>281</sup> Davis (2006), 52.

<sup>282</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006) also appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:20 where the risen Jesus is said to be the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep (κεκοιμημένων). They note that "in the Greek original, that final phrase is literally 'those who were asleep' (176). This is a poor translation of the perfect tense, given that fourteen verses earlier Paul comments that some believers have fallen asleep (έκοιμήθησαν) in the years between when the risen Jesus had appeared to them and the time of Paul's writing 1 Corinthians (15:6). I list this reference by Borg and Crossan here, because I am uncertain whether Crossan himself would argue in this manner, since it is absent in his writings on the subject.



St. Sargius Church building in Old Cairo cannot be dated earlier than the fourth century and the Chora Church in Istanbul was built in the early fifth century. That, of course, is not to say that belief in the harrowing of hell was not held earlier by Christians in those cities. But they are too late for establishing what part if any the harrowing of hell played in the beliefs of the first post-Easter Christians.

For the Petrine sources, we have already noted that the *Gospel of Peter* is of a highly questionable pedigree. Crossan does not see the walking and talking cross as being the wooden one to which Jesus was crucified. Instead, he views it as a cross-shaped procession of the dead saints whom Jesus was leading out of hell. This appears allowable but it is by no means required. The text does not indicate to whom the voice in heaven is addressed. Since the question comes after the head of Jesus is said to have ascended beyond the heavens, it may be directed toward him with the saints in the cross formation providing the answer. The question may also be addressed to a wooden cross, which is following Jesus and the angels and which answers in the affirmative. I see no reason for preferring one interpretation over the other. Nothing else in the text indicates that the cross is a large formation of people. While we may assign Crossan's interpretation as *possible*, prudence limits us from going further. And when the questionable origin of the *Gospel of Peter* is added, the disciplined historian should not place much weight on the *Gospel of Peter* to support the contention that the harrowing of hell was a belief of the earliest Christians that was in competition with Jesus' bodily resurrection.

When we approach the two texts from 1 Peter, Crossan and Borg assert that, although it is debated whether 3:18b-19 refers to the harrowing of hell, there can be no question pertaining to 4:6. Comparing the two texts, one can notice some parallel thoughts:

3:18b-19

- (a) Jesus was put to death in flesh
- (b) but Jesus was made alive in spirit
- (c) in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison

4:6

- (c) The gospel was preached<sup>283</sup> to the dead
- (a) in order that the dead may be judged in the flesh (as before men)
- (b) but that the dead may live in the spirit (as before God)

Accordingly, if the harrowing of hell is mentioned in 4:6, the preaching to the spirits in prison in 3:19 appears to be a related activity. However, in 3:20 it is stated that these spirits were once disobedient. Were the spirits human (at least formerly) or demonic? That they were demons may be more at home with 3:18-20 but that they were humans now dead fits better with 4:6. While debating over interpretation continues, a consensus has begun to emerge within Petrine scholarship that holds that Peter is describing "Jesus' declaration of victory over demonic spirits in the lower heavens during his ascent, not descent into Hades to proclaim the gospel to the dead."<sup>284</sup> Thus, neither of the two texts in 1 Peter provides support of much weight for the harrowing of hell.

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<sup>283</sup> Note that it is ἐκήρυξεν in 3:19, whereas εὐηγγελίσθη appears in 4:6.

<sup>284</sup> Quarles in Stewart, ed. (2006), 112.

This brings us to that strange little text in Matthew 27:52-53 where upon Jesus' death the dead saints are raised and walk into the city of Jerusalem. During Jesus' crucifixion and upon his death, Mark and Luke report two phenomena that occurred: there is darkness and the temple veil is torn in two (Mark 15:33, 38; Luke 23:44-45). John is silent on the matter. Matthew likewise reports the darkness and tearing of the temple veil but adds four more phenomena: the earth quakes, the rocks split, the tombs are opened, and the dead saints rise up and walk into Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection (27:51-54).

Brown notes that similar phenomena were reported at the death of Romulus and Julius Caesar.<sup>285</sup> Confining himself only to those who wrote within one hundred years on either side of Jesus' death, his examples include Plutarch (*Romulus* 27.6; *Caesar* 69.4), Ovid (*Fasti* 2.493), Cicero (*De Republica* 6.22), Virgil (*The Georgics*, Georgic 1.466ff.), Josephus (*Ant.* 14.12.3; 309) and Pliny (*Natural History* 2.30; 97). Virgil's account appears to be encomium when he reports the following sixteen phenomena that occurred after Caesar's death in a passage that is clearly poetic: prolonged darkness, dogs and birds acted unusually, Etna erupted, fighting in the heavens was heard, the Alps shook near Germany, a powerful voice was heard in the groves, pale phantoms were seen at dusk, cattle spoke portents, streams stood still, the earth opened up, ivory idols wept and bronze idols were sweating in the shrines, dark intestines appeared outside of animals in their stalls, blood trickled in springs, wolves howled, lightning appeared in a cloudless sky, a bright comet was seen.

Going more than one hundred years after Jesus, we may add that six phenomena connected to the death of Claudius were reported by Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 65.35.1). These include a comet, raining blood, lightning striking Pretorian standards, Jupiter's temple opening up by itself, bees swarming in the camp, and an incumbent of every political office dying. Philo (*On Providence* 2.50) claimed that eclipses were omens of the impending death of a king. However, phenomena were not limited to the death of a king. Dio Cassius (51.17.4-5) reported eight phenomena when Julius Caesar enslaved Egypt: It rained where it had never rained previously, it rained water, blood, and weapons from the dead, the sound of musical instruments was heard, a huge snake appeared and let out a loud hiss, there were comets, apparitions were seen, images frowned, and the image of the bull deity Aris lamented and wept.

Also of interest is the comment by Lucian (AD 170) of how he embellished a story for the sake of "dullards" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 39): Having just described Proteus's public suicide at which he was present, he wrote the following to Cronius:

I had no end of trouble, telling the story to all while they asked questions and sought exact information. Whenever I noticed a man of taste, I would tell him the facts without embellishment, as I have to you; but for the benefit of the dullards, agog to listen, I would thicken the plot a bit on my own account saying that when the pyre was kindled and Proteus flung himself bodily in, a great earthquake first took place, accompanied by a bellowing of the ground, and then a vulture, flying up out of the midst of the flames, went off to Heaven, saying, in human speech, with a loud voice: 'I am through with the earth; to Olympus I fare.' They were wonder-struck and blessed themselves

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<sup>285</sup> R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 1120-27; cf. 1114.

with a shudder, and asked me whether the vulture sped eastwards or westwards; I made them whatever reply occurred to me.<sup>286</sup>

Lucian noted their credulity, then added that shortly thereafter he heard a gray-haired man with beard who presented himself in a very credible and believable manner telling about Proteus's suicide, swearing that he had seen a vulture flying out of the pyre and that he had just seen him walking cheerfully in the Portico of the Seven Voices, wearing white clothing and a garland of wild olive.<sup>287</sup>

Josephus (*War* 6:288-309) tells of numerous wonders that accompanied the destruction of the Temple: a star shaped like a sword hovered over the city, a comet appeared and remained for a year, during one night for one hour a light that was as bright as daylight shone on the altar and the holy house, a cow gave birth to a lamb in the temple, the eastern gate of the temple's inner court which could hardly be moved by twenty men opened by itself, chariots and angels were seen in the clouds surrounding the city, while in the inner court of the temple the priests felt a quaking and heard a large number of people say, "We are departing from here." Jesus the son of Ananus went around Jerusalem for four years predicting the impending destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Josephus reports that even the strangest of these things actually happened.

That the biblical writers were familiar with and employed this type of language seems clear. The sun goes down at noon in Jeremiah 15:9. In Amos 8:8-9, the earth will quake and the sun will go down at noon. In Zephaniah 1:15ff. and Joel 2:2, the day of the Lord is described among other things as "a day of darkness and gloom" (ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου). Later in the passage Joel adds the following:

It will come about after this that I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.<sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days.<sup>30</sup> I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke.<sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.<sup>32</sup> And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls (2:28-32, *NASB*).

In Acts 2:15-21, Peter quotes from this text and indicates these things were being fulfilled in their presence.

<sup>286</sup> The English translation is that of A. M. Harmon, in *Lucian*, Volume V in the Loeb Classical Library (45).

<sup>287</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 40. Harmon notes that an eagle flew up at the deaths of Plato and Augustus, and at the martyrdom of Polycarp it was a dove (44n1). This is not so clear to me. Although Harmon provided no references, the eagle at Augustus' pyre is found in Dio Cassius' *Roman History* 56:42 and seems to be an eagle that was ceremoniously released during the event. Holmes (1999) notes that the reference to a dove at Polycarp's burning and impalement at the stake in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16:1 is only in manuscript G(L) and that the "reference to the dove is almost certainly a later addition to the text (possibly by the Pionius mentioned in the last paragraph of the epilogue)" (239n20). I was unable to locate a reference to an eagle related to the death of Plato.

The rending of rocks is reported in Isaiah 2:19 (LXX), 1 Kings 19:11-12, Zechariah 14:4, Nahum 1:5-6, and the Testament of Levi 4:1 (109-106 BC). In the last, “the rocks are rent and the sun darkened.” The opening of tombs and the dead walking in Jerusalem may have a parallel in Ezekiel 37:12b-13: “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.<sup>13</sup> Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, my people.” Compare this with Matthew 27:52-53: “the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had been sleeping were raised, and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, went into the holy city and showed themselves to many.”

On the other hand, in favor of the historicity of the phenomena reported by Matthew, the darkness reported in all three Synoptics is also apparently reported by the secular historian Thallus (c. AD 52).<sup>288</sup> Moreover, destructive earthquakes were common in the region and can explain four of the six phenomena (tearing of the temple veil, earthquake, rocks splitting, tombs opened).<sup>289</sup>

A number of sources may report that these were real persons who were raised by Jesus. Ignatius may refer to them when he speaks of the prophets raised by Jesus (Ign *Mag* 9:1-2). But it is uncertain how this report was intended to be interpreted. Quadratus (AD 117-138) reported that those whom Jesus had raised continued to live for a considerable period and some even still lived (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.3.2). However, he is more likely referring to those whom Jesus raised from the dead during his earthly ministry. *Acts of Pilate* 17:1 reports that Jesus raised Simeon and his two sons, that their tombs could still be seen opened, that they were alive and dwelling in Arimathea, and that people had gone and talked with them. However, the authenticity of this source has long been questioned and it is likewise possible that this was a reference to one of Jesus’ activities during his earthly ministry.

Given the presence of phenomenological language used in a symbolic manner in both Jewish and Roman literature related to a major event such as the death of an emperor or the end of a reigning king or even a kingdom, the presence of ambiguity in the relevant text of Ignatius, and that so very little can be known about Thallus’s comment on the darkness (including whether he was even referring to the darkness at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion or, if so, if he was merely speculating pertaining to a natural cause of the darkness claimed by the early Christians), it seems to me that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52-53 as poetic is most plausible. There is further support for a poetic interpretation. If the tombs opened and the saints being raised upon Jesus’ death was not strange enough, Matthew adds that they did not come out of their tombs until *after* Jesus’ resurrection. What were they doing between Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning? Were they standing in the now open doorways of their tombs and waiting?<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Mark 15:33; Matthew 27:45; Luke 23:44-45. For Thallus, see “The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus” (18.1) in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, Logos Libronix ECF 1.6.2.1.3.25).

<sup>289</sup> For references on destructive earthquakes in the Greco-Roman world, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.47, 4.13, 55; 12.43, 58; 14.27, 15.22; Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*, Augustus 47, Tiberius 8, 48, 74, Caligula 37, Claudias 22, Nero 20, 48, Galba 18, Vespasian 17; Jos. *Ant.* 15:121-22, 142; *War* 1:370-3, 377-8; 380-1; 4:285-7.

<sup>290</sup> Crossan (1995), 195; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.

Even if we regard Matthew's report of the six phenomena that occurred after Jesus' death as a poetic device, something which Crossan grants, Crossan's hypothesis that Matthew was thinking of the harrowing of hell is not necessarily supported.<sup>291</sup> Since Virgil before him and Dio Cassius afterward use a similar device, Matthew may simply be emphasizing that a great king has died. If he has one or more of the Jewish texts in mind, he may be proclaiming that the day of the Lord has come. God has once again turned his back on Israel in judgment for their disobedience and has left them for even greater punishment which would be realized in the very near future. Moreover, Crossan and Borg themselves note a major difference from the harrowing of hell in Matthew 27:52-53: "The saints are liberated by God's earthquake, not Jesus's presence, and they do not appear with him in resurrection, but only without him after his resurrection."<sup>292</sup> They suggest that Matthew is making a difficult attempt to fit the harrowing of hell into the resurrection narrative he had borrowed from Mark.<sup>293</sup> However, given the absence of any evidence of reasonable strength for the harrowing of hell theme in the earliest Christian literature, this may be a bit of a strain.<sup>294</sup> It seems best to regard this difficult text in Matthew as a poetic device added to communicate that the Son of God had died and that impending judgment awaits Israel.

If some or all of the phenomena reported at Jesus' death are poetic devices, we may rightly ask whether Jesus' resurrection is not more of the same. At least two observations prove helpful in providing an answer. As previously stated regarding metaphor, there is no indication that the early Christians interpreted Jesus' resurrection in a metaphorical or poetic sense to the exclusion of it being a literal event that had occurred to his corpse. Indeed, that a literal bodily resurrection was the primary intended interpretation seems clear. Moreover, if Jesus' resurrection was meant to be interpreted as a poetic metaphor, why is it that no known Christian opponent criticized the early Christians or their opponents for misunderstanding poetry as history? Why was there no known correction from any of the early Christian leaders to this effect? The early opponents proposed that Jesus survived death, his body was stolen, the witnesses were unreliable, and that the disciples hallucinated. These are all answers to claims of a literal bodily resurrection. Accordingly, interpreting the phenomena at Jesus' death as poetry does not lend support to interpreting Jesus' bodily resurrection as nothing more than a poetic or symbolic device.

### 5.5.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Crossan's hypothesis (CsH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation.

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<sup>291</sup> Crossan (1995), 220; Borg and Crossan (2006), 148, 150.

<sup>292</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.

<sup>293</sup> Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.

<sup>294</sup> The authenticity of the text has also been questioned. Evans in Stewart, ed. (2006) denies that the short passage in Matt. 27:51b-52b "has any claim to authenticity" and believes that it may be a "late-first or early-second-century scribal gloss" that attempts "to justify the Easter appearances of Jesus as resurrection, in the sense that Jesus and several other saints were the 'first fruits' of the general resurrection" as Paul understood Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:23 (195).



- 1) *Explanatory Scope.* CsH nicely accounts for all of the historical bedrock we have identified. It grants Jesus' death by crucifixion and accounts for the experiences and beliefs of Paul and the disciples as psychological phenomena and/or exegetical interpretations. Therefore, CsH passes this criterion and matches GH and LH in this area.
- 2) *Explanatory Power.* Similar to GH and LH, CsH pushes Paul's conversion experience in order to make it fit. Crossan proposes that Paul's vision occurred while in a trance and provides supporting arguments from psychology that explain how trances may occur when brain chemistry is altered. Cultural training and expectation are responsible for the content of the experience. Since Paul would have been familiar with the beliefs of the early Christians, Crossan thinks that Paul's vision while in a trance is responsible for abandoning his present convictions and promoting precisely what he had so vehemently opposed. Yet, it is precisely because of his cultural training and expectations pertaining to God, his favor of Judaism, and his cursing of Jesus who was rightfully executed by being hung on a tree that we would have expected the content of Paul's vision to have opposed rather than supported the Christian view. Crossan provides no reasons for why Paul's vision would have altered his view of the Christians and their beliefs.

Crossan contends that the appearances in the resurrection narratives are "profoundly political" and "have nothing whatsoever to do with ecstatic experiences or entranced revelations," but are instead interested in "authority, power, leadership, and priority." He notes the awkward syntax of Luke 24:33-35, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon," arguing that it is deliberate in order to inform the others that "Peter's witness preempts theirs." However, as previously discussed, many scholars explain the awkward syntax by identifying the statement as belonging to oral tradition: the hint that it is foreign to the narrative and the hint of Christological interest.<sup>295</sup> Oral tradition fits more nicely as an explanation than Crossan's proposal that an awkward syntax was introduced deliberately in order to flag Peter's authority as taking priority over that belonging to the community. We may note several places where differing syntax results from the inclusion of oral tradition but we do not observe it occurring elsewhere in the sense Crossan proposes.<sup>296</sup> And we may ask why Luke did not simply narrate an appearance to Peter if he was attempting to emphasize Peter's authority. Further reasons for rejecting Crossan's proposal that the appearances were meant to legitimize Church authority have been previously discussed.<sup>297</sup>

Carl Braaten writes,

We have seen that despite the form-critical consensus that the whole of the New Testament is written from the perspective of the resurrection, such non-biblical factors as a naturalistic view of history and an existentialist concept of faith have intervened to obstruct the path from exegesis to dogmatics, so that theologians will *freely invent*

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<sup>295</sup> See chapter 3.2.3.4.b.

<sup>296</sup> 1 Cor. 15:3-7; Rom. 1:3b-4; 1 Tim. 3:16.

<sup>297</sup> See chapter 4.3.2.2.

*interpretations that run counter to the plain sense of what is written in the New Testament and conveyed by the apostolic tradition.*<sup>298</sup>

Wedderburn takes an approach similar to Crossan, proposing that *resurrection* was “just a vivid way of expressing the power and the vitality of these experiences.”<sup>299</sup> However, unlike Crossan, he admits that his interpretation “goes beyond anything that any of the New Testament writers actually say, however much I may take them as a starting-point. Indeed they may at many points contradict my arguments.”<sup>300</sup> Crossan, however, appears clueless to this weakness in his own work.

Although the harrowing of hell is what most strongly persuades Crossan to go with metaphor, it is nowhere to be found in our earliest known sources. Crossan musters support by assigning a *possible* interpretation to a mid-second century text, an interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18 that goes against the emerging consensus (plausibility), and the strange text in Matthew 27:52-53 for which not only is a superior interpretation available, but if interpreted as Crossan does, has Matthew contradicting himself pertaining to his rendition of Jesus’ resurrection. CsH is severely lacking in explanatory power and certainly trails VH in this regard.

- 3) *Plausibility*. Is CsH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? Crossan’s portrait of the historical Jesus relies very heavily upon a chancy use of numerous sources regarded as late, of dubious value, and even nonexistent by a large majority of scholars. Crossan bases his reconstruction of the earliest resurrection narrative on a hypothetical source he dates before Paul (despite the fact that it is far more extraordinary than multiple sources he regards as later) and that has been redacted and may be detected most accurately in a single source of uncertain origin and character and which is partially preserved in only a single late manuscript. While scholars must remain open to new ways of approaching a variety of issues, Crossan’s approach is unsound given our discussion of sources in chapter three. We must always keep in mind that *possible* is not interchangeable with *probable*. CsH is less plausible than VH.
- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. Although CsH *a priori* excludes an interventionist view of God (i.e., theism), Crossan provides a defense of his worldview and, thus, does not fall prey to an *ad hoc* component in this respect. However, CsH employs psychohistory, which is purely conjectural. Since CsH lacks an explanation for how Paul’s “entranced revelation” came to have its pro-Christian content, one

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<sup>298</sup> Braaten (1999), 149, ital. mine. See also Caird (1980): “Literary critics have wisely warned us against the intentional fallacy, the error of supposing that a writer meant something other than he has actually written” (61). Craffert and Botha (2003) criticize Crossan’s approach: “[I]f our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic?” (20-21).

<sup>299</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 147-48.

<sup>300</sup> Wedderburn (1999), 103-04. Wedderburn sees himself as exercising similar freedoms taken by the early Church fathers. It is remarkable, then, that he even criticizes McDonald for taking the very same liberty. In his assessment of McDonald’s interpretation of the experience of the Emmaus disciples, which bears similarities with Crossan’s, he writes, “This sounds impressive, but on sober reflection one is left with the suspicion that the author’s rhetoric has taken flight away from the text and has left the evangelist himself far behind” (255n66).

senses the presence of a *fudge factor* that can be manipulated however one desires in order to gain a lot of leeway. His appeal that second-century *Peter* made use of a hypothetical *Cross Gospel* is without a scrap of external support and lacks solid internal evidence. While Crossan assigns many of the *Thomas* logia a date that predates the canonical Gospels, contending that the former are less extraordinary and less theologically adorned, he ignores the same principle when it comes to *Peter* for which CsH is almost completely dependent. One senses in this arbitrary use of method that either a salvage operation is taking place or Crossan is taking a dream vacation where he is free from the requirements of sober historiography.<sup>301</sup> The *ad hoc* quality of CsH is quite strong. It is certainly more *ad hoc* than VH and perhaps even more so than GH and LH. It, thus, fails this criterion.

- 5) *Illumination*. If true, CsH provides illumination pertaining to the extent that the ancients could create purely symbolic stories which they cast as historical events. Accordingly, CsH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, CsH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). It is important to observe that CsH passes only one of the four most important criteria.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P

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<sup>301</sup> Johnson (1996) refers to Crossan’s approach as “flights of fancy rather than sober historiography” (100); Perkins (2007): is founded on “a very thin collection of actual textual evidence and a great deal of speculative reconstruction” (125); Wright (2003): they are “based on nothing more than elaborate guesswork. We simply do not know very much about the early church, and certainly not enough to make the kind of guesses that are on offer in this area. When tradition-historical study (the examination of hypothetical stages by which the written gospels came into existence) builds castles in the air, the ordinary historian need not feel a second-class citizen for refusing to rent space in them” (19; cf. 20).

## 5.6. Pieter F. Craffert

### 5.6.1. Description of Craffert's View.

**5.6.1.1. Introductory Comments.** Pieter Craffert is a professor at the University of South Africa and employs the social sciences perhaps more than any of the others we have assessed. He asserts that the state of historical Jesus research primarily involves two basic traditional approaches. The first approach understands the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event. Craffert sees four problems with this view. Members of this camp are guilty of circular reasoning: The resurrection narratives serve as proof for the unique eschatological event of Jesus' resurrection and, thus, can be trusted.<sup>302</sup> Second, historical method becomes a moot act if it is assumed that God can intervene whenever he desires and do whatever he wants and that some can experience authentic revelations not readily observed by others.<sup>303</sup> But Craffert's two major objections are ethical and theological in nature. In the presence of abundant parallels in the modern world and antiquity, it is morally wrong to claim that the Christian traditions about Jesus' resurrection are historically accurate while miracle traditions in other religions are not. "It is not against the acceptance of supernaturalism as such, but against the special pleading for the one instance in history."<sup>304</sup> The theological objection concerns the fact that historians must employ their worldview when adjudicating on the historicity of a miracle claim. What one thinks about Jesus heavily depends upon what one thinks about God.<sup>305</sup> Theist Christian historians will tend to regard the Gospel reports as historical while historians who are atheists will not.

The other traditional approach understands the reports of Jesus' resurrection as a literary creation.<sup>306</sup> Craffert and co-author Pieter J. J. Botha ask whether an approach as offered by Crossan (i.e., the resurrection is a parable) is equally valid to or more plausible than other approaches.

Asked differently, if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic? Cultural sensitivity not only invites all sorts of possibilities, but also makes some possibilities plausible—especially when considered within the setting of cultural realities.<sup>307</sup>

Craffert likewise applies his ethical and theological objections to those in this camp. He views those scholars on the left who write off the biblical stories "merely as mythological creations or creedal statements" as being equally disrespectful to "those people for whom the stories were part of reality."<sup>308</sup> Theologically, he accuses members of the New Quest of being guided by a metaphysics that *a priori* excludes

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<sup>302</sup> Craffert (1989), 334.

<sup>303</sup> Craffert (2002), 97.

<sup>304</sup> Craffert (2003), 367, also 366; cf. Craffert (1989), 342; Craffert and Botha (2005), 21. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18 and Lindars (1986), 91.

<sup>305</sup> Craffert (2003), 367; Craffert and Botha (2005), 21.

<sup>306</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.

<sup>307</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.

<sup>308</sup> Craffert (2003), 368.

the possibility of God revealing himself in Jesus who was a miracle-worker and who rose from the dead.<sup>309</sup>

Craffert recognizes that the major factor influencing conclusions in the debate over Jesus' resurrection concerns worldview.

[L]et us set the record straight that the real issue in historical Jesus research is not about textual evidence (or the lack of evidence) about these aspects. How many early texts do you need to confirm Jesus' virginal birth or resurrection? The real issue is philosophical in nature, or if you like, about world-views and perceptions of reality.<sup>310</sup>

Consequently, as in most other areas of historical Jesus research, current scholarship is divided in their conclusions pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. It either assumes that a supernatural event occurred or that the narratives were invented creating symbols for a reality that did not include a divine miracle.<sup>311</sup> According to Craffert, both of the traditional approaches just discussed share in common a lack of attention to cultural events. Their approach is the same but they differ pertaining to whether one believes that a supernatural event has occurred involving Jesus.<sup>312</sup>

Craffert proposes a different approach: the social scientific approach with a postmodernist view of history. This approach

tries to avoid the application of modernist criteria of what is real, to all other people and stories. It strives to be post-modernist in that it accepts that there is more than one cultural system or view of reality. . . . In fact, it radically takes seriously the insight that *reality* is a systems phenomenon. Within this perspective, the elements of the stories lose their *mysterious* or *supernatural* character or their exotic flavour when it is realised that they properly belong in a different cultural system. They become *natural* human phenomena in specific cultural systems which can be appreciated as such.<sup>313</sup>

The new historiography is part of the intellectual movement or new consciousness in Western thinking which is broadly speaking known as post modernism. It is, on the one hand, characterised by a reaction against ontological monism and, on the other hand, a defence of multiple world-views. . . . Opposed to the acceptance of a fixed register of reality, this implies the acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism<sup>314</sup>. . . . On the other hand, it accepts that each world-view is an expression of reality and therefore, that more than one world-view or view of reality is valid.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Craffert (1989), 342; Craffert (2002), 100; Craffert (2003), 366.

<sup>310</sup> Craffert (2003), 365; cf. Craffert (2002), 95, 97; Craffert (1989), 343, 337; Habermas in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 126.

<sup>311</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 19.

<sup>312</sup> Craffert (2003), 343.

<sup>313</sup> Craffert (2003), 369.

<sup>314</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 13.

<sup>315</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.



Craffert and Botha describe *cultural realities*. Some things exist ontologically but only because there is widespread agreement on the matter within human institutions. *Cultural realities* cannot be captured with language that merely describes their physical and chemical makeup. One cannot use physical and chemical descriptions to provide an adequate description of a restaurant, waiter, and table, a marriage, the government, soul flights by shamans, or demon possession. One must include meanings imported by the cultural context in which they appear.<sup>316</sup> Money exists in two senses. Observer-independent qualities include its physical and chemical makeup (e.g., colored paper and/or small metal objects that are perhaps flat and round) while observer-dependent qualities include the value, meaning, and roles assigned them by individuals or institutions (e.g., a paper \$10 USD is worth more than a paper \$1 USD or a metal Euro).<sup>317</sup> “The most important implication following from this is that events or phenomena can be real without being ‘out there.’”<sup>318</sup>

Turning to the Gospels, Craffert and Botha assert

Of the events reported in the gospels and ascribed to the life of Jesus, a very large part consists of *cultural events* which are being experienced and which belonged to their specific cultural system (they, therefore, are objectively there without being ontologically objective—they cannot be photographed or analyzed by physical or chemical analyses). Treating such events and phenomena as if they belong to the category of hard biographical data is an instance of what is called the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.<sup>319</sup>

In order to conduct a responsible historical investigation, historians must be able to view the reported events both from the perspective of those in the ancient context in which it appears as well as in their own modern context. In an investigation pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, Craffert contends that historians must determine what the subjects claimed or thought had occurred then compare those with their own experience in modern culture. In this manner, historians may do justice to their sources while attempting to provide an “adequate interpretation” of the event.<sup>320</sup> However, since there are multiple realities allowed within a postmodern approach, determining what actually occurred (i.e., the traditional understanding of historicity) becomes “highly complex” and “problematic,” since multiple conclusions will always be present. Consequently, future discussions of historicity must involve “cultural dialogue, negotiation and criticism.”<sup>321</sup>

In Craffert’s approach, he claims to be less interested in determining whether a reported event occurred as he is in trying “to understand what could possibly have happened.” For this he does not operate by the principle that historians “should remain free of preconceptions and assumptions” and merely paint a portrait of the past

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<sup>316</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 16; cf. 19.

<sup>317</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 15.

<sup>318</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 17; cf. 15.

<sup>319</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.

<sup>320</sup> Craffert (1989), 338, 343; Craffert (2003), 369.

<sup>321</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 18.

based on facts that were mined from the literature.<sup>322</sup> Instead he will employ the principle of analogy.<sup>323</sup>

### 5.6.1.2. Case Study: Jesus' Walking on Water

Craffert and Botha provide an example of his approach applied to Jesus' walking on water. In agreement with Bruce J. Malina, they see a few things going on in this nature miracle.<sup>324</sup> It was nighttime, the disciples were exhausted, sleep-deprived, and afraid in the storm. They entered an Altered State of Consciousness or ASC, which resulted in a collective vision with "somatic, visual and auditory elements": They saw Jesus walking on water. This collective vision made sense to them given similar stories in their era where Yahwah walked on and trampled the sea (Hab 3:15) and Poseidon (Lat. Neptune) traveled across the sea on his sea creatures.<sup>325</sup> Moreover, there are "a number of heroes in the Greco-Roman literature who were associated with sea-walking while the idea is also found in literature on dream interpretation."<sup>326</sup>

Craffert asserts that from a modern perspective the experiences of the disciples *seeing* Jesus walk on water were observer dependent. He interprets them occurring within an ASC. Craffert and Botha think it "very probable" that the disciples experienced a vision they believed was Jesus walking on the Sea.<sup>327</sup> The cultural event occurred, that is, they had a vision they interpreted according to their horizon or religious system. They accepted this event as part of reality but from Craffert's post-modern perspective, the interpretation of the disciples may not be preferred. "[O]ntologically subjective experiences need not be taken as evidence for ontologically objective events. . . . [an] ASC experience within such a cultural setting as that of the first-century Mediterranean world need not be read as a report about someone actually walking on H<sub>2</sub>O on the Sea of Galilee. A culturally sensitive reading does not exclude cross-cultural dialogue and criticism."<sup>328</sup> In other words, one does not stop with what the disciples believed about the experience, but interprets what occurred within the framework of their own worldview. Of most importance, however, is not whether this suggestion is actually correct, but that the door has been opened to encourage additional possibilities for describing events in the Gospels via the social scientific method.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Craffert (1989), 337.

<sup>323</sup> Craffert (1989), 343.

<sup>324</sup> B. J. Malina, "Assessing the historicity of Jesus' walking on the sea: Insights from cross-cultural social psychology" in Chilton and Evans (1999), 351-71.

<sup>325</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 9-10. For this example they rely on the work of Cotter (1998), 148-63.

<sup>326</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 10-11.

<sup>327</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 19.

<sup>328</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 19-20. Borg and Crossan (2006) appear to be in agreement (207).

<sup>329</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 11; cf. Craffert (1989), 344n4. Although I have a strong suspicion—perhaps unwarranted—that by ASC Craffert and Botha are thinking of a natural psychological disorder such as a hallucination or delusion, I desire not to read more into their words than may be intended. After all, they may personally believe this was the nature of the ASCs but are being commendably reserved in their judgment. I will proceed as though they would qualify as an ASC a vision in which the ontological Jesus appeared but in which no one other than the person experiencing the vision could see. Also see Borg and Crossan (2006): "it is important to emphasize that not all visions are hallucinations. They can be disclosures of reality" (207).

### 5.6.1.3. Social Scientific Approach Applied to the Resurrection of Jesus

Craffert asserts that the social scientific approach rejects the claim that the early resurrection faith originated from the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and seeks “to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated.”<sup>330</sup> Given their first-century worldview, what did the early Christians mean when they claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead?<sup>331</sup>

For those living in the ancient Mediterranean world, “visions, dreams, apparitions and the like” were “typical and normal” experiences which they regarded as “literal and real.” The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus “belong to these phenomena.” When the disciples saw the body of the risen Jesus in a vision they believed “they were experiencing reality,” even though that reality did not require a transformation of Jesus’ corpse.<sup>332</sup>

Since Craffert’s goal is “to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated,”<sup>333</sup> the portrayal of Jesus in the resurrection narratives as eating with his disciples and being touched by them presents a challenge to which he answers:

Human brains do not need external stimuli in order to create physical or material visionary bodies. Therefore, the fact that his followers could identify him and that they experienced him in bodily form as eating, speaking and walking is no argument in favour of any physical, material body.<sup>334</sup>

Although the early Christians interpreted their experiences of the risen Jesus as viewer-independent ontological events where the bodily raised Jesus appeared and conversed with them, modern scholars may view them as ASC experiences. This complicates answering the historicity question: Did the resurrection of Jesus actually occur?

[The answer] hinges on the ‘it’ in the question: ‘did **it** actually happen’? If the ‘it’ (e.g. a vision) is taken in its ancient setting, the answer can be, yes, it actually happened! But it can also be taken in a comparative setting (for example, as an ASC experience), and the answer can also be, yes, it actually happened! If the ‘it’ is taken in a sense of misplaced concreteness—as a reference to a *supernatural event*, the answer should be no, as no such an event is being reported!<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Craffert (1989), 340; cf. Craffert (2002), 90.

<sup>331</sup> Craffert (1989), 339-40.

<sup>332</sup> Craffert (2002), 98, 99-100.

<sup>333</sup> Craffert (1989), 340; cf. Craffert (2002), 90.

<sup>334</sup> Craffert (2002), 101; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006): “visions can involve not only seeing (apparition) and hearing (audition), but even a tactile dimension, as dreams sometimes do. Thus a story in which Jesus invites his followers to touch him or is seen to eat does not intrinsically point away from a vision” (207).

<sup>335</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19, bold and italics in original.

Craffert contends that his proposal does “justice to the literal meaning of the sources within their own cultural system, but also has the support of research in the neurosciences and transpersonal anthropology.”<sup>336</sup> It is, therefore, “cross-cultural.”

#### A Summary of Craffert’s Hypothesis (CfH)

- CfH is postmodern, which accepts the validity of “multiple realities” and “radical pluralism.”<sup>337</sup>
- Events and objects have two qualities: Viewer-independent qualities can be described in physical and chemical terms while viewer-dependent qualities are infused by the culture. A tree may be described in biological terms (i.e., viewer-independent) or it may be described as a *shelter* (i.e., viewer-dependent). Both qualities are present when an event is experienced. Thus, it is a “cultural event” and, thus, natural. Historians must be able to distinguish between viewer-independent and viewer-dependent qualities.
- Historians need to be fully cognizant of how the ancient subjects interpreted events as they explain the same events from the perspective of modern culture.
- The disciples were in an altered state of consciousness (ASC) when they experienced an appearance to them of the risen Jesus. For those living in that culture, visions and dreams (ASCs) were normal events that were regarded as real. Thus, when they experienced Jesus appearing to them in a subjective vision, they judged it as an ontological appearance of a physical Jesus, although Jesus’ corpse still lay in the grave.
- The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus occurred, not in an ontologically objective sense as the Gospels are typically interpreted as portraying, but in a subjective sense. They believed strongly that Jesus had appeared to them in an ontologically subjective sense, that is, in a vision. It was real but incapable of being captured by a video camera.<sup>338</sup>
- Did the resurrection of Jesus actually occur? If we regard the appearances of Jesus as visions that were subjective (i.e., viewer-dependent) experiences with or without an ontological reality, we may answer in the affirmative. If we regard the appearances of Jesus as visions that were objective (i.e., viewer-independent) experiences with an ontological reality, we must answer in the negative.
- CfH should be preferred, since it honors the integrity of the texts and the beliefs of the ancients while drawing upon the social sciences for modern insights pertaining to the nature of the events.

#### 5.6.2. Analysis and Concerns

Craffert provides a proposal unique among the six we are assessing. He combines a postmodern element with a use of the social sciences. Drawing on the work of John Pilch, Craffert provides a fresh look at Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.<sup>339</sup> Even in critique, Philip H. Wiebe acknowledges that Pilch has offered new challenges pertaining to identifying the nature of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances that are

<sup>336</sup> Craffert (2002), 97.

<sup>337</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 13, 14.

<sup>338</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.

<sup>339</sup> Pilch (“Appearances,” 1998).

not fully resolved.<sup>340</sup> Thus, we are indebted to Craffert for his work on the subject. Nonetheless, there are a number of concerns we must address prior to weighing CfH.

### 5.6.2.1. ‘Straw Man’ Argument

Craffert is guilty of employing a ‘straw man’ argument. He charges traditionalists of being guilty of circular reasoning: The resurrection narratives serve as proof for the unique eschatological event of Jesus’ resurrection and, thus, can be trusted.<sup>341</sup> I am unaware of any scholar arguing in this manner in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While a number of conservative Christian scholars embrace a methodical credulity toward the New Testament literature, they do not argue for the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection in the manner suggested by Craffert. However, this misstep has no impact on Craffert’s overall arguments and conclusions. So, we may move along without further comment.

### 5.6.2.2. Postmodernism

Craffert’s appeal to a postmodern approach to history is troublesome. Although this approach may be somewhat new to biblical scholars, it is not new to historians outside of the community of biblical scholars. As noted earlier (1.2.7), debates over realist and postmodern approaches to historical research have been debated among philosophers of history throughout the past few decades, resulting in the overwhelming majority of historians identifying themselves as realists. Unfortunately, as noted in the Introduction, few biblical scholars have had any formal training in the philosophy of history and historical method or show evidence in their bibliographies of a familiarity with the literature on these subjects by professional historians. As a result, they often find themselves entering debates on these issues long after similar debates have occurred among historians outside the community of biblical scholars.

Craffert is obviously not a radical postmodernist who denies a past, any hopes of knowing it, or the truth about events. Consequently, his hypothesis does not suffer from all of the problems inherent in such a position.<sup>342</sup> In fact, although Craffert’s language is very postmodern, he is somewhat modernist in his practice. This creates inconsistencies. For example, he promotes the “acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism,” asserting that “more than one world-view or view of reality is valid.”<sup>343</sup> But it is a select “radical pluralism,” since it *a priori* excludes hypotheses including supernatural events.<sup>344</sup> Thus, in practice, Craffert does not acknowledge multiple realities but rather multiple ways of understanding an experience. Realist historians readily grant that much.

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<sup>340</sup> P. H. Wiebe, “Altered States of Consciousness and New Testament Interpretation of Post-Resurrection Appearances,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* (2001). This article may be accessed online at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/4-4.htm>. No page numbers are provided.

<sup>341</sup> Craffert (1989), 334. This is his first objection against those who interpret Jesus’ resurrection as a historical event.

<sup>342</sup> See chapter 1.2.7.

<sup>343</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.

<sup>344</sup> Craffert (2003), 369; Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19.



He claims that his proposal “radically takes seriously the insight that *reality* is a systems phenomenon.”<sup>345</sup> This, too, bespeaks of postmodern thought. I am in agreement to an extent that reality may be classified as a “systems phenomenon,” if we limit that reality to *viewer-dependent* events. However, it is not the same with *viewer-independent* events. One who creates ontological reality is divine. When humans think they can, they are deluded.

### 5.6.2.3. Naturalistic Bias

Craffert’s social scientific approach *a priori* requires a natural explanation and excludes those that are supernatural. Because historical facts are not vacuous of interpretation,

[W]e are forced to set up hypotheses based upon assumptions and knowledge about human behaviour to interpret the data. . . . [T]hat forces us to accept that when the origins of resurrection faith are being considered, we are dealing with some kind of human construction. No attempt at explaining the origins of resurrection faith is without these two aspects.<sup>346</sup>

The question we may ask is *whose assumptions and knowledge* about human behavior are we to use for interpreting the data? Must we settle for psychohistories, such as those proposed by Goulder and Lüdemann, that are conjectures composed of compounded speculations without any direct evidence and are often built upon a foundation of metaphysical naturalism?<sup>347</sup> Historians are not chained to using a psychology that is stacked against the supernatural in order to obtain purely natural conclusions in their historical work.<sup>348</sup> They need to go beyond psychological conjectures and employ method carefully.

In critique of Crossan, Craffert and Botha ask “if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic?”<sup>349</sup> We agree but rephrase the question slightly and ask Craffert “if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which stories employing naturalistic conjectures can be told about any topic?” In requiring a natural explanation, Craffert’s approach does precisely what he and Botha chide Crossan of doing. However, given Craffert’s objections to entertaining a miracle hypothesis, the end result will always be the same: a natural explanation.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Craffert (2003), 369.

<sup>346</sup> Craffert (1989), 333.

<sup>347</sup> Johnson (1996) reminds us of our observations pertaining to GH and LH: Explanations provided using the social sciences “are sometimes suggestive but rarely probative” (42).

<sup>348</sup> Craffert (2003) asserts that when *reality* is regarded as a systems phenomenon, “the elements of the stories lose their . . . supernatural character . . . [and] become *natural* human phenomena” (369). In terms of the disciples’ encounters of the risen Jesus, I agree that the *seeing*, whether ocular or hallucinatory, is natural. However, if the resurrected Jesus appeared to them in an objective reality, that changes things. If within an ordinary state of consciousness they touched an ontologically physical Jesus, it was a natural action applied to a physical but supernatural being. Craffert’s attempt to exclude this possibility is nothing more than a bias against such an interpretation.

<sup>349</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.

<sup>350</sup> The ethical and theological objections discussed below in section 5.6.2.5.

In the 2006 theme issue of *History and Theory* that focused on “Religion and History,” Brad Gregory objects to a traditional (i.e., religious) confessional history because it “often privileges and seeks sympathetically to understand a given tradition at the expense of explaining others in reductionist terms.”<sup>351</sup> He goes on to note that recent historians of Christianity

have turned to theories of religion drawn from the modern social sciences (most often sociology, anthropology, or psychology) or the humanities (sometimes philosophy, and more recently, literary criticism or cultural theory), in an effort to treat all traditions with even-handed neutrality. Yet at the same time, however well-intentioned, this move is deeply problematic: the means and the end are mismatched, most fundamentally because the assumptions embedded in such theories are almost never impartial or neutral with respect to religion as such, however unprejudiced they might be with respect to any particular religious tradition. The result is not a neutral or objective account of what religion really is, still less a means by which to understand what religion means to its believer-practitioners. Rather, the results yield *differently* biased accounts that reflect the secular assumptions underpinning the theories.<sup>352</sup>

Gregory goes on to refer to a “*secular confessional history*” that is simply an antithesis of the old *traditional confessional history*. Historians abiding by it “leave no room for the *reality* of the content of religious claims . . . Consequently, spirituality, for example, can only be approached through secular psychological categories. . . . Put bluntly, the underlying beliefs of the modern social sciences and humanities are metaphysically naturalist and culturally relativist, and consequently contend that religion is *and can only be* a human construction.”<sup>353</sup> In the end, Gregory writes, “It seems incumbent on scholars of religion to proceed as if the religious beliefs of their subjects might be true, a possibility that a metaphysically neutral methodology leaves open.”<sup>354</sup>

Craffert refers to the principle of analogy as “one of the basic principles of all social scientific study.”<sup>355</sup> It implies that *ad hoc* divine interventions in nature that produce events with special historical significance do not occur. We apply what we experience in the present as a guide to understanding the past. Because we do not allow excuses such as ‘The Devil made me do it’ in the present, we also do not grant the validity of similar claims in ancient sources.<sup>356</sup> He acknowledges that “this blade cuts both ways. Thus the question is not whether, but on what grounds, certain possibilities are excluded or included. The standards of everyday life are an indispensable criterion for a historian to a priori exclude certain possibilities. For that reason the historical study of the New Testament will have to include a debate on 20<sup>th</sup> century world-views.”<sup>357</sup> Since we have already discussed a few of the more serious

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<sup>351</sup> Gregory, “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion” (2006), 135.

<sup>352</sup> Gregory (2006), 136.

<sup>353</sup> Gregory (2006), 136-37. See Craffert (1989), 333.

<sup>354</sup> Gregory (2006), 147.

<sup>355</sup> Craffert (1989), 342.

<sup>356</sup> Craffert (1989), 342.

<sup>357</sup> Craffert (1989), 343.

drawbacks to an unqualified usage of the principle of analogy, here we can only affirm Craffert's observation that *worldview plays a large part when using analogy*.<sup>358</sup>

Craffert is concerned that historical method becomes a moot act if it is assumed that God can intervene whenever he desires and do whatever he wants and that some can experience authentic revelations not readily observed by others.<sup>359</sup> However, openness to the historicity of an ancient miracle claim does not necessarily render one credulous and susceptible to all sorts of superstition. Considerations of genre, the demand for quality evidence, and methodological controls are important for all claims to historicity. In principle, a historian of Jesus might conclude that the resurrection hypothesis warrants a judgment of historicity while simultaneously concluding that certain elements in the Gospel narratives were added as encomium or were created while knowing only the historical kernel that Jesus had healed a blind person.

#### 5.6.2.4. Altered State of Consciousness (ASC)

Although Craffert and Botha propose that an ASC can account for the 'cultural event' of Jesus' walking on water, a supernatural explanation can account equally well for the same event. The fact that it was nighttime and that the disciples were exhausted, sleep-deprived, and afraid in the storm could imply that they entered an ASC, but it could just as easily be suggested that their fear overcame their dullness of mind and their mental awareness reached an all-time heightened state when they saw Jesus walking on water. Realizing that all of them were seeing the same thing, they knew it was neither a dream nor a hallucination. This objective experience made sense to them given similar stories in their era where Yahweh walked on and trampled the sea (Hab. 3:15). They then came to have a greater understanding of who Jesus had been claiming to be: deity.

The point is that while the proposal that ASCs explain the 'cultural event' of Jesus' walk on the sea is one possible explanation, it is by no means required, since the incident can be explained as a 'cultural event' in different terms employing a different judgment pertaining to the ontological reality of what occurred. In fact, this latter explanation has the benefit of fulfilling the criterion of illumination, since it provides a reason for how the earliest Christians came to believe Jesus was divine, a question that has perplexed major scholars of Christology.<sup>360</sup>

Craffert and Botha differentiate between hard and soft biographical data:

Controlling the elements, experiencing spirit possession, controlling and commanding spirits, miraculous healings, special births and the like, are stories which make sense in many traditional cultural systems and particularly in a shamanic world-view. These can all be considered soft biographical features. Hard biographical information refers to the when, where and what of a social personage such as details of place and time of birth and death, parents, family members and friends, place of residence, occupation and, in so far as they can be determined, important specific events in a person's life which are observer independent. In a literate and bureaucratic society such information

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<sup>358</sup> See chapter 2.2.2.

<sup>359</sup> Craffert (2002), 97.

<sup>360</sup> See Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005), 205.

can normally be obtained by any interested party from documents such as birth-, christening- and death certificates, from educational reports and other documentary databases. Provided that a full record of data is available and collected, the same picture of hard biographical information can be drawn by any independent researcher by comparing sources, determining the most authentic and weeding out the corrupted documents.<sup>361</sup>

Hard biographical data pertains to legal documents and reports of somewhat mundane events. Soft biographical data pertains to descriptions of ‘cultural events.’ Craffert and Botha then make the following contention:

It is clear that in terms of the distinction between hard and soft biographical data, which exist in all cultural systems, that there never was any hard biographical evidence for Jesus’ walking on the water. The only evidence is of the soft biographical nature—that is, evidence from observer dependent reports about a real cultural event by the disciples. Unless the reports are misread for their cultural nature as if they were conveying hard biographical data, there is no evidence to claim that Jesus of Nazareth actually walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee. For this reason the position that it is an actual instance of a report about a supernatural event, need not be seriously entertained.<sup>362</sup>

When Craffert and Botha define Jesus’ stroll on the water as soft biographical data, they are claiming to know ahead of time that the event did not take place in space-time as reported. This, of course, is metaphysics, not history.

Craffert and Botha contend that their approach does more justice to the texts than Crossan’s *symbolic parable* hypothesis. While I am in agreement with them on that point, I will add that their contention that we should assume an event occurred when the text reports one can come back to haunt them. What are we to make of the other Gospel miracle stories? How are we to account for the feeding of the five thousand? Did Jesus hypnotize the crowd to believe they were eating and being filled? What about the turning of water into wine? Was this also the result of a hypnotic act on those present? How about the healing of the blind and the lepers? Were they also

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<sup>361</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.

<sup>362</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 21. In support of viewing Jesus’ walk on the sea as a cultural event, they cite the work of Cotter (1998) as providing a number of examples of others walking on water. However, Cotter states that, of all the reports, walking on the sea belongs only to the Jewish God (160). Poseidon rides across the sea atop his sea-beasts (Homer, *Iliad* 13.27-29). This idea that Poseidon rides across the sea appears to have been widely known in antiquity. Xerxes (486-465 BC) and Caligula (c. AD 39) built bridges across a large body of water in order to cross as a deity (see Cotter [1998], 155-59). Caligula sought to outdo Xerxes, building a bridge of about 3.5 Roman miles or just under 3.5 modern miles (158). On Xerxes, see Dio Chrysostom, *Third Discourse on Kingship* 30-31. For Caligula, see Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, Gaius Caligula, and Josephus, *Ant.* 19:6. In addition to Cotter’s examples, we may add Homer’s deity Erichthonius who runs over water or overtop a cornfield (Homer, *Iliad* 20.226). Lucian refers to this example as poetry (*How to Write History* 8). In respect to interpretations of dreams involving walking on water, the lone example is provided by Artemidorus. The interpretations appear arbitrary. For example, if a man dreams of walking on water prior to sailing, his safety is being foretold. If a man is involved in a lawsuit, he will win if he dreams of walking on water. If a woman dreams of walking on water, she will live her life as a prostitute (Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 3.16). In no known case did the one dreaming believe he or she had actually walked on water.

hypnotized or healed psychosomatically? If the group of disciples experienced a collective hallucination of Jesus walking on water, what did Jesus himself think of the event? Was he there and did he inform them that he had been in the boat the whole time? Did he later inform them that he was never there or allow his followers to believe that he was? Especially problematic is Jesus' raising of the dead: Lazarus, the widow's son, and Jairus's daughter. Did Jesus place his followers in a trance in order to convince them that he was raising Lazarus? And what happened to Lazarus? Is the Lazarus in John 12 the same person who had died in John 11? If so, how did Lazarus and his family come to believe he was dead prior to Jesus' arrival? Or did Jesus convince someone to pose as Lazarus after the event, subsequently convince everyone else that the poser was Lazarus, and arrange for the corpse to be stolen? Jesus becomes an extraordinary hypnotist, magician, and imposter who surrounded himself with thousands of amazingly gullible folk.

The ASC hypothesis of Craffert and Botha asks too much of us. It seems much easier to propose, if one wishes to be skeptical that supernatural events occurred, that the stories were urban legends that quickly developed, were redacted with theological spins, and were then passed along to others.

#### 5.6.2.5. The Appearances

Although the concept of resurrection in the first century is debatable, the more important question concerns how the earliest Christians interpreted *resurrection*. Craffert himself agrees and adds that historians must do justice to their sources in the process.<sup>363</sup> He contends that the concept of *resurrection* did not necessarily involve a corpse.<sup>364</sup>

Human brains do not need external stimuli in order to create physical or material visionary bodies. Therefore, the fact that his followers could identify him and that they experienced him in bodily form as eating, speaking and walking is no argument in favour of any physical, material body.<sup>365</sup>

Craffert and Botha go even further. They accuse those holding that Jesus' post-resurrection bodily appearances could have been photographed of committing the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*, since the Gospels are not even reporting an event of such nature.<sup>366</sup>

We might agree with Craffert if only some appearances to individuals had been reported. In that case, enough ambiguity is present. That there are numerous group appearances, not only in the resurrection narratives but also in the *keryma* preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, is damaging to Craffert's proposal. And we need not forget that the resurrection narratives likewise tell of an empty tomb from which Jesus' corpse went missing. Can Craffert present any credible reports of a group of individuals all of whom were convinced they were at the same time engaged in mutually interactive activities such as speaking with, eating with, walking with, and touching an individual who is not actually there in an ontologically objective sense?

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<sup>363</sup> Craffert (1989), 338.

<sup>364</sup> Craffert (2002), 98.

<sup>365</sup> Craffert (2002), 101.

<sup>366</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 17, 18-19.



The resurrection narratives and Paul are unquestionably more at home with a bodily resurrection involving a corpse than an ASC. Craffert does not do justice to the texts as he imagines.

Craffert contends that Pilch “has shown that the appearances of the resurrected Jesus can be seen as typical and normal experiences in alternate states of consciousness [ASC]. Within the cultural system of the ancient Mediterranean world, it was customary and common to have visionary experiences of a variety of kinds. The experiences of Jesus after his death belong to these phenomena.”<sup>367</sup>

In reply to Pilch, Wiebe examined more than thirty reports of ASC experiences he received from those who had experienced them.<sup>368</sup> He compares them with OSC experiences (ordinary state of consciousness), listing ten qualities that are typically though not always absent in an ASC. The probability increases that the experience is an OSC as more of the following qualities are fulfilled:

1. Objects disappear when we close our eyes.
2. Solid objects are not occupying space simultaneously occupied by other objects.
3. Our normal senses mesh. For example, in ASCs it is common to hear words spoken while the lips of the person do not move.
4. Solid, complete, moving, colored objects are generally seen, whereas in ASCs they are usually transparent or incomplete.
5. Objects continue to be viewed even after the viewer turns away and looks back at the original spot.
6. Others present also report seeing something very similar at the same location and time (for example, a group experience).
7. The ontologically objective domain of the experience remains the same.
8. Ontological effects correspond with the experience. For example, a woman who went into a trance for three hours in full view of others during a church worship service dreamed of Jesus giving her a goblet full of wine and instructing her to drink. She did. Upon waking, her breath smelled of wine.
9. The experience was not induced by attempts to manipulate the senses.
10. Those having the experiences are able to comment on the experience to others present while they are occurring.

Although the New Testament literature does not provide enough details that may identify the appearances with each of the above, a number of the ten qualities fit. For example, we may see 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the resurrection narratives when Jesus appears to others. This suggests that the disciples’ encounters with the risen Jesus were OSCs. Wiebe concludes that ASCs may appropriately describe other kinds of experiences reported in the New Testament, but they are inadequate for assisting us in our understanding the disciples’ encounters of the risen Jesus.

I also think it quite presumptuous of Craffert to assume that the early Christians did not think they were encountering the risen Jesus in space-time, lending further evidence that they were experiencing ASCs.

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<sup>367</sup> Craffert (2002), 98.

<sup>368</sup> Wiebe (2001).

Therefore, *seeing* Jesus' resurrected body in a vision or a dream, was for first-century Mediterranean people part of their 'reality'. They could seriously believe that when seeing Jesus' resurrected body in a vision, they were experiencing 'reality' and therefore, experiencing the resurrected Jesus.<sup>369</sup>

Accordingly, those who interpret their encounters with Jesus as a supernatural event are guilty of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, since "no such an event is being reported!"<sup>370</sup>

Perhaps the earliest Christians thought about the nature of their experiences more than Craffert imagines. This is what we find in the texts. They believed that God occasionally communicated to them through dreams and visions.<sup>371</sup> Paul experienced at least one vision he knew did not belong to physical reality (Acts 9:12). However, on another occasion the experience was so real in nature that he could not distinguish ordinary from alternate realities (2 Cor. 12:1-4). In Acts 12:6-12, Peter came to realize that what he had initially thought was occurring in a dream was actually an ontological or ordinary reality. If the New Testament literature accurately reports the events, which Craffert's approach assumes, the early Christians appear to have reflected on their experiences, understanding that there were differences between dreams, visions, and ontological reality in an objective and ordinary sense while believing all of them were real.<sup>372</sup>

What then may be said of Craffert's two objections to understanding the resurrection appearances in a literal sense? He regards it as immoral for the biblical scholar to grant the biblical accounts a privileged position, accepting as historical biblical claims of extraordinary events while rejecting similar claims in non-Christian religions. We observed that Crossan made this similar objection in his third concern. However, for Craffert, it likewise applies to scholars like Crossan who, in writing off the biblical stories as mythological creations, are being "equally disrespectful (ethnocentric) to those people for whom the stories were part of reality."<sup>373</sup>

Craffert's *ethical* objection is merited if the historian *a priori* grants the relevant New Testament literature a privileged position by presupposing it is correct and that all of the others are not or if we knew beforehand that the religious claims in all religious literature are mistaken. But the former has not been made in the present investigation and the latter is not known. Historians can be open to miracle claims in a variety of religious traditions and assess their veracity according to an application of careful historical method while applying a deliberate and sustained effort to manage their horizon during the exercise. If the Christian reports of Jesus' resurrection are actually true, Craffert's charge of "special pleading for pro-Christian or indirect rationalism" is

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<sup>369</sup> Craffert (2002), 9, cf. 101.

<sup>370</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19; cf. 17.

<sup>371</sup> See Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19; Acts 9:10; 10:10-16.

<sup>372</sup> *Although beyond our historical bedrock*, I have previously argued that Paul taught that resurrection involves the revivification of a transformed corpse and that this assertion more likely than not is precisely what the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. The point to be made here is, if ASCs were the actual cause of the appearances and the early Church leaders could distinguish between ASCs and ontological events in ordinary reality, they did not *need* to say, "Jesus rose bodily and the tomb was empty." In fact, there is no reason to believe they would have made such a claim about Jesus had they thought they had experienced an ASC.

<sup>373</sup> Craffert (2003), 368.

misguided.<sup>374</sup> Consequently, Craffert's *ethical* objection is invalid pertaining to this present investigation. The *ethical* objection shows no interest in what may be factually true. It is more of an emotional appeal.

Craffert's second objection against a literal interpretation of the reports of Jesus' resurrection is a *theological* one. There are many views about God. One may not even believe there is a God. If God exists, is his relation to the universe one of transcendence (e.g., theism, deism) or immanence (e.g., pantheism)? The literal view of Jesus' resurrection requires a certain view of God being correct, which cannot be known. Craffert charges some as being guided by a pantheistic view of God. Thus, "the precondition for this discussion is an acknowledgement from *both sides* that the other's image of God has an equal right of presentation."<sup>375</sup>

We agree that all sides have an equal right to present and defend their views. But granting others the right to have, present, and defend a view is not the same as acknowledging those views as being equally valid as one's own, as Craffert and Botha would have us do.<sup>376</sup> They claim that a literal view of Jesus' resurrection requires theism; but since scholars cannot agree on a certain view of God, RH cannot be seriously entertained. However, as I argued in my assessment of Ehrman's objection, this is to do history backward: rejecting a historical conclusion because of its theological implications. Jesus' resurrection might indeed imply or entail theism, but one need not presuppose theism in order to investigate the historical question of Jesus' resurrection. Rather, one might first bracket the question of theism with the understanding that if the resurrection of Jesus is historically validated that would have to be considered strong evidence for theism.<sup>377</sup>

As noted with Ehrman, historians have concluded that Carloman died in AD 771 after he had co-ruled the Roman Empire with his brother Charlemagne with whom he had been at odds. However, historians are not confident about how he died: Did he die of natural causes or did Charlemagne have him murdered? Likewise, historians may conclude that Jesus rose from the dead without adjudicating on who or what raised him. Otherwise, the philosophical and theological presuppositions of historians may lead them to historical conclusions prior to an examination of the data.

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<sup>374</sup> Craffert (2003), 367.

<sup>375</sup> Craffert (2003), 367. I know of no other tradition about a religious leader of whom it can be *demonstrated* that he claimed to be here by God's choice, had a message for us from God, performed deeds that were absolutely jaw-dropping, and whose return from the dead was reported by individuals and groups, by those who had followed and those who had fought him, all of whom so sincerely believed that he had appeared to them that they were willing to wager their souls and put their lives on the line for it. Not all religious stories are equal. Why should a story like the resurrection of Jesus, which has a significant amount of historical evidence in its favor, be filed together with stories in other religious traditions for which solid supporting evidence is missing or for which there are probable naturalistic reasons for rejecting their overall claims? For example, clear reports of postmortem appearances of certain gods of the mystery religions all postdate the reports of Jesus' resurrection and may, therefore, be said to have borrowed from them in order to compete with the growing religion.

<sup>376</sup> Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.

<sup>377</sup> See chapter 2.5.3.

### 5.6.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Craffert's hypothesis (CfH) employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation.

- 1) *Explanatory Scope*. CfH accounts nicely for all of the historical bedrock we have identified, assuming Jesus' death by crucifixion and regarding the experiences of the disciples as psychological phenomena referred to as "cultural events." However, no attempt is made to explain the appearance to Paul who would not have been in the same state of mind as the disciples whom he was apparently hunting. Therefore, CfH trails other hypotheses in its explanatory scope.
- 2) *Explanatory Power*. Similar to GH, LH, and CsH, CfH nicely explains Jesus' death by crucifixion but proposes interpretations that clearly run contrary to the plain sense of the texts. For example, CfH proposes that the canonical Gospel texts do not state that the disciples thought that when Jesus walked on water that he had appeared to them in an objective sense within ordinary reality. Instead, the disciples all thought that these events occurred in an alternate reality, that is, their minds were elsewhere and so was Jesus. This is essentially what occurred with the resurrection appearances. This does violence to the texts, which are quite clear that the tomb was empty because Jesus had been resurrected bodily and could be touched in ordinary reality.<sup>378</sup> Moreover, Wiebe has shown that ASCs are inadequate as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances. CfH fails in its explanatory power.
- 3) *Plausibility*. Is CfH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? CfH appeals to a postmodern approach to history, which the community of modern historians has largely rejected. Moreover, if we understand the appearance to the disciples as ASCs involving encounters with the ontological Jesus, CfH has plausibility since we would expect them to be convinced of the veridicality of the events. Because our historical bedrock makes no claims pertaining to Jesus' post-resurrection state, an ASC involving an ontological Jesus is no different than RH, since in both the ontological Jesus is alive and appeared to his disciples and Paul. Since I suspect that Craffert would have no part in identifying CfH with RH, I will discard interpreting him as allowing an ASC with an ontological Jesus. If we regard the ASC as a natural event with no ontological Jesus appearing, we would not expect for Paul to have experienced an ASC that was positive in nature toward Christianity and that would result in his conversion and an ASC experienced simultaneously by a group suffers the same challenges as a group hallucination, which have been addressed earlier.<sup>379</sup> Although CfH and VH are both implausible in terms of not being implied by Paul's conversion experience of the risen Jesus, CfH has additional plausibility challenges and, thus, trails VH in this regard.

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<sup>378</sup> This observation is confirmed by our examination of Paul's view on resurrection, which held to a revivification of a transformed corpse and more likely than not is precisely what the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. Again, I want to be careful to acknowledge that Paul's view of Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred to his corpse is not part of our historical bedrock.

<sup>379</sup> See n72 above.

- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. CfH employs psychohistory, which is purely conjectural, and, thus, possesses a strong *ad hoc* component. It *a priori* rules out a supernatural cause on the basis of naturalistic assumptions pertaining to human behavior and, thus, carries an additional *ad hoc* component. In contrast, VH makes no appeal to non-evidenced facts, although, like CfH, it *a priori* excludes the Resurrection hypothesis. Since CfH is more *ad hoc* than VH, it fails this criterion.
- 5) *Illumination*. As with GH and LH, if true, CfH provides illumination pertaining to numerous ancient religious experiences and, thus, passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, CfH passes one (illumination) and fails to fulfill every one of the most important criteria. Moreover, we observed a number of concerns that cast further doubt on CfH.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P
CfH	F	F	F	F	P



## 5.7. The Resurrection Hypothesis

**5.7.1. Description of the Resurrection View.** The final hypothesis we will examine is the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead (RH). Perhaps the earliest assertion of the post-Easter Church was “God raised Jesus from the dead.” What did the earliest Christians mean when they proclaimed that God had raised Jesus? The answer has and continues to be debated. At present, Wright’s work on the matter stands as the proposal that must be answered by those taking a contrary position.<sup>380</sup> He concludes that when the early Christians claimed that Jesus had been resurrected, they meant that his corpse had been revived and transformed. Even so, widespread agreement on the matter is absent.

I see no reason for scholars to hesitate in drawing their own conclusions on the matter and proceeding accordingly. However, since the method we have employed throughout this investigation has been to proceed solely with the historical bedrock unless there is a need to do otherwise, we will continue to restrict ourselves. If a hypothesis cannot account for the relevant historical bedrock, it is dead in its tracks. Since the historical bedrock makes no statement pertaining to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection appearances, we must choose how we shall define the Resurrection hypothesis (RH). We could make a choice between an objective vision (RH-V), that is, Jesus ontologically appeared to others in a manner not perceived by the physical senses (i.e., an actual appearance occurred outside of space-time), and Jesus’ appearance in his revived corpse that was seen with ordinary vision (RH-B; “B” for bodily). The former could not have been videotaped while the latter could have been. Because neither of these interpretations belongs to historical bedrock, we will not choose between them in the present research. Since the claim that it was *God* who raised Jesus is incapable of verification, we will not make any claims pertaining to the cause of the event other than it must have been supernatural. Accordingly, I herein define the Resurrection Hypothesis as follows: *Following a supernatural event of an indeterminate nature and cause, Jesus appeared to a number of people, in individual and group settings and to friends and foes, in no less than an objective vision and perhaps within ordinary vision in his bodily raised corpse.* In this sense, we are true to our method of considering only the historical bedrock while allowing for a range of specific possibilities. Where appropriate, we will also assess RH in terms of both RH-V and RH-B in order to eliminate an aspect of ambiguity.

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<sup>380</sup> Wright (2003). Nickelsburg (2006) regretfully does not give Wright’s work the attention it deserves. He mentions the works of Wright (2003) and Segal (2004) only in passing and explains the reason is that he has a different approach: “Perhaps the root of the difference lies in our presuppositions. I began with an openness to diversity and was suspicious of whether a belief in bodily resurrection was present if it was not either explicit or intertextually implied . . . I felt that the burden of proof lay with the person who posited a bodily resurrection” (5). We have adopted *methodical neutrality* where the burden of proof lay with the person making any claim. This is especially relevant since the definition of resurrection in pre-Christian Judaism is a topic unto itself with varied opinions. Accordingly, a definition of resurrection that is non-physical in nature is not a default position as Nickelsburg apparently thinks.

## 5.7.2. Analysis and Concerns

### 5.7.2.1. The Challenge of Legend

Legend emerged rapidly in antiquity. Lucian reports that while sailing down a river, Aristobulus handed Alexander the Great a narrative of combat between Porus and Alexander that he had just written. Alexander was so disgusted by the specific deeds of valor and achievements too great to be true, that he threw the book into the river and told Aristobulus that he should do the same with him.<sup>381</sup> When Lucian informed Cronius of Perigrinus's suicide, he added that he had conveyed the details without embellishment. However, he stated that he would dress them up for the dullards.<sup>382</sup>

Lucian adds that he was not the only one to propagate urban legend pertaining to that event.

On my return to the festival, I came upon a grey-haired man whose face, I assure you, inspired confidence in addition to his beard and his general air of consequence, telling all about Proteus, and how, since his cremation, he had beheld him in white raiment a little while ago, and had just now left him walking about cheerfully in the Portico of the Seven Voices, wearing a garland of wild olive. Then on top of it all he put the vulture, swearing that he himself had seen it flying up out of the pyre, when I myself had just previously let it fly to ridicule fools and dullards.<sup>383</sup>

This shows both how quickly urban legend could develop and how credulous some could be.<sup>384</sup>

Seneca noted that historians were often guilty of reporting incredible events in order to win approval. He adds that "Some [historians] are credulous, some are negligent, on some falsehood creeps unawares. . . . What the whole tribe has in common is this: it does not think its own work can achieve approval and popularity unless it sprinkles that work with falsehood."<sup>385</sup> After a lengthy discussion on accuracy and falsehood in ancient historiography and rhetoric, Byrskog comments,

It seems likely, generally speaking, that the apparent paradox between the rhetoricians [sic.] emphasis on truth, on the one hand, and their effort to produce extensive elaboration, on the other hand, had to do with the requirement that the basic material—the *fundamenta*—should be true while its elaboration—its *exaedificatio*—should be plausible.<sup>386</sup>

Our discussion of Gospel genre in chapter three also revealed that ancient biographers were allowed certain literary freedoms, although they took these to varying

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<sup>381</sup> Lucian, "How to Write History," 12.

<sup>382</sup> Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 39. English translation by Harmon (1936), 45. See 5.5.2.4 above for the entire citation.

<sup>383</sup> Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 40. English translation by Harmon (1936), 45, 47.

<sup>384</sup> Crossley (2005) observes that "the rapid emergence of miraculous and legendary traditions surrounding pagan figures, such as Alexander or Augustus, even within their own life times . . . was one of the few points of agreement at the resurrection BNTC discussion" (181, 181n39).

<sup>385</sup> Seneca the Younger (*QN* 7.16.1-2). English translation by Byrskog (2002), 201.

<sup>386</sup> Byrskog (2002), 213.

degrees.<sup>387</sup> Some like Suetonius exercised minimal liberties while others like Appian have been “severely censured for want of accuracy in details.”<sup>388</sup>

Given this challenge, it is most important to identify and adequately account for the historical bedrock, which “can be recovered even from the most deplorable of our tertiary sources.”<sup>389</sup> Moreover, the presence of legend, differences, and errors does not warrant wholesale rejection of a report. “Myths about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy abound, but Kennedy was in fact shot by somebody.”<sup>390</sup>

Despite any varying insecurities we may have in relation to the early Christian sources, many of these sources still yield valuable data relevant to our investigation. We have identified historical bedrock that is both strongly supported and acknowledged by a nearly universal and heterogeneous consensus of scholars. That is important, since we must be careful not to throw away the baby with the bath water. The historical bedrock is clear and firm and must be accounted for adequately by any serious hypothesis.

### 5.7.2.2. Occam’s Razor

We earlier noted Goulder’s assertion that a natural explanation that can account for the known data should be preferred over a supernatural explanation given Occam’s Razor, which states that the hypothesis importing fewer assumptions is simpler and, thus, preferable. Accordingly, Goulder disposes of RH since it must presuppose God.<sup>391</sup> But this move possesses a number of difficulties.

First, Goulder *a priori* excludes the supernatural so that historians are not duped by superstition. But this move undermines the value of carefully applied method. Not only have we discussed and made public the specific methodological procedures employed in the historiography to be written in the present investigation, we have also formed criteria for identifying a miracle. Together these two steps severely hinder a credulous acceptance of a miracle claim.<sup>392</sup> Moreover, this move of Goulder unfairly excludes any possibility of a competing hypothesis prior to an examination of it. One could similarly—and wrongly in my opinion—argue that psychological explanations such as those employed by Goulder should be *a priori* excluded so that historians do not fall prey to the dangers of psychohistory, which is often wrong. Since modern psychologists often find it difficult to correctly diagnose patients sitting in front of them who can be questioned extensively, non-professionals such as Goulder, Lüdemann, Crossan, and Craffert are far more likely to misdiagnose those who lived two thousand years ago in a foreign culture.

Second, the often unbridled fantasy present in Goulder’s psychohistory is no more helpful than superstition for historians serious about determining the fate of Jesus. While we certainly want to avoid a “god of the gaps” component in any hypothesis,

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<sup>387</sup> See chapter 3.2.1.

<sup>388</sup> Appian, *Roman History*, Volume I, Horace White, translator (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), xi.

<sup>389</sup> Sherwin-White (1963), 186.

<sup>390</sup> Allison (“Explaining,” 2005), 127-28.

<sup>391</sup> See section 5.3.3, less *ad hoc* criterion above.

<sup>392</sup> See chapter 1.2-3, chapter 2.4, and chapter 4.2.1-2.

the “naturalism of the gaps” components within GH, LH, CsH, and CfH are no better. We should not grant a privileged position to a hypothesis employing “naturalism of the gaps” arguments over a hypothesis possessing a supernatural component if the latter is superior in its ability to fulfill the criteria for the best explanation and the historical bedrock occurs in a context that is charged with religious significance.

Third, if RH turns out to be the best explanation, Goulder’s *a priori* exclusion of it would actually prohibit him (and those following his method) from knowing the past.

Fourth, while RH is open to the existence of the supernatural including God, it does not presuppose it. As we commented in our discussion of Ehrman, the historian could carefully examine the data and context of a miracle claim and adjudicate on whether it was a historical event. If a particular miracle claim fulfills the criteria for the best explanation and there is adequate reason for awarding its historicity, the historical conclusion may have theological implications. If a historical conclusion leads to a theological or supernatural implication, the historian is on safe ground. It is when the theological *or anti-theological* motivations of historians guide their historical conclusions that trouble is almost guaranteed.<sup>393</sup> On the other hand, GH draws presupposes at least five conjectures: Peter had a hallucination, the groups experienced “communal delusions,” Paul entertained secret doubts about Judaism and Christianity, Paul and the Jerusalem apostles had contradictory beliefs pertaining to the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, and the empty tomb and reports of bodily appearances were later invented.

In our previous discussion of criteria for the best explanation, we observed that historical events often have multiple causes. For this reason, the criterion of simplicity or Occam’s Razor may be inadequate. Although it can accommodate multiple sub-hypotheses—which should please Goulder—the “less *ad hoc*” criterion looks for the hypothesis with the *least number of non-evidenced assumptions*.<sup>394</sup> It is obvious that RH is far superior to GH, LH, CsH, and CfH in this regard.

### 5.7.2.3. Not Enough Evidence

Jesus’ resurrection will never be established via historical method with the degree of certainty desired by many of the faithful. The provisional quality of historical knowledge, given our limited data and the presence of interpretation by the ancient authors, limits the amount of certainty attainable. However, as we observed in chapter one, this limitation is not unique to early Christian claims but applies to all historical knowledge. Neither will there ever be widespread agreement on the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead, since the disparity of horizons among historians creates a gridlock, shattering any hopes of achieving a consensus.

We wish there was more. It would be nice to possess greater knowledge about our sources, such as earlier reports about the authors of our four canonical Gospels. It would also be nice to have a few documents dating to the period between the 30s and 60s written by Roman and Jewish authorities describing their take on the events that

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<sup>393</sup> See chapter 2.5.3.

<sup>394</sup> See chapter 1.3.2, letter d.

led up to Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, and the claims of the earliest Christians after these events.

Of course, the absence of additional desirable sources is not an argument against RH, since the same may be desired in reference to any hypothesis. The question is whether the evidence is adequate enough for building a respectable hypothesis. We are fortunate that the historical bedrock in our collection provides a substantial foundation on which historians may work. It has been noted that there were no eyewitnesses to the actual event of Jesus' resurrection. We only have reports of an empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. This is not as sobering as some may think. Davis observes that the inference in the matter of Jesus' resurrection is quite strong: "If you saw me today with my hair a certain length and then you saw me next week with much shorter hair, you would be with your rights in concluding that I had had a haircut, even if you did not see the event occur."<sup>395</sup>

#### 5.7.2.4. Deficient Sources

Ehrman argues that the canonical Gospels are poor sources that prevent historians from discovering what actually happened to Jesus. He supports his position by contending that they were not written by eyewitnesses, were late since they were written 35-65 years after Jesus' death, and contain propaganda that itself was altered during various stages of transmission resulting in numerous differences. Furthermore, no extra-biblical sources mention Jesus until approximately 80 years after his death. In short, Ehrman argues that the Gospels are neither contemporary, disinterested, nor consistent.<sup>396</sup>

There are numerous problems with Ehrman's contentions. He complains that the New Testament Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses. Bracketing this discussion where a number of scholars have taken a contrary position,<sup>397</sup> this challenge is not unique to the New Testament literature. No surviving account of the life of Alexander the Great was written by an eyewitness. Tacitus and Suetonius were not eyewitnesses to the majority of the events about which they wrote. Nevertheless, historians remain confident that they are able to recover the past to varying degrees without ever knowing who their sources were.<sup>398</sup> Moreover, while virtually all agree that Mark and Luke were not written by eyewitnesses, many scholars hold that they preserve eyewitness testimony to varying degrees.

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<sup>395</sup> Davis (1999), page 4 of 11, accessed online.

<sup>396</sup> Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 10-11.

<sup>397</sup> See Bauckham (2006) and Byrskog (2000). Also see chapter 3.2.1 above.

<sup>398</sup> Barrera (2001) contends that historians need not know the authorship of a document in order to use it with value in their investigation (203). Answering the contention of Fasolt (2006, 23) that Paul's letter to the Roman church is helpful as a historical source "only on the assumption that it was written by Saint Paul," Cladis (2006) writes, "This is going to be news to countless social historians of the religions of the ancient Mediterranean basin who investigate archaeological and textual work without always knowing the specifics of the exact agents involved. Indeed, these historians are investigating the society that shaped the agents, even if they do not know most of the agents' names (and all that this means). They collect, analyze, and interpret evidence from a variety of sources—monuments and tombs, literary texts and shopping lists— in order to learn something important about the socio-historical circumstances in which people, like Paul, lived, moved, and had their being. The historian of antiquity, then, can learn much about the past from the 'Letter to the Romans' whether or not that text was actually written by Paul" (100).



Ehrman complains that all of the canonical Gospels were written 35-65 years after Jesus and that Jesus does not appear in “any non-canonical pagan source until 80 years after his death. So clearly he didn’t make a big impact on the pagan world.” However, Josephus mentions Jesus within 60-65 years rather than Ehrman’s 80 years.<sup>399</sup> Moreover, when compared with written sources of other historical figures and events, 35-65 years is a relatively short period. Augustus is generally regarded as Rome’s greatest emperor. There are seven chief sources used by historians to write a history of Augustus. Three of the seven are contemporary with Augustus: two cover Augustus until age 19-20 while the third is a funeral inscription that may have been composed during Augustus’ lifetime. A fourth source writes from 50-110 years after the death of Augustus and the final three write from 100-200 years after his death.<sup>400</sup> Therefore, it is remarkable that four biographies of Jesus were written within 35-65 years of his death.<sup>401</sup> Furthermore, oral tradition is peppered throughout the New Testament writings, including the Gospels. For example, creeds, hymns, oral formulas, and the Acts sermon summaries contain very early tradition, some of which goes back to the earliest stages of the post-Easter church.

The lacking plethora of non-Christian contemporary sources on Jesus is not unique. Only three sources on Augustus have survived that are contemporary with him, only one of which reports his adulthood.<sup>402</sup> The Roman emperor Tiberius was a contemporary of Jesus. The number of *non-Christian* sources who mention Tiberius within 150 years of his life is equal to the number of *non-Christian* sources who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life. If we add Christian sources, the Jesus:Tiberius ratio goes from 9:9 to at least 42:10.<sup>403</sup> In addition, the purpose of writing heavily influences what authors do and do not write about and they write according to where their interests lead them. Christian writers said very little about their Roman lords and the Romans said very little about the Christians. Moreover, if

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<sup>399</sup> Ehrman may correctly reply that Josephus was not pagan and, thus, cannot be counted. But we would then ask why he uses “pagan” as a qualifier rather than “non-Christian,” noting that such a distinction appears to dodge the non-Christian source who mentions Jesus within his prescribed time period.

<sup>400</sup> In his contribution on Augustus in *De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors*, Garrett Fagan lists the following as the “chief ancient sources for the life of Augustus”: Appian (+100-150), Dio (+175-200), Cicero (contemporary, but dies when Octavius [Augustus] is 20 years old), Nicolaus of Damascus (contemporary, but little information provided and stops when Octavius is 19 years old), Plutarch (+50-110), Suetonius (+100-115), and Augustus’ funerary inscription (contemporary). Augustus was probably largely responsible for his funerary inscription *Deeds of the Divine Augustus*, which is less than 4,000 words and offers a sketch of his accomplishments as Emperor. Garrett Fagan is associate professor of classics and ancient Mediterranean studies at Penn State University. His article on Augustus may be accessed at <http://www.roman-emperors.org/auggie.htm> (accessed on August 26, 2006). See also Yamauchi in Millard, Hoffmeier, Baker, eds. (1994), 26, cited in chapter one (n241).

<sup>401</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) himself grants that this is the view of “almost all scholars” (57). See chapter 3, n24.

<sup>402</sup> We may note that Nicolaus and Suetonius may have used Augustus’ *De Vita Sua* as one of their sources, thus pushing the date of their information even earlier. Biblical criticism postulates other sources of Jesus’ life that are earlier than the canonical Gospels such as *Q*, *M*, and *L*. In Luke 1:1-3, the author reports that “many” others had compiled narrative accounts of Jesus prior to his own. Most scholars date Luke’s Gospel to c. AD 85 or within 55 years of the death of Jesus and, thus, these “many” others are even earlier. Paul who writes between AD 49-65 is likewise familiar with traditions on the life of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

<sup>403</sup> Habermas and Licona (2004), 126-28.

the early church believed that Jesus' eschatological return was imminent, we might expect a lack of motivation at that time for writing more on his historical life.

Ehrman notes the non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels. Granted, but these sources are later than the canonical Gospels and most if not all of them are much later. We must wonder why Ehrman raises this objection, since elsewhere he concedes that "if historians want to know what Jesus said and did they are more or less constrained to use the New Testament Gospels as their principal sources. Let me emphasize that this is not for religious or theological reasons . . . It is for historical reasons, pure and simple."<sup>404</sup> He also asserts that "the noncanonical Gospels are of greater importance for understanding the diversity of Christianity in the second and third and later centuries than for knowing about the writings of the earliest Christians."<sup>405</sup>

Ehrman complains that the canonical Gospels contain propaganda. The Gospel of John reports, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."<sup>406</sup> There can be no question that the Evangelists have the agenda of presenting a particular portrait of Jesus to their readers and teaching a message they wish for them to believe and act upon. However, this does not warrant the conclusion that their content is mistaken. Many historians write with a purpose to convince and persuade to their particular viewpoint. Grant asserts that Caesar's "*Gallic War* is among the most potent works of propaganda ever written."<sup>407</sup> Yet, he adds, "[i]t is extremely hard to fault him on facts."<sup>408</sup> Pertaining to his book *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, Lüdemann writes, "Its aim was to prove the nonhistoricity of the resurrection of Jesus and simultaneously to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly."<sup>409</sup> Similarly, Richard Dawkins writes, "If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down."<sup>410</sup> Would Ehrman encourage others to distrust these books because Lüdemann and Dawkins had agendas that are propagandistic in nature when writing them? One has to analyze the arguments provided.

Propaganda can and is employed in malevolent ways. It can be used to swindle money from others for the benefit of the propagandist. However, propaganda is not necessarily bad. When Jewish historians write on the Holocaust they want the world to know of the atrocities suffered by the victims so that it never happens again. When African-American historians write on slavery in the United States and the severe discrimination of blacks that continued long after American slavery was abolished they want others to know what they and/or their ancestors endured with the objective

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<sup>404</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 229.

<sup>405</sup> Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 221. See also Meier (1991), 118.

<sup>406</sup> John 20:30-31.

<sup>407</sup> Grant (1970), 190.

<sup>408</sup> Grant (1970), 188. Grant comments that an "occasional distortion or exaggeration might well pass unchallenged. But downright lies could all too easily be caught out; because, after all, Caesar was by no means the only Roman who wrote home from the Gallic campaigns—and eventually returned home, too" (188).

<sup>409</sup> Lüdemann (2004), 7.

<sup>410</sup> Dawkins (2007), 5.

that blacks will be treated fairly.<sup>411</sup> Thus, propaganda can actually be good *and* true. When it comes to the reports in the Gospels, in theory there could be a good reason for the bias of the Evangelists: they were convinced of the truth of their story. And those who have something to gain or lose may recall events better than a disinterested observer.<sup>412</sup>

Ehrman claims that the stories of Jesus were altered during their transmission, accounting for the irreconcilable differences among them in the Gospels. He offers a few examples, such as the day and time in which Jesus died. The Gospel of John (John) reports that it was at noon on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, whereas Mark's Gospel (Mark) says it was at 9am after the Passover meal was eaten. Did Jesus carry his cross the entire way as John states or did Simon of Cyrene carry it part of the way as in the Synoptics? When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, did Mary go alone or were other women with her? What did they see when they got to the tomb: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)? Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? He adds that there are also non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels.

While this objection is no red herring, it is not as strong as Ehrman thinks. Responsible method requires that historians take genre into consideration.<sup>413</sup> It was noted above that there is now somewhat of a consensus among contemporary biblical scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bioi*) and that this genre offered biographers a great deal of flexibility to rearrange material, invent speeches to communicate the teachings, philosophy, political beliefs of the subject, and often included encomium.<sup>414</sup>

One may notice some of these liberties in Luke's account of Jesus' trial confession. Mark and Matthew report that the high priest asked Jesus if he is the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus affirms not only that he is both but that he is the apocalyptic Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7 who will be seated at God's right hand and who will come on the clouds of heaven. For this claim, the high priest and other leaders charge Jesus of blaspheming and condemn him to be executed.<sup>415</sup> Luke's report differs slightly and reads as follows: The Council asked Jesus if he is the Messiah. Jesus replied that even if he confessed to being the Messiah they would not believe. Nevertheless, he assures them that, as the apocalyptic Son of Man, he will be seated at God's right. The Jewish leaders reply with a question: "Are you claiming then to be God's Son?" Jesus replies in the affirmative and the Jewish leaders proceed to take

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<sup>411</sup> Finley (1965) notes that Herodotus and Thucydides changed the way history was written by not only placing the events they described in time rather than the distant gray past, but by also providing a secular analysis that introduced and elevated politics (300-01). Although not religiously biased, Thucydides had political bias. Tacitus had an aristocratic bias and was convinced that moralizing was the "highest function" of history (*Ann.* 3.65), although he claims to be "far removed" from partiality (1.1).

<sup>412</sup> Byrskog (2002), 165-66. Accordingly, M. Martin's (1991) objection that the eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus were friends and disciples and so were not objective observers (76) carries limited weight.

<sup>413</sup> Willitts (2005): The idea of "historicity" must be "both appropriate to the genre and elastic enough to allow for the selective nature of historical narrative." Therefore, latitude for narrative is given to the Gospels in their reporting (107).

<sup>414</sup> See chapter 3.2.1.

<sup>415</sup> Mark 14:61-64; Matt. 26:63-66.

him before Pilate.<sup>416</sup> The difference is easily explained. Matthew and Mark are writing to Jews who have a robust understanding of the apocalyptic Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7 and known in the *Similitudes of Enoch*.<sup>417</sup> However, Luke is writing to a Gentile individual or Gentile audience who may not understand the full implications behind Jesus' claim to be the apocalyptic Son of Man or the Council's charge of "blasphemy." Therefore, Luke may be focusing on the Son of God feature of Jesus' confession, in order to communicate Jesus' high claim to divinity, since Gentiles would have understood the claim more clearly in those terms. If the historical Jesus made such a claim, Mark and Matthew are probably much closer to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, since Jesus the Jew was talking to an audience of Jewish leaders. However, Luke's redaction enables him to communicate more clearly with his Gentile reader(s) what Jesus confessed about himself. Words that precisely replicate what the subject said are good but can only be properly understood within their context.<sup>418</sup>

The voice (*ipsissima vox*) of the subject is equally valid. Even numerous conservative scholars maintain that redaction was a practice of John who also rearranges the traditions in order to theologize.<sup>419</sup> F. F. Bruce asserted that John paraphrased the words of Jesus in the same dramatic and powerful manner that Shakespeare paraphrased Mark Antony's speech in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*.<sup>420</sup> In John's Gospel, we are often hearing Jesus' voice (*ipsissima vox*) rather than his actual words.<sup>421</sup> Accordingly, when analyzing *bioi* historians should focus more on identifying the historical core in the narratives. This is not unique to *bioi* but applies to history where the subject is not an individual. Thucydides is regarded as one of antiquity's finest historians and is known for his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Finley writes, "History 'contained the truth', and for Thucydides that meant that it was unnecessary to invent as the poets did. But it was also impossible merely to record what happened. It is necessary to compose speeches which would lay bare the appropriate arguments (appropriate in Thucydides' judgment) on both sides on an issue."<sup>422</sup> In the second century AD, Lucian stated this was a standard practice.<sup>423</sup> Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob

<sup>416</sup> Luke 22:66-71.

<sup>417</sup> It is uncertain when the *Similitudes* were written. Sometime between the end of Jesus' life and the end of the first century is probable. However, a more precise date of writing cannot be made with confidence at this time.

<sup>418</sup> Likewise, John did not sacrifice the historical essence behind the cleansing of the Temple, although he moved it in time in order to make a point. See John 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-17; Matt. 21:10-13; Luke 19:41-46.

<sup>419</sup> Keener (2003) notes how, instead of placing Jesus' overturning of the temple tables at the end of his ministry, John places the event at the beginning but especially mentions the Passover in relation to it so that this Passover event "frames Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel" (518).

<sup>420</sup> Bruce (1983), 15-17.

<sup>421</sup> Blomberg (2001), 61. See also Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 73-99. Witherington (*John*, 1995) declares that it is not "a matter of this evangelist's trying to deceive the listener about who is saying what. In various respects he is just following normal operating procedures of writing an ancient biography, in which, since there were no footnotes, all commentary was put in the text along with the source material." The Evangelist "feels free to recast the Jesus tradition into his own style" (101). Keener (2003) argues that John belongs to the category of *bioi* and adds that "all scholars acknowledge *some* adaptation and conformity with Johannine idiom" (52). See also R. Brown (1997), 363-64, 371 and Burrige (2005) who argues that John's Gospel presents a "high-flying perspective" of Jesus (135-63) and belongs to *bioi* ([2004], 250-51).

<sup>422</sup> Finley (1965), 302.

<sup>423</sup> Lucian, *How to Write History* 58-59.

warn that “Professional historians are most acutely aware of this temptation to sacrifice accuracy to the goals of glorification or lesson-teaching.” However, they add that we all have the urge to relate our past to a sort of morality and that complete accuracy is difficult to attain even when it is our aim.<sup>424</sup> We must be careful not to condemn the ancients for not acting according to our modern conventions. Accordingly, Ehrman’s argument does not adequately take genre into account.

Nearly all of Ehrman’s examples specific to the resurrection of Jesus are quite easily reconciled even apart from the issue of genre. Did Mary go alone or were other women with her? Matthew, Mark, and Luke report that a small group of women went to the tomb. John focuses on Mary and she appears to speak for the others. In 20:1 it is Mary who visits the tomb but in the following verse she announces to the disciples, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and *we* do not know where they laid him.” It is doubtful that this is a literary plural, since in verse 18 Mary returns from the tomb after Jesus’ appearance to her and announces to the disciples, “*I* saw the Lord.” Luke makes a similar move in his Gospel. When the women report the empty tomb and the message of the angels, Peter responds by running to the tomb (24:12). It appears that Luke did not intend to exclude others who may have accompanied Peter on his tomb visit, since only a few verses later Luke reports that more than one of the disciples went to the tomb (24:24; ἀπὸ τῶν τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον).

What did they see upon arriving at the tomb: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)? This is also easily resolved when one considers that an angel was sometimes referred to as a man.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, we observe Luke doing this in his resurrection narrative. He first refers to the “two men” at the empty tomb, then eleven verses later calls them “angels.” White or shining clothes in the New Testament are often the mark of a heavenly visitation.<sup>426</sup> Whether there were one or two angels at the tomb has some difficulty but can possibly be resolved by understanding that the focus of the Evangelist is on the one speaking at the moment as we just observed regarding the initial visits to the tomb by Mary and Peter. Although not mentioned by Ehrman, we may note that the angel speaks while *sitting* on the large stone he moved away from the tomb (Matthew), speaks while *sitting* inside of the tomb (Mark), two speak while *standing* inside of the tomb (Luke), and while no angels are there on the first visit, there are two *sitting* inside the tomb at the second visit (John). Time compression may account for the one visit reported by the Synoptics<sup>427</sup> and they may have altered details for economy, convenience, or due to faulty memories. Discrepancies among peripheral details do not necessitate wholesale invention.<sup>428</sup> It

<sup>424</sup> Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994), 307.

<sup>425</sup> In Tobit 5:5, 7, 10 the angel is addressed as “Young man.” See also Luke 24:4, 23; Acts 1:10; 10:30.

<sup>426</sup> Matt. 28:3; Mark 9:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; 10:30. Also see Dan. 7:9.

<sup>427</sup> It is clear that Luke employs telescoping. In his Gospel, all of the appearances and the ascension occur on Easter. However, in his sequel Acts, he reports that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of 40 days (1:3).

<sup>428</sup> A few years ago, John P. Meier communicated to me via email that he was working on volume four in his *Marginal Jew* series and that the topic would be the self-understanding of Jesus. Around the same time I had communicated briefly with James D. G. Dunn regarding his new volume *Jesus Remembered*, in which he devoted a significant portion to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. In a subsequent conversation with a friend I communicated that *Dunn* was working on a new book and that the topic would be the resurrection of Jesus. It was an embarrassing moment when I recognized my error. What was true was that a prominent historian of Jesus was working on a new book. On another occasion, I recalled watching Baltimore Oriole baseball pitcher Jim Palmer hit an ‘inside the park’



is also possible that the angels were added as a literary device on the part of the Evangelists indicating their belief that a divine activity had occurred.<sup>429</sup> Such a move would be entirely acceptable within the conventions of ancient biography. If this is the case, arguing over the number of angels misses the point the authors seek to make.

Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? We have already address this above and observed that it need not at all be problematic.<sup>430</sup>

It is important to note that all of the discrepancies between the Gospels usually cited appear in the peripheral details rather than at the core of the stories.<sup>431</sup> Moreover, discrepancies between accounts do not require that they are all mistaken. Recall that *Titanic* survivors offered contradictory testimonies pertaining to whether the *Titanic* went down intact or broke in two just prior to sinking. Until recently, historians were warranted in having only limited confidence in their conclusions concerning this detail. However, none of them doubted the core of the story itself that the *Titanic* had sunk.<sup>432</sup> Thucydides was aware of differences in extant reports pertaining to the Peloponnesian War. He wrestled with these. However, since Thucydides himself had participated in the War, the discrepancies would never have suggested to him that the War had not taken place or that the outcome was different.<sup>433</sup>

Luke Timothy Johnson draws attention to the challenge of knowing the historical Socrates even though we have reports about him from three of his contemporaries. Aristophanes was a critic of Socrates while Xenophon and Plato were personal students who wrote of him shortly after his death. Xenophon recalled his table talk, his teachings, and his defense. Yet his reports of Socrates' table talk and defense differ from those provided by Plato. We probably will never know with assurance the precise details.<sup>434</sup> However, this does not prevent historians from arriving at broader conclusions pertaining to Socrates.

Historian Paul Maier offers the following comment concerning discrepancies in the Gospels:

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homerun on television when I was much younger. Years later I had the opportunity to speak personally with Palmer during which time I asked him how he felt when he hit that homerun. He replied that he was a slow runner and never hit an 'inside the park' homerun. However, he had hit a number of homers. Once again, my memory had failed me in the details. I had taken a feat that was much rarer in the 1970s than today—a pitcher hitting a homerun—and had unconsciously embellished it over time. What is true is that Jim Palmer hit a homerun that day. (Allison [*Resurrection Jesus*, 2005] notes a similar failure on his part [235n140].) This failure of accuracy in my memory is quite sobering to me. However, I find some encouragement in Apply, Hunt, Jacob (1994) who write of us moderns, "all people are the historians of their own lives and know something of the urge to point their past toward a useful moral precept. Even when people have no motive to bend history in a particular direction, they have difficulty getting it straight" (307).

<sup>429</sup> This is the suggestion of R. Brown (1993), 129, 156, 260. Contra is Bauckham (2002), 304.

<sup>430</sup> See chapter 4.3.2.3.

<sup>431</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 7.

<sup>432</sup> Allison ("Explaining," 2005) writes, "To show that there are legendary elements in the accounts [of the empty tomb] is not to discredit those accounts entirely. . . . Myths about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy abound, but Kennedy was in fact shot by somebody" (127-28). See also R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 10.

<sup>433</sup> Thucydides, *Histories* 1.22.1-3.

<sup>434</sup> L. T. Johnson (1996), 106.

It is no service either to Christianity or to honesty to gloss over these discrepancies, or, as is incredibly done in some circles, to deny that they exist. . . . On the other hand, some critical scholars are equally mistaken in seeking to use these inconsistencies as some kind of proof that the resurrection did not take place, for this is an illogical use of evidence. The earliest sources telling of the great fire of Rome, for example, offer far more serious conflicts on who or what started the blaze and how far it spread, some claiming that the whole city was scorched while others insist that only three sectors were reduced to ash. Yet the fire itself is historical: it actually happened.<sup>435</sup>

In agreement is historian Michael Grant:

Certainly, there are all those discrepancies between one Gospel and another. But we do not deny that an event ever took place just because pagan historians such as, for example, Livy and Polybius, happen to have described it in differing terms.<sup>436</sup>

According to Ehrman, historians look for desirable witnesses that include eyewitness accounts, multiple independent accounts, consistent and corroborative accounts, and unbiased or disinterested accounts. In his debate with Ehrman, Craig noted that Ehrman's "wish list is so idealistic as to be practically irrelevant to the work of the practicing historian."<sup>437</sup> He adds that

Compared to the sources for Greco-Roman history, the Gospels stand head and shoulders above what Greco-Roman historians have to work with, which are usually hundreds of years after the events they record, usually involve very few eyewitnesses, and are usually told by people that are completely biased. And yet Greco-Roman historians reconstruct the course of history of the ancient world.<sup>438</sup>

Accordingly, the question we will need to ask is whether the sources available to contemporary historians are adequate for learning what happened to Jesus, especially regarding what happened to him after his death. I am not here attempting to argue that the canonical Gospels are, for the most part, reliable sources; only that Ehrman's attempts to argue to the contrary are very poor.

The most important observation is that, despite the hesitations of Ehrman and others toward the canonical Gospels, they regard them as reliable enough to obtain solid historical bedrock, some of which is relevant to our present investigation. In fact, Ehrman grants all three facts that belong to our relevant historical bedrock.

1. *Jesus died by crucifixion.* Ehrman: "One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate."<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Maier (1991), 180.

<sup>436</sup> Grant (1977), 200. See also Gwynne (2000), 10 and Sherwin-White (1963), 187-88.

<sup>437</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 18. Ehrman (2000) himself refers to a "wish list" for historians (139).

<sup>438</sup> Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 37.

<sup>439</sup> Ehrman (2000), 162; cf. Ehrman (2008), 235, 261-62.

2. *Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.* Ehrman: "It is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name; one of them, the apostle Paul, claims quite plainly to have seen Jesus alive after his death"; "These people also claim to have seen him alive afterwards."<sup>440</sup>
3. *Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after a personal experience that he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.* Ehrman: "there is no doubt that [Paul] believed that he saw Jesus' real but glorified body raised from the dead."<sup>441</sup>

If Ehrman's salvage operations of the canonical literature yield the very historical bedrock employed in RH, it is useless for him to continue proclaiming the unreliability of the Gospels as an argument against RH. Such efforts serve only to undermine his own conclusions. He must instead attack the historical method upon which RH is built.

### 5.7.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of RH by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.

- 1) *Explanatory Scope.* RH (RH-V and RH-B) nicely accounts for all of the historical bedrock we have identified. It grants Jesus' death by crucifixion and accounts for the experiences and beliefs of the disciples and Paul. Therefore, RH passes this criterion, since it matches and does not trail other hypotheses (i.e., GH, LH, and CsH) in its explanatory scope.
- 2) *Explanatory Power.* RH (RH-V and RH-B) explains all of our historical bedrock without any strain whatsoever. Indeed, if the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are interpreted as seeing Jesus' resurrected body with normal vision (RH-B), this is in accord with the plain sense of the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels. So, RH-B exceeds RH-V in its explanatory power. RH is also far superior to VH in its explanatory power. While RH has no trouble at all explaining all of our relevant historical bedrock, ambiguity and unanswered questions abound in VH. As I noted in my assessment of VH, when Vermes speaks of "visions" and "apparitions" he does not specify whether these were hallucinations, delusions, or actual appearances of Jesus in some form to others. Neither does he specify who had the experiences nor what happened to Paul that led him to conclude that the risen Jesus had appeared to him. And we are left wondering how the tomb that had contained Jesus' corpse had become empty (which VH grants). Although the empty tomb is not part of the relevant historical bedrock, it is easily accommodated by RH-B, whereas RH-V will have difficulty.
- 3) *Plausibility.* Is RH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? Since RH requires a supernatural cause of some sort, it

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<sup>440</sup> Ehrman (2008), 282; Ehrman (2000), 178.

<sup>441</sup> Ehrman (2008), 301.

has implications that may affect one's horizon. Since we are bracketing the question of worldview in relation to RH, it is difficult to name widely accepted truths that imply the truth of RH. In order to illustrate this point, let us presuppose for the moment that supernaturalism is false. In this case, we can conclude that RH is implausible, since it is certainly not implied by other accepted truths, namely that supernaturalism is false. Conversely, let us presuppose for the moment that supernaturalism is true or that God or some supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus from the dead. In this case, we can conclude that RH is very plausible, since it is certainly implied by the accepted truth that a supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus. The challenge, of course, is that historians do not know these things.<sup>442</sup> So they should neither presuppose supernaturalism nor *a priori* exclude it. Instead, they should examine the evidence without prejudice in either direction and select the best explanation of the relevant historical bedrock, which is accomplished by weighing hypotheses according to which best meets the five criteria for the best explanation.

One may claim that RH lacks plausibility, since it is generally accepted that the dead do not return to life. However, what is generally accepted is that the dead do not return to life *by natural causes*. RH and the early Christians have not asserted that Jesus returned to life by natural causes but by a supernatural one. In fact, the statement could be turned around as follows: If a supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus from the dead, RH is the most plausible explanation for the relevant historical bedrock. Thus, I reiterate the importance of historians bracketing their worldviews during an investigation of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. If we bracket our worldviews, we have no *a priori* reason for rendering RH as plausible. However, in chapter two we discussed the role of context in identifying a miracle or distinguishing one from an anomaly.<sup>443</sup> An event may be said to be a miracle when it (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. In chapter four we observed that this context exists in relation to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus performed acts that he and many others regarded as miracles and exorcisms, and believed that he had a special relationship with God who had chosen him to usher in his eschatological kingdom. While we will not presuppose God's existence, it is hard to ignore that our relevant historical bedrock exists without the broader context of Jesus' ministry that contains additional bedrock that is charged with religious significance. In other words, given the historical bedrock of Jesus' beliefs about himself and the deeds he performed that awed the crowd, his resurrection is implied by our three facts relevant to Jesus' fate if God exists. If the event occurred, it was a miracle. On the other hand, RH (RH-V and RH-B) is not implausible since it does not appear to be in tension with other conclusions supported by strong evidence held firmly and widely. Thus, RH is has some degree of plausibility.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> While debates over God's existence are far from over, if RH is the best explanation of the historical bedrock the case for supernaturalism and even theism is strengthened and the cases for metaphysical naturalism and atheism are weakened. One might argue that belief in God is not widely held. But on what basis could such a statement be made? Theism is quite prevalent and crosses multiple cultures.

<sup>443</sup> See chapter 2.4.

<sup>444</sup> Some propose that Jesus' resurrection (as RH-V or RH-B) nicely accounts for the explosion of the Christian Church despite trying circumstances. I must admit to failing for some time to recognize the

This brings us to the question of how RH compares in its plausibility to competing hypotheses. Since VH is the most plausible of the five previous hypotheses we have examined, we will compare RH with it. VH is not implied by Paul's

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value of this observation, despite its being offered by a few highly respected scholars. See Burrige and Gould (2004), 7, 45; L. T. Johnson (1996), 136, 139; Witherington (2006), 11. Wedderburn (1999) acknowledges the “dramatic recovery [of the Christian movement] from what had seemed like a crushing defeat [in Jesus’ execution].” He asserts that whatever happened to turn things around “is the historical kernel of the Christian faith” (47). (But Wedderburn is agnostic regarding Jesus’ resurrection.) My initial hesitation was due to the fact that every major world religion had some cause that catapulted it into success, none of which required a supernatural intervention. But O’Collins (Easter Faith, 2003) makes an observation that challenged my pause: “Gautama passed most of his long life teaching the way of enlightenment. The Chinese sage Confucius also spent years spreading his wisdom and attracting disciples, until he died and was buried with great pomp outside of Kufow. A wealthy wife and then military victories helped Muhammed to gather followers and propagate his teaching. As the recognized prophet of Arabia, he died in Medina and was buried there. In these three instances we can point to publicly verifiable causes which furthered the spread, respectively, of Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam: the long careers of the founders, financial resources, and success in battle. In the case of Christianity, the founder enjoyed none of these advantages: his public career was extremely short, he lacked military and financial support, and his life ended in humiliating failure and a disgraceful death on a cross. After all this, the subsequent propagation of the message of universal salvation in his name remains an enigmatic puzzle unless we admit a cause (the resurrection) adequate to account for the affect” (40). Yet I am still hesitant. After all, one may claim that the Christian Church struggled until Constantine had a vision that he interpreted as a portent from Jesus for the military victory he experienced shortly thereafter. Once Rome had embraced the Church, there was no need for a supernatural cause to explain its spread.

We may imagine a few scenarios in which RH may be either significantly damaged or even disconfirmed. Let us suppose that while digging around in Jerusalem, future archaeologists discover an early letter from the high priest Caiaphas to a synagogue official in Damascus. This letter explained that Saul had recently experienced a major rift with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that opened him up to Christianity. Caiaphas had ordered him to arrest and imprison a favored family member who had become a Christian. When Saul refused, Caiaphas publicly defrocked him and had one of Saul’s colleagues and rivals do the job, who executed his orders with swiftness and brutality. Humiliated and angered, Saul took a few of his assistants and fled to Damascus. While on their way, he informed his assistants of a dream he had experienced the previous night in which Jesus had appeared to him. Shortly after arriving in Damascus, he sought out the Christians, joined them, and changed his name to Paul. Since Paul may be said to be the strongest brick in RH’s foundation, the discovery of such a letter, if deemed authentic, would hurt RH possibly beyond repair. On the other hand, RH would be significantly strengthened if an official Roman document was discovered that demonstrated the presence of historical kernels in the Acts of Pilate. While the possibilities of such documents being discovered are intriguing, they may never have existed. Moreover, to the extent that RH fulfills the criteria for the best explanation and historicity, there is a corresponding unlikelihood that it will be disconfirmed. In other words, as the probability of RH increases, the likelihood decreases that there will ever be found disconfirming evidence. Thus, the mere possibility of such documents surfacing should not prevent us from moving ahead with an adjudication based on the actual evidence in our hands. If a future team of highly regarded archaeologists actually discovered the bones of Jesus, RH-V would not be impacted whereas RH-B would be disconfirmed.

Michael Martin (1998) contends that “the believer in Jesus’ alleged resurrection must give reasons to suppose that it can probably not be explained by any unknown laws of nature. Since presumably not all laws have been discovered, this seems difficult to do” (74). But Swinburne (2003) answers, “We have to some extent good evidence about what are the laws of nature, and some of them are so well established and account for so many data that any modifications to them which we could suggest to account for the odd counter-instance would be so clumsy and ad hoc as to upset the whole structure of science” (23). It is not what we do not know from science that gives us pause relating to the resurrection of Jesus. What we do know from it gives us great reservation in waiting for a natural explanation unveiled by new scientific discoveries. Martin is certainly guilty here of appealing to a naturalism of the gaps.



conversion, at least if we are referring to natural events behind the apparitions and empty tomb, since we would not expect that a persecutor of the Church would have the same sort of experience as Jesus' disciples who had promoted it. This is a significant deficiency of VH since the appearance to Paul is part of the historical bedrock and is ignored by VH. While RH possesses a bit of plausibility, VH possesses some implausibility in reference to the relevant historical bedrock. Consequently, VH trails RH in its plausibility.

- 4) *Less Ad Hoc*. The only sense in which RH may be charged with being *ad hoc* is that it requires a view of reality that allows for the supernatural. However, we have already addressed the matter above (5.7.2.b) and found it to be without merit. I have neither presupposed nor *a priori* excluded God or supernaturalism but take a position of openness. It is worth observing that naturalism, especially metaphysical naturalism, is no less a philosophical construct than supernaturalism and theism.<sup>445</sup> And even if I am completely mistaken, RH must be judged according to whether it exceeds any *ad hoc* element in competing hypotheses. In my assessment of previous hypotheses, I concluded that GH, LH, CsH, and CfH have strong *ad hoc* elements.<sup>446</sup> VH is the superior to them. However, its *a priori* exclusion of RH seems to be somewhat of an *ad hoc* component, regarding it as “extreme” and requiring “blind faith.” But this fault in VH does not prohibit others from assessing RH. In my judgment, VH and RH are equal in lacking *ad hoc* elements and are certainly less *ad hoc* than the four other hypotheses we have assessed.<sup>447</sup> I will, therefore, assign both a passing grade.
- 5) *Illumination*. A hypothesis fulfills this criterion when it provides a possible solution to other problems while not confusing other areas held with confidence. RH, if true, actually provides historians with a solution to a question that has frustrated them. There is amazement over the devotion of the earliest Christians toward Jesus, which was to such an extent that they felt obligated even to worship him.<sup>448</sup> How did this devotion come about, especially when it would certainly seem blasphemous to do so? There are no hints of any Jews who believed the Messiah was divine. Since many Jews believed in the general resurrection on the final day, neither would being resurrected require the conclusion that the one resurrected was a divine figure.<sup>449</sup> What then was the catalyst of such devotion to

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<sup>445</sup> During a conference I attended in Marietta, Georgia, on February 3-4, 2006, naturalistic evolution and intelligent design were debated by leading proponents from both sides. Michael Ruse, a prominent philosopher of science who is an agnostic, stated his complete commitment to the occurrence of biological evolution by natural causes and then added that such a belief requires a “metaphysical commitment” and “an act of faith.”

<sup>446</sup> Johnson (1996): “Not only has critical scholarship generated multiple and conflicting hypotheses, but these can be considered, in their own way, just as ‘mythic’ as the one they seek to supplant” (103).

<sup>447</sup> McCullagh’s (1984, 21) assertion that RH is less plausible and more *ad hoc* than alternative explanations is thus unfounded. He states that “[f]or a hypothesis to be implausible, our present knowledge of the world must imply that it is probably false” (27). But no such knowledge exists pertaining to RH. As we observed with the plausibility criterion, it is generally accepted that humans do not return from the dead by natural causes. However, it is not a generally accepted truth that God cannot raise someone from the dead, which was the precise claim made by the early Christians.

<sup>448</sup> Hurtado (“Jesus’ Resurrection,” 2005), 205; Phillips (1998), 246.

<sup>449</sup> Wright in Stewart, ed. (2006), 38-39. Hurtado (“Jesus’ Resurrection,” 2005) regards the resurrection of Jesus as one of the major causes behind high christology (206).

Jesus? Hurtado regards this as “perhaps the most puzzling and most notable feature of the earliest Christian treatment of the figure of Jesus.”<sup>450</sup>

I would like to suggest that, whether explicitly or implicitly, Jesus claimed divinity for himself during his earthly ministry in a manner similar to what is reported in the canonical Gospels. After he rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, any doubts they may have had concerning the truth of those claims dissolved. Granted, Jesus’ claims to divinity in the canonical Gospels are typically regarded as inauthentic. But this conclusion is reached by presupposing that the high Christology we find among the early Christians existed *only* in the post-Easter Church.<sup>451</sup> Furthermore, the Gospels present Jesus making divine claims in so many ways and in such varied contexts that attributing all of these indications to the creativity of the Evangelists or their sources stretches credulity. Remove that presupposition and grant the unique event of Jesus’ resurrection and the high Christology present among the earliest Christians loses its perplexity as the puzzle pieces come together quite nicely. Illumination is a bonus criterion and RH certainly fulfills it.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illum.
VH	F	F	F	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P
CfH	F	F	F	F	P
RH	P	P	P	P	P

Here we see that RH comes in first place and is the only hypothesis to fulfill all five criteria. RH is not only superior to the competing hypotheses examined, it outdistances them by a significant margin. RH explains all of the relevant historical bedrock without breaking a sweat, while all of the others but VH go to great pains to explain it with only limited success. VH actually gives up in the process.

Assessing the strength of the others compared to one another is not so clear at first glance. Recall that I adopted McCullagh’s prioritization of the weightiest criteria: (1) plausibility, (2) explanatory scope and explanatory power, (3) less *ad hoc*, (4) illumination.<sup>452</sup> With this in mind, we can observe that RH is likewise the only hypothesis to fulfill all of the weightiest criteria, while CfH is the only of the six that could not fulfill a single one of these criteria and finds itself trailing the others. VH likewise fulfills only one criterion. But the less *ad hoc* criterion fulfilled by VH is weightier than the illumination criterion fulfilled by CfH. We also observed that GH, LH, and CsH are superior to VH in their explanatory scope while VH is less *ad hoc* than the three of them. If we stopped here, GH, LH, and CsH would be superior to VH. However, we must keep in mind that the above chart reflects the final analysis. Prior to assessing RH, we observed that VH is more plausible than GH, LH, and CsH and plausibility is a weightier criterion than explanatory scope. Consequently, VH

<sup>450</sup> Hurtado (“Jesus’ Resurrection,” 2005), 205.

<sup>451</sup> We see this move clearly demonstrated by Barrett (1967), 25-26 and Dunn (2003), 723.

<sup>452</sup> See chapter 1.3.2.

excels over GH, LH, and CsH in criteria within the first and third weightiest categories (plausibility, less *ad hoc*) whereas it is inferior to them in the second and fourth (explanatory scope/power, illumination). Of the six hypotheses we have examined, I, therefore, place VH in second place, while GH, LH, and CsH are tied for third, and CfH in fourth. This is interesting because it informs us that an agnostic position (i.e., “What happened to Jesus and what led his disciples and Paul to conclude that he had risen from the dead and appeared to them remain anomalies.”) is superior to a number of attempts to explain the historical bedrock in natural terms.

## 5.8 Summary and Conclusions

We have examined six hypotheses according to the methodology discussed in greater length in the preceding chapters and outlined at the beginning of this chapter. We judged that five of the hypotheses are very weak and quite problematic while the Resurrection hypothesis fulfills all five criteria for the best explanation—the only of the six to do so—and outdistances all of the competing hypotheses we examined by a significant margin.<sup>453</sup> Accordingly, we are warranted in placing it on our spectrum of historical certainty at “very certain.”<sup>454</sup> The only legitimate reasons for rejecting the Resurrection hypothesis are philosophical and theological in nature: if supernaturalism is false or a non-Christian religion is exclusively true.<sup>455</sup> However, if one brackets the question of worldview, neither presupposing nor *a priori* excluding supernaturalism, and examines the data, the historical conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead follows.

The powerful presence of horizons has an extraordinary influence on scholars. For some Christians, no amount of disconfirming evidence would ever be sufficient to convince them that Jesus did not rise from the dead. The converse is likewise true: For some, no amount of evidence for Jesus’ resurrection would convince them that it was an event in the past.<sup>456</sup> Although neither position is reasonable, it seems to me that those in the latter group as well as those who are simply unconvinced by the historical case for Jesus’ resurrection could acknowledge that naturalistic explanations are flawed and that the Resurrection hypothesis is quite good on strictly historical

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<sup>453</sup> Habermas (2003), 14. Richard Swinburne, “Evidence for the Resurrection” in Davis, Kendall, O’Collins, eds. (1998), 201. Accordingly, Watson’s (1987) claim that belief in Jesus’ resurrection cannot be founded upon evidence (366) is mistaken and Tucker’s (2004) claim that naturalistic hypotheses are superior is uninformed (99-100).

<sup>454</sup> See chapter 1.3.4.

<sup>455</sup> Or a naturalistic hypothesis we have not examined turns out equally strong or stronger than RH.

<sup>456</sup> In some instances, it appears that any explanation other than Jesus’ resurrection will do, no matter how problematic it may be. Davis (2006) offers a review and critique of *The Empty Tomb* by Price and Lowder (2005). Most of the contributors in this volume are hypercritical and advance hypotheses such as that Jesus may not have died on the cross or may not have even existed or that Paul did not write 1 Cor. 15:3-11. Davis comments, “One aspect of the desperation of which I speak is a methodological procedure that unites the essays in *TET*. I would describe it as having three steps: (1) suggesting naturalistic hypothesis which, if true, explain some aspects of the New Testament accounts of the resurrection of Jesus; (2) embrace all biblical or extrabiblical ancient texts, phrases, hints, or textual variants that can be interpreted as supporting the hypothesis; and (3) reject all the other biblical texts as late, or patently false, or apologetically motivated, or legendary” (62). Statements by atheist philosopher Michael Martin (1991) are revealing: “It is not inconceivable that on very rare occasions someone being restored to life has no natural or supernatural cause” (76); “I admit that some events could occur without any cause” (87); “[E]ven if the resurrection of Jesus was justified by the evidence, it would not support the belief that the Christian God exists and that Jesus is the Son of God” (100).

grounds, yet choose to withhold belief.<sup>457</sup> This seems to me to be a more honest and respectable position than to run wild with imaginative constructions and call it *history*.<sup>458</sup>

A good critical scholar must account for the facts with integrity, even when he finds his conclusion in tension with his desired outcome. Long before John Adams became the second U.S. President, in 1770 he was a respected lawyer in New England where the Boston Massacre had just occurred. No lawyers would defend the British soldiers involved for fear of the American public, which had now grown even stronger in its anti-British sentiments. But Adams believed that everyone was entitled to a fair trial. He took the case, the public turned against him and he lost more than half of his clients. In a courtroom that was described as crowded and “electrical,” Adams argued that the soldiers were innocent and that anti-British sentiments could lead to the execution of innocent men. He then added, “Facts are stubborn things and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictums of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”<sup>459</sup> A similar axiom is applicable to historians interested in answering the “prize puzzle of New Testament research.” No matter how much one may loathe the idea that Jesus rose from the dead and fantasize about other outcomes, the historical bedrock remains the same and resists misuse when prudent method administers reasonable controls.

Fortunately, many modern skeptical scholars have opted for a higher road. Habermas has given more attention to naturalistic hypotheses than perhaps anyone.<sup>460</sup> He observes that the rejection of naturalistic hypotheses is not exclusively found among Christian scholars but is widespread: “Intriguingly, this more recent rejection is not confined to any one school of thought. Theologians holding a wide range of positions often agree in dismissing all of these naturalistic theories as untenable.”<sup>461</sup> Vermes may be placed in this category.

I am contending, however, that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock. Since it fulfills all five of the criteria for the best explanation and outdistances competing hypotheses by a significant margin in their ability to fulfill the same criteria, the historian is warranted in regarding Jesus’ resurrection as an event that occurred in the past. Questions pertaining to the cause behind the event (i.e., who or what raised Jesus), the mechanism behind the event (i.e., how precisely was it accomplished), and the precise nature of Jesus’ resurrected state are beyond the reach of historians.

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<sup>457</sup> With Vermes, a few others who have concluded that they do not know what happened on Easter are Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 350; cf. Allison (“Explaining,” 2005), 132; Carnley (1987), 61, 89; Dunn (2003), 876-77; Gwynne (2000), 21; Segal (2004), 477; Smit (1998), 17; Wedderburn (1999), 96-98, 217-18. While an atheist, Flew asserted that one can be rational in believing Jesus rose from the dead. Now a deist, Flew still rejects the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. See Ankerberg (2005), 22.

<sup>458</sup> Caird (1980): “We can respect the genuine agnostic who is content to live in doubt because he considers the evidence inadequate for belief, but not the spurious agnostic who prefers fantasy to evidence” (60-61).

<sup>459</sup> D. McCullough (2001), 65-68; *Legal Papers of John Adams*, III, 269.

<sup>460</sup> See Habermas (“Resurrection Claims,” 1989); Habermas (“Explaining,” 2001); Habermas (“The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses,” 2001); Habermas (“Replies,” 2001); Habermas and Licona (2004), 81-181; Habermas in Stewart, ed. (2006).

<sup>461</sup> Habermas (2003), 14; cf. 15.

There can be no doubt that many will be unimpressed with my conclusion. After all, is it not just another road manipulated in its construction in order to arrive at the same desired destination numerous Christian scholars have already reached? The same, of course, may be said of any new book written on Jesus' resurrection and that comes to the conclusion that he did not, in fact, rise from the dead. I have laid out my method in a manner anyone can view, worked hard at managing my bias, and weighed hypotheses according to how well they account for items regarded as facts by a nearly universal and heterogeneous majority of scholars. Thus, it would be insufficient to scoff at my conclusions and write them off with a single brush stroke: "He manipulated the exercise so that it produced the results he desired." My method and its application throughout must be critically assessed.

In spite of my efforts to manage my horizon, maintain a strict adherence to method, and arrive at a sound conclusion, I find myself having some doubts related to the integrity and results of this investigation. Have I been overly critical of naturalistic hypotheses while unconsciously turning my head away from data difficult for RH to handle? Have I unfairly manipulated the process to my advantage? Have I forced the results? Rather than feeling relief that RH is the best explanation, I find myself skeptical that the tools of historical research can produce reliable results. But I suspect this is simply Cartesian anxiety and perhaps a lingering effect of my conscious and enduring efforts to manage my horizon rather than an indication of the deficiency of method. The persistent practice of seeking to identify my biases and abiding suspicion of their controlling influence to the point of frequent agony over the past several years is not turned off by the flick of a switch or placing a period at the end of this dissertation.

I am fully aware that I would have been tougher on RH and perhaps easier on the other proposals considered herein had I possessed an animus against Christianity. I would have been more creative in my attempts to strengthen those naturalistic hypotheses we have considered. Irrespective of my shortcomings, I take comfort that a few of the owners of the naturalistic hypotheses we have considered have the animus I lack and are indeed motivated to come up with a plausible hypothesis that is superior to RH. We have assessed six hypotheses using a method over which we have deliberated. Accordingly, although imperfect, there are a number of controls in the approach we have taken. And that gives me further comfort.

I also concede that we have only weighed a limited number of naturalistic explanations. Although these are representative of a majority of naturalistic positions offered today, others that are far different and worthy of examination may remain.<sup>462</sup> It must also be admitted that there are times when a prudent assessment of all of the available evidence can point to the wrong conclusion. We have all made decisions

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<sup>462</sup> Although not a natural hypothesis, the recent proposal by Dale Allison is perhaps the best challenge at present to RH-B. See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 198-375. I would like to note that I reviewed this book for RBL and moderated a panel discussion in which he defended his hypothesis against the criticisms offered by three other panelists present: William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and Stephen Davis. This panel discussion was a joint event of EPS and AAR and took place in San Diego on November 17, 2007. Allison maintains that an ontologically living Jesus probably appeared to his disciples in some manner after his death. While judging the empty tomb as more probable than not, he does not think that Jesus rose bodily and was the cause of its vacancy.



that turned out being mistaken after careful consideration of the data and all known options at the time. Accordingly, we must always hold our conclusions provisionally.

If the resurrection of Jesus is the “prize puzzle of New Testament research,”<sup>463</sup> it is my hope that this dissertation has contributed toward making the puzzle solution a little clearer.

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<sup>463</sup> Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 200.

## Summary and Further Considerations

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jesus continues to captivate the attention of scholars. His attraction is not limited to the pious; non-believers study him, too. Extreme skeptics assert he is a myth. The orthodox declare him deity. And everyone who falls between these two positions offers enough portraits to fill a gallery. Whether Jesus was mythical, mortal, or immortal, and whether it was he or those who wrote about him who are responsible for the phenomenon, few if any other historical figures have received the attention Jesus has.

Scholars are captivated not only with the task of uncovering Jesus' teachings and deeds, but also with determining his fate. And while nearly every scholar in the world agrees that Jesus was killed by the Romans via the brutal method of crucifixion, it is what happened after he was removed from his cross that has been the subject of more than twenty-five hundred books and articles written during the past thirty-five years.

The outsider might expect that there would be more agreement among scholars in their conclusions pertaining to what happened to Jesus after his crucifixion. Instead they find numerous renditions of a Jesus who either died, survived, or revived. Thus, given the academic interest in the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, we are not surprised to find that it has been called the "prize puzzle of New Testament research."

Almost without exception, the literature pertaining to Jesus' resurrection has been written by biblical scholars and philosophers. Could a reason for the varied conclusions on the subject be that those writing on it are not equipped for the task? Have biblical scholars and philosophers received the same training in the philosophy of history and historical method as their cousins, that is, professional historians outside of the community of biblical scholars and philosophers? How do historians of non-religious matters go about their practice? Would an application of their approach lead us closer to solving the puzzle?

The objective of this dissertation was to learn and apply the approach of historians outside of the community of biblical scholars to the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. It differs from previous approaches in providing unprecedented interaction with philosophers of history related to hermeneutical and methodological considerations and applies these to an investigation pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

### Part 1: Summary of Chapters

**Chapter One:** The task of this chapter was to familiarize ourselves with the approaches of historians outside of the community of biblical scholars. So we discussed a number of matters in the philosophy of history and historical method relevant to our investigation, such as the nature of historical knowledge, managing the influence of one's horizon on an investigation, and historical method. We observed that, despite the contentions of postmodernist historians, the overwhelming majority of practicing historians outside of the community of biblical scholars are realists, that is, they maintain that the past is knowable to a limited extent and that narratives constructed of the past correspond to the actual past to varying degrees. Indeed, most historians continue to practice history as always. However, postmodernist historians

have reminded conventional historians that there is no strictly objective knowledge of facts independent of interpretation and this has led them away from the unwarranted confidence in the conclusions many of them have portrayed.

We then discussed various opinions pertaining to who shoulders the burden of proof. I concluded with others that methodical neutrality is most appropriate. Historians should presume neither the reliability nor the falsehood of a text. Those making statements about a text are responsible for defending them. A similar approach applies to hypotheses. The truth of a hypothesis must not be presumed and counter suggestions must be supported.

We discussed how historians assess and compare competing versions of the past and observed that they typically employ arguments to the best explanation, which weigh hypotheses according to how well they fulfill a number of criteria. The hypothesis that does this best is to be preferred. Although historians have named various criteria, their number, how they are defined and the importance assigned them differ. We discussed each criteria and I named five which may be employed in weighing hypotheses, adopted and defended specific definitions for them, and assigned them an order of importance. We likewise observed that differences of opinion exist pertaining to when historians are warranted in concluding that a hypothesis has been verified adequately. In light of these, I argued for a spot on a spectrum of historical certainty on which hypotheses being placed at least there may be said to be historical.

Our research revealed some conclusions that came as a surprise. As with biblical scholars, few historians engage themselves in reflective thought pertaining to matters in hermeneutics and historical method. By historical method I am not referring to criteria for authenticity which are commonly employed in historical Jesus research. Rather I am referring to deliberate methods for weighing hypotheses and criteria for awarding historicity. Biblical scholars and historians more commonly rely on their own intuition, which, unfortunately, is heavily influenced by their horizons. Many scholars do not acknowledge the impact their horizon has on their investigations and appear to proceed unaware that it influences their every step. This is perhaps the main reason for the plurality of historical conclusions in both historical Jesus research as well as historical inquiries unrelated to religious matters.

We observed that historians are asking many of the same questions being asked by biblical scholars. However, they have been debating the issues much longer and are ahead of biblical scholars in their understanding of the problems. The debate over postmodern approaches is a good example. While biblical scholars appear to be moving in the direction of postmodernist history, their historical cousins have recently completed a lengthy debate between postmodern and realist approaches and have for the most part abandoned postmodernism. It is surprising to find biblical scholars who appear to regard themselves as pioneers in adopting a postmodern approach, apparently oblivious to the fact that others have already camped there, extinguished their fires, scattered the ashes, and returned home to realism. Accordingly, biblical scholars would benefit from familiarizing themselves with similar debates between professional historians. Biblical scholars have much they can learn from historians in general and especially from those who have specialized in the philosophy of history. Notwithstanding these discussions, the problems inherent in every historical inquiry

remain and there are no specific canons of history that are broadly accepted throughout the community of professional historians.

**Chapter Two:** The task of this chapter was to examine a number of objections to the investigation of miracle-claims by historians in order to see if historians are not suited to adjudicate on them. We examined objections offered by David Hume, C. B. McCullagh, John Meier, Bart Ehrman, A. J. M. Wedderburn and James D. G. Dunn. I concluded that none of them stood up to critical scrutiny, although some of them warned us of potential pitfalls in an investigation of a miracle-claim such as the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, I concluded that historians are not barred from proceeding.

I defined “miracle” as “an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate.” That is to say that the nature of the event itself is such that there could be no natural cause. Defining “miracle” is a different exercise from identifying one. I provided two criteria for identifying a miracle in order to distinguish one from an anomaly. We may conclude that an event is a miracle when the event (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) it occurs in an environment or context that is charged with religious significance. That is, we find the event occurring in a context in which we may expect a god to act.

The identification of a miracle had implications for our discussion of Meier’s objection. Meier claims that when all naturalistic explanations have failed, historians cannot claim that “God has directly acted” in a specific situation. While I agree that historians are not warranted in asserting that their investigations have proved that “God” was the cause of the event, I argued that they are not barred from attributing the event to a cause that is supernatural in nature. Such a cause could be a god or a personal force of a sort. Thus, while historians cannot conclude that the cause of the supernatural event was the Judeo-Christian God, they cannot exclude him either. Indeed, given the available options, a historian may conclude, in principle, that the Judeo-Christian God is the most plausible explanation.

This is, of course, contingent on the quality of the context in which the data for Jesus’ resurrection appears. And I concluded that the context was charged strongly in its religious significance, although I reserved a discussion of the context of Jesus’ life for chapter four. Accordingly, historians are warranted in concluding that Jesus’ return to life was a miracle, if the Resurrection hypothesis turns out being the best explanation after a critical examination of numerous hypotheses has been made.

Wedderburn contends that historians cannot adjudicate on the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, given the presence of a discrepancy among the early Christians pertaining to the meaning of *resurrection*. According to Wedderburn, the Evangelists affirmed the corporeal nature of the event while Paul believed it was non-corporeal given his comments in 1 Corinthians 15. How may one then determine whether Jesus was resurrected when the early Christians could not agree on what they meant by the claim?

I concluded that if Paul taught an incorporeal resurrection while the Evangelists and Orthodoxy a corporeal one, the earlier source (Paul) should be preferred. The waters would be somewhat muddy but visibility for historians would be present. I added that

Wedderburn and Dunn are, in fact, mistaken in their interpretation of Paul who taught a corporeal resurrection, although the discussion of the relevant Pauline texts was reserved for chapter four.

We observed that a number of professional historians are calling for a paradigm change within the community and that the refusal to consider miracle-claims is usually based on a secular metaphysics rather than historiographical considerations. Finally, we discussed whether historians proposing that a miracle has occurred shoulder a great burden of proof. I concluded that no greater burden is required. However, a particular historian may require additional evidence for himself before believing if the conclusion is in conflict with his horizon. But the horizon of a historian does not place a greater burden on the shoulders of another unless the criterion of consilience is affected. It is the responsibility of all historians to lay aside their biases and consider the evidence as objectively as possible. It is not the responsibility of the evidence to satisfy the biases of historians.

In short, in this chapter I examined a number of objections to the investigation of miracle-claims by historians and concluded that historians are within their professional rights to proceed.

**Chapter Three:** The task of this chapter was to identify sources relevant to our present investigation from which I would mine data. I surveyed the primary literature that mention the death and resurrection of Jesus and that were written within two hundred years of Jesus' death. These sources included the canonical literature, non-canonical Christian literature—including the Gnostic sources, and non-Christian sources. I rated each according to the likelihood that it contains data pertaining to Jesus' death and resurrection that go back to the earliest Christians. I identified the sources most promising for the present investigation.

I concluded that Paul's letters and the oral traditions embedded throughout them, especially 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, are our most promising material. Paul was an eyewitness, had even been hostile toward the Christian message, and some of the oral traditions are both early and probably reflect the teaching of the Jerusalem apostles. Other sources are likewise promising. These include the canonical Gospels, *1 Clement*, Polycarp's letter to the Philippians, the speeches in Acts, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and on occasion a few non-Christian sources. However, their pedigree is not nearly as clear. Scholars continue to debate over the extent of material in the canonical Gospels that may be traced back to Jesus and his original disciples, the dating and origin of *Thomas*, whether the speeches in Acts reflect apostolic *kerygma*, and whether Clement of Rome and Polycarp knew any of the apostles. Moreover, while certain logia in *Thomas* may go back to Jesus and his apostles, the two logia that are relevant to this present investigation probably do not. What is far more certain is that Paul and the oral traditions preserved mostly in his letters are excellent sources that may assist us greatly in our investigation pertaining to the fate of Jesus. This conclusion enjoys widespread support.

**Chapter Four:** The task of this chapter was to mine our primary and most promising sources for data relevant to our investigation. We first observed that a context exists pertaining to Jesus' life that is charged with religious significance. Given the strength of supporting evidence, virtually all specialists of the historical Jesus agree that he



believed himself to be God's eschatological agent and that he performed acts that both he and many of his followers regarded as miracles and exorcisms. I then contended that the evidence is quite strong that Jesus predicted his violent and imminent death as well as his subsequent resurrection by God very shortly afterward, adding fresh arguments to the discussion. It is within this context that the relevant historical bedrock pertaining to Jesus' fate appears. Accordingly, given our discussion in chapter two pertaining to the identification of a miracle, historians are warranted in concluding that Jesus' return to life was a miracle if the Resurrection hypothesis turns out being the best explanation after a critical examination of numerous hypotheses has been made.

We observed that there are three facts that are strongly supported by the data and are acknowledged as facts by a nearly unanimous and heterogeneous consensus of scholars who have studied the subject.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.
3. Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

These facts form the historical bedrock, facts past doubting, upon which all hypotheses should be built.

We also investigated Paul's view of resurrection, analyzing 1 Corinthians 15:42-54 and five other relevant Pauline texts (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:21; Col. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:16-5:8; Gal. 1:11-19). I concluded that the texts in Romans and Philippians both referred to Jesus' corporeal resurrection, the text in Galatians is ambiguous, and the text in Colossians—which may or may not belong to Paul—refers to Jesus being in a bodily state now but says nothing about the nature of his resurrection. I also concluded that in 2 Corinthians Paul is asserting that believers who die prior to the Parousia will become disembodied until the general resurrection when they will receive their resurrection bodies while believers alive at the Parousia will have their earthly bodies clothed with their new resurrection body. Accordingly, Paul has not written anything in conflict with the views he expressed shortly thereafter in his letters to the churches in Rome and Philippi. But had he changed his mind since he previously wrote to the Corinthian church?

We focused on four points of contention in 1 Corinthians 15 and I concluded that none of them support an immaterial or ethereal resurrection. Of particular interest was our discussion related to the comparison of the terms *natural* (ψυχικόν) and *spiritual* (πνευματικόν) in 15:44. I located 846 occurrences of the former from the eighth-century BC through the third-century AD and could not locate a single occurrence of the term that possessed a meaning of *physical* or *material*. This discovery in itself eliminates any interpretation of 15:44 that has Paul asserting physical corpses are buried while resurrection bodies will be immaterial (*a la* Wedderburn, RSV/NRSV, *et al*).

We considered a fourth fact: the conversion of Jesus' skeptical half-brother James when he believed the risen Jesus had appeared to him. Although we observed that this fact has strong supporting evidence and a large and heterogeneous majority of scholars writing on the subject who grant it, most scholars have not given attention to James' conversion. Thus, I did not judge it strong enough to qualify as historical bedrock. We also considered a fifth fact: the empty tomb. Although—according to Habermas—a strong majority of scholars grant the historicity of the empty tomb, it does not approach a universal consensus. Consequently, we did not pursue it further.

**Chapter Five:** The task of this final chapter was to pull everything together for a full application of my historical method in weighing hypotheses in order to come to a conclusion pertaining to whether Jesus rose from the dead. We assessed six hypotheses according to their ability to account for the historical bedrock. If there were more than one that could do this, we would repeat the exercise on the best of the six hypotheses, this time including second-level facts; that is, facts for which I contended in the dissertation but that do not qualify as historical bedrock.

The six hypotheses we examined are largely representative of those presently being offered by scholars. We first assessed the proposal of Geza Vermes that we do not know whether Jesus rose from the dead. This was followed by the hypotheses of Michael Goulder and Gerd Lüdemann that drew extensively from psychology and proposed that psychological events such as hallucinations, delusions, and wishful thinking were behind the beliefs of the disciples and Paul that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. While these two hypotheses share a lot in common, they differ quite extensively in their handling of Paul who is a major player in the early Church and his conversion is part of our relevant historical bedrock. We then assessed John Dominic Crossan's complex proposal that a combination of conditions led the early Christians, including the original disciples and Paul, to believe that God's great clean-up of the world had begun and that a bodily resurrection of Jesus was far from their understanding. We then moved along to Pieter Craffert's hypothesis that attempted to take the biblical reports seriously while drawing up the social sciences in order to explain them in natural terms. Finally, we assessed the Resurrection hypothesis.

I judged that the Resurrection hypothesis is by far the best explanation of the historical bedrock. When I applied historical method to the other five, I observed how weak they actually are in comparison. While the Resurrection hypothesis fulfilled all five criteria for the best explanation, the strongest of the others (VH) met only one. RH's competitors are simply unable to account for the relevant historical bedrock in an adequate manner.

Since the Resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation, fulfills all five criteria, and that it outdistances all of its competitors by a significant margin, I contend that we may declare that Jesus' resurrection is "very certain," which is higher on the spectrum of historical certainty than I had expected. Since the Resurrection hypothesis is based on historical bedrock, those who disagree with my conclusion must criticize my method.

**Summary:** The objective of this dissertation was to learn and apply the approach of historians outside of the community of biblical scholars to the question of whether

Jesus rose from the dead. Far more work has been performed by philosophers of history than by biblical scholars pertaining to hermeneutical and methodological considerations. Yet, the typical practicing historian, like her cousin by profession in biblical studies, rarely gives much attention to these matters. Through my work, I profited immensely as a student of history, employing the fruits of discussions between philosophers of history and formulating my own criteria and method where needed.

I followed this method throughout the dissertation, surveying and assessing the relevant sources for a collection of strongly evidenced facts that are agreed upon by virtually all scholars studying the subject and then weighing a number of hypotheses representative of what is being proposed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the end, the resurrection hypothesis came out on top and meets the standards discussed herein for being historical. On the other hand, I acknowledge that this conclusion is provisional, since future discoveries may require its revision or abandonment. This conclusion makes no assertions pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection nor does it claim to address the question of the cause of Jesus' resurrection.

## **Part 2: Contributions**

I would like to draw attention to a few other points in this dissertation that I believe are of especial interest. I discovered that historians and biblical scholars give little attention to the philosophy of history and important aspects of historical method. In fact, there are no canons of history. Yet biblical scholars have much they can learn from discussions among philosophers of history. Informing themselves of these discussions will help them avoid repeating the work of others and allow them to focus on new areas.

I also believe that I have contributed to the discussion of whether historians are within their professional rights to investigate miracle-claims such as "Jesus rose from the dead." I am unaware of any discussions on the subject that directly address this issue relevant to historical Jesus studies to the degree found in chapter two.

Since scholars disagree on their interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:44, I surveyed the use of ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν in all of the extant literature from the eighth century BC through the third century AD. Both terms carry numerous meanings. While πνευματικόν can refer to something as being ethereal, ψυχικόν never referred to something as physical or material. Consequently, while this exercise validates a number of interpretations of 15:44 without endorsing any, it eliminated one that has been long held: Christians are buried with physical bodies but raised with non-physical bodies. This interpretation is no longer sustainable.

While the historicity of Jesus' predictions concerning his death and resurrection have been widely discussed, I believe that I have taken the discussion to a new level, introducing new arguments for historicity and proposing solutions for the tensions.

I believe that I have introduced a nuanced approach to the question of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection that has not been previously taken. My conclusions were both more sanguine and restricted than I had anticipated. I was surprised by the actual

strength of the resurrection hypothesis. At the same time I learned that carefully defined method applied to the question of Jesus' resurrection cannot ascertain the cause of Jesus' resurrection with substantial certainty, although a supernatural cause is by far the best candidate. Furthermore, the historical bedrock cannot tell us anything about the nature of Jesus' resurrection state. However, I have argued that there is superb evidence that the earliest Christians understood that Jesus' corpse had been raised and transformed and that is what Paul and the original disciples believed they had seen.

### **Part 3: Considerations for Future Work**

Although the majority of scholars who comment on the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to James grant that James had an experience he believed was his risen half-brother, this experience is largely neglected by scholarship. More work in this area is desirable.

While nearly all alternative hypotheses to Jesus' resurrection propose a combination of natural events, this is largely the result of the anti-supernatural bias of Enlightenment thinking. Since our modern world is quickly becoming open to the supernatural, skeptics may wish to consider new hypotheses employing supernatural explanations that attempt to account for the historical bedrock. Dale Allison's recent treatment has paved the way for these.<sup>1</sup>

What impact may the historicity of Jesus' resurrection have on future historical Jesus research? If Jesus was actually raised as a critical historical approach suggests, a limited number of reports about Jesus in the canonical Gospels may gain greater plausibility, such as his miracles, his claims to divinity, and his predictions pertaining to his imminent and violent death and subsequent resurrection shortly afterward.

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<sup>1</sup> See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005).

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