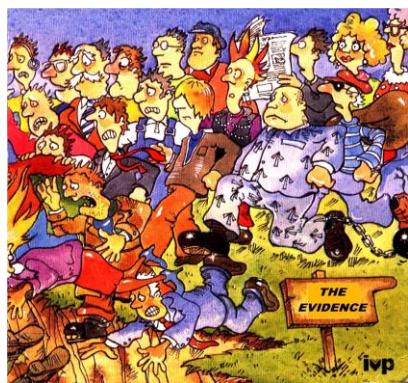


HOAX? MYTH? or LITERALLY TRUE?

THE EVIDENCE FOR JESUS' HISTORICAL RESURRECTION

“**Good News**” is the name early believers gave to their message about Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 1:1). Their choice could not have been better. That God came to our **rescue** in Christ (John 15:13) is the **greatest demonstration of love** the world has ever known. In contrast to Samuel Beckett’s no-show in his play *Waiting for Godot*, Jesus’ life is the **revelation of the heart of the visiting Creator** (John 14:9, Col. 1:15) so that we are not left in the dark about who God is. Jesus’ death underscores and puts flesh on **God’s love for you personally** (Romans 5:8). His crucifixion is offered as the **serious answer to a troubled conscience** by *completely* paying sin’s penalty and breaking its power (Romans 8:1,2). Having been raised from the dead (Revelation 1:18), His living presence is held out as the means for **breaking old habits** and the living of life on a **new plane** (2 Cor. 5:19). The living Christ also promises **fellowship today** (Rev. 3:20) and **everlasting life** (John 5:24) to all who trust in Him, regardless of our past (John 6:37). In earlier times these claims were regarded as sensational, though today they tend to be evaded either in fear¹ of the yet unknown, or passed over in favor of more titillating promises



“out there.” But what finally can be more inviting than the news that God can be known, that sins can be forgiven, and that **hope and purpose** have solid grounds, **both in the present and beyond the grave?**

In this act of rescue God chose to become **vulnerable**. The word of choice Christians use for Jesus’ coming is “**incarnation**,” which means “**in the flesh**.” God Almighty, the Holy Trinity, in the Son literally entered our world *in the flesh* (John 1:1-3, 14). His arena of working was not the “never-never-land” of mythology (2 Peter, 1:16), but **flesh-and-blood history** that is discernible by historical method. He died before watching crowds, but then showed Himself alive again “on the third day” following.

For nearly two thousand years, every Sunday, Christians from all over the world have professed faith based on this extraordinary claim. As the Four Gospels describe it, Jesus was raised from the dead **bodily** on the third day after His death by crucifixion. Whether this claim is true or whether it is false, it is certainly a matter worth exploring. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either the **greatest event**, or it is the **crueler hoax** in history. If it is a hoax, then the whole of the Christian message crumbles together with the hopes of those lives built on His name (1 Cor. 15:14-19). But if it actually did happen that He was raised, then this world has been hit with amazing news of earthshaking consequences. Have you ever taken the trouble to decide which it is? Many people who do not believe **have not ever bothered** to examine the evidence¹ in support of Jesus’ resurrection, but as the cartoon implies, are **running** from it. At the same time, many Christians themselves are not sure whether the claims of Christ are actually solid. If you wonder about these matters, and you really should, I urge you to read on.

AN ASTONISHING CLAIM

One important facet in the case for Jesus’ resurrection is the claim as to His identity. The Scriptures do not argue that just any² person rose from the dead, but rather one who in other respects

¹ Cartoon on p.1 by "Taffy," from the cover of Michael Green. *World on the Run*. (I.V.P., 1983), on p. 2 by Joseph Farris of Bethel CT, and on p. 10 by Wayne Stayskal from the Tampa Tribune, and p.14 by Bruce Plante of the Tulsa World, all used by permission.

² J.B. Phillips. (*Ring of Truth*. (Shaw, 1967)), observed, “*I have had hundreds of conversations with people, many...of a higher intellectual calibre than mine, who quite obviously had no idea what Christianity is really about...This I find pathetic and somewhat horrifying. It means that the most important event in history is politely passed by. For it is not as though the evidence had been examined and found unconvincing; it had simply never been examined*” (p.24). This essay hatched an email debate with an atheist professor of Psychiatry, Dr. Kalle Spolander from the University of Stockholm who saw it posted on the internet,

When agnostic philosopher Dr. Kai Nielsen, was confronted with the evidence for Christ’s resurrection he admitted his ignorance, saying, “*I don’t know much about such things...Suppose there were good evidence...I have no idea if there is or isn’t.*” See J.P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen. *Does God Exist? The Great Debate*. (Nelson, 1990), p.64.

was also unusual. In this matter His self-claims alone are **extraordinary!** If the Bible is correct, Jesus **looms above and stands apart** from every other figure in history. No one else with an ounce of sanity ever made the **lofty self-claims** that He did. Neither Mohammed, nor Gautama Buddha, nor Ramakrishna. For example, He **accepted worship** (Matthew 14:33, John 20:28), and claimed the right (as a finite person) to **forgive the sins of other human beings**; a privilege every Jew understood to be reserved not for their fellows, but only for God Almighty (Luke 5:20f). And He said of Himself, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30); a claim that aroused certain parties to plot His death (John 5:18; 10:30-33). Significantly, a wide array of New Testament writers speak of this one born in a Bethlehem stable to Joseph and Mary as no less than the **Creator of the universe** in His heavenly pre-existence (John 1:1-3,14, Col. 1:16f, and Hebrews 1:2f). The soundness of these claims, furthermore, are not overthrown by Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*, an agenda-driven novel, laden with error and resting on an impossible premise. In summary, the claim of the New Testament is that **Jesus is God**, the Eternal Son, who **became a human being** in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4, Philippians 2:5-11).

What is to be done with such claims? Clearly, these implications are too enormous to brush to the side. In fact, the choices open to us are surprisingly few. C.S. Lewis, a **former agnostic intellectual** who became a Christian, stated the three basic options with crystal clarity:

I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say... 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or he would be the devil of hell. You must make a choice. Either [he] was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse.³

WHAT IS THE REAL ISSUE?

Post-modern, *relativistic* thinking (an attractive yet fallacious² system that can only be appealed to selectively), is private *truth-lets* becomes merely hats. But the that your eternal Christ (1 John or it is not true at other pursuits. come to terms rests not on Nazareth stacks indeed is the



confusing the whole issue about Jesus Christ. Whenever come to replace absolute truth, Jesus' perceived relevance a matter of individual taste, on the level of one's choice of issue is really of an altogether different kind. The Bible claims destiny and mine is at stake over what we do about Jesus 5:11,12). Either the claim of Jesus' resurrection is true for all all. If it is falsehood, then it is high time one should go after But if the claim is **true in the absolute sense**, shall we not with Him⁴ and believe in Him as He commands? The answer what we may happen to prefer, but on whether Jesus of up as the One He claims to be. Laying the case that He Eternal Son of God (John 8:58) is what this essay is all about.

Current trends influenced by Soren Kierkegaard in *Training in Christianity*. (Princeton, 1967), p.28f, ** and reflected in Leo Tolstoy. *A Confession*. (Norton, 1996), divorce faith from reason. ** The unfolding of this trend is described by John Warwick Montgomery in *The Suicide of Christian Theology*. (Bethany, 1970). ** Joseph Campbell is a contemporary example (*The Power of Myth*. (Anchor 1991)). When he had just admitted to disbelief in a personal god, a Catholic priest asked him whether logical argument might change his mind. He replied, "No, Father, what then would be the value of faith?" (p.266). Yet his answer is a perversion of faith since, although faith is not sight, it is based on the psychological calculation that its' object is *worthy* of trust and not merely a leap in the dark. ** Jean Paul Sartre, initially an atheist, betrays a curious indifference toward evidence (*Existentialism*. Bernard Frechman, tr. (Philosophical Library 1947), p.51). ** Stephen J. Gould's rigid separation of science from religion as "non-overlapping magisteria" in *Rocks of Ages*. (Ballantine, 1999) misconstrues the distinction between the two (p.22). ** Luther's ongoing critique of Aristotle (*Luther's Works* (LW), A.E. vol.31. p.12, ** v.44. pp.200f. etc.) leads some to believe the former was opposed to reason in general. Yet Luther's comfort with argument and reason is amply demonstrated in *Ibid. vol.1. pp.207f, * v.25. p.157, v.26. pp.29f, v. 28.pp.75f. and v.44. p.201.* ** See also J. W. Montgomery. *Faith Founded on Fact*. (Nelson, 1978), p.129f. ** In fact, the N.T. makes *claims of fact* regarding persons and events both historical and cosmological. It cites a broad range of supporting evidence (John 20:30,31, Acts 1:3, Romans 1:20f), and urges the use of our minds to proclaim it (1 Peter 3:15).

³ C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. (Macmillan, 1952), pp.55,6.

⁴ Mortimer Adler. *"How to Think About Truth."* *How to Think About the Great Ideas*. (Open Court, 2000), ch.1.

The following **THREE ARGUMENTS**, now to be elaborated, cumulatively point to this conclusion:

1. *Jesus' deeds and character are consistent with His high claims.*
2. *The New Testament is reliable testimony to His life.*
3. *There is superior historical evidence for His resurrection.*

I. JESUS: A LIAR? OR DECEIVED?

Although deception, either as self-delusion, or as a fraudulent parade before His followers, is a theoretical possibility, in *reality* it is very difficult to explain Jesus away so simply.

Over 300 aspects of His life fulfilled to an astonishing degree predictions and typological themes from Old Testament **prophecy**. Consider just **eight of the most major** ones that include the time and place of His birth, His manner of entry into Jerusalem, and His death. The odds of Jesus fulfilling just these by chance has been calculated as **one in one hundred million billion**.⁵ Controversy over certain details, including varying degrees of specificity, Jesus' level of control over events (very limited), alleged invention of the authors (which has not been demonstrated) etc., have not explained this figure away.

Jesus also publicly **performed miracles** over nature, sickness, and the demonic, as even His opponents, ancient and modern, acknowledge. For example, while His hostile contemporaries ascribed His powers to the devil (Mk. 3:22) they did not deny His healings *per se*.⁶

In addition, His **teaching** revealed an astonishing depth, and His entire demeanor was so consistent with His precepts that near unanimous opinion regarded Him as a person of **extraordinary character**. Indeed, His appeal has reached across every social class and culture (Mark 5:1f, Matt. 15:21-31, John 3:1f; 4:1-39, Galatians 3:28) where He has lifted multitudes of believers to a new plane of life.

Furthermore, His portrayal in the Gospels cannot be chalked up to human creativity. Genuine holiness is very difficult to credibly invent. Some attempts tend toward a perverse portrait where certain qualities (asceticism, severity, separation) are exaggerated to an extreme. Yet the contemporary opposite extreme tends to suppress Jesus' *holiness* while highlighting His love exclusively. Authentic holiness is found in an encounter with the one person who **demolished all stereotypes** of the term *holy*.⁷

I invite you to do your own reading of the Gospels if you have been relying on faulty and second-hand information about Jesus. Many people are surprised to discover that the Jesus we actually meet in the Gospels bears no resemblance to the "Caspar Milqetoast" caricatures that they had previously held about Him. H.G. Wells, for example, though himself a staunch opponent of Christianity, admitted about Jesus that He was a "*soaring personality*" who was "*too great for His disciples*".⁸ And literary critic and playwright Dorothy Sayers paints the following portrait of Him:

The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore--on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality. It is [we in our generation] who have pared the claws of the Lion of Judah. He was emphatically not a dull man in his human lifetime.⁹

⁵ Jewish writer Louis Lapidus, in Lee Strobel, ed. The Case for Christ. (Zondervan, 2016), pp.253f.

⁶ N.T. Wright. Jesus and the Victory of God. (Fortress, 1996), p.187.

⁷ C.F.D. Moule. The Phenomenon of the New Testament. (SCM, 1967), writes, "*It is difficult enough for anyone, even a consummate master of imaginative writing, to create a picture of a deeply pure, good person, moving...in an impure environment, without making him a prig or prude or a sort of plaster saint. How is it that, through all the Gospel traditions [we find a] remarkably firmly-drawn portrait of an attractive young man moving freely among women of all sorts, including the decidedly disreputable, without a trace of sentimentality, unnaturalness, or prudery...?*" (pp.63,4). ** In light of Moule's words, my very favorite dramatic portrayal of Jesus is presented in the *Sight and Sound* theater production of "Jesus."

⁸ H.G. Wells. The Outline of History. (Garden City Books, 1920), v.l, pp.425,6.

⁹ Dorothy Sayers. The Whimsical Christian: Eighteen Essays. (Macmillan, 1978), p.14.

II. IS THE NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE?

Since it is from the New Testament (NT) that we gain our knowledge of Jesus, it is fitting to ask whether such literature is sound and historically accurate. Critics often describe the Gospels as pious legend that was designed only for propaganda purposes. Now it is true that the Gospel writers had as their purpose to instill faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). But we are told nothing of His physical appearance, His personality is nowhere *directly* described, and much of His life is not addressed. For these reasons it is granted that the Gospels are not biography in the *strict* sense by 21st century definitions. Nevertheless, the following facts add immense weight to their historical accuracy.

A. Archaeology Upholds the New Testament.

Archaeologists who study ancient civilizations by locating and excavating ruins and examining their artifacts, are increasingly confirming the accuracy of the Biblical texts. Sir William Ramsay's vindication of Luke's writings is a classic example.¹⁰ The findings of archaeology have in fact reversed the opinions of a number of skeptics, including Dr. William Albright who writes:

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible [by some schools of thought] has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of numerous details.¹¹

Recent archaeological discoveries include both the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1f) and "the pavement" (John 19:13)--their very existence was doubted prior to then--and the accuracy of the setting of Jacob's Well (John chapter 4). Such findings have caused many scholars to reverse earlier skeptical opinions on the historicity of the *Fourth Gospel*. Its author demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the Jerusalem of Jesus' generation, just as we would expect from the Apostle John, the traditionally held author. Since much of Jerusalem came to be utterly destroyed, its many features would not have been accessible to a later writer. Neither would they have been relevant to later readers since Jerusalem was demolished and all Jews scattered for centuries thereafter by Titus' Roman army in the year 70 C.E.¹²

Archaeologist Harry Frank writes, "**Almost all the sites associated with the life and ministry of Jesus have been identified** by archaeological surveys..."¹³ And the confirmation of Luke's *synchronism* (the Roman manner of tying together unrelated events into a single timeline) in Luke 3:1f, underscores the care he took in writing his Gospel (1:1-4). Critics of his Gospel weave, utterly without evidence, imaginary alternatives to Luke's historical claims (e.g. the Christmas story), but they have not successfully overthrown his demonstrated track record.¹⁴ By extension, the other two *synoptic* (meaning to see similarly) Gospels of *Matthew* and *Mark*, painting similar portraits of Jesus, also deserve to be regarded as trustworthy accounts of His life.

It is popularly held that Jesus' existence is not mentioned by anyone of His times outside of the New Testament. But that is simply false. Within a hundred and fifty years of Jesus' life, numerous contemporaneous non-Biblical and secular writers, some of whom are outright hostile, mention various

¹⁰ Sir William Ramsay. St. Paul the Traveler. (Baker reprint: 1949). Intent on discrediting Luke's writings, in the 19th century, Ramsey traveled across the Mediterranean to that end. But he was astonished to discover that his archaeological findings confirmed repeatedly the customs, locations, and the governing titles Luke had mentioned. He finally concluded, "*Great historians are the rarest of writers...[I regard Luke] among the historians of the first rank*" (pp.3,4).

¹¹ W.F. Albright. The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible. (Revell, 1935), p.127.

¹² Raymond Brown. The Gospel According to John I-XII. (Doubleday, 1966), p.XLIII.

¹³ Harry Thomas Frank. Bible Archaeology and Faith. (Abingdon, 1971), p.292.

¹⁴ N.T. Wright. Who Was Jesus? (Eerdmans, 1992), p.65f. ** Also A.N. Sherwin-White. Roman Society and Roman Law in the N.T. (Oxford, 1963), who wrote, "*It is astonishing that while Greco-Roman historians have been growing in confidence, the 20th century study of the Gospel narratives, starting from no-less-promising material, has taken so gloomy a turn in the developments of form criticism...As soon as Christ enters the Roman orbit in Jerusalem [Herod and Pontius Pilate] confirmation begins. For Acts [authored by Luke], the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming*" (pp.187f).

aspects of His existence. This roster includes Roman authors Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, and Pliny the Younger, and the Jewish writings of Josephus and the Talmud.¹⁵

B. The Gospels Bear *Internal Marks of Historical Integrity.*

There are also characteristics *within* the texts which mark the Gospels as sober history. Consider that the Gospel writers occasionally set the **leading disciples in very poor light** (Matthew 14:30, Mark 9:33f, Luke 22:54f). Unlike Greco-Roman legendary heroes (who also had flaws) the disciple's failures were in *fundamental* contradiction to their subsequent role as moral leaders (Acts 2:22f). The Gospels also included harsh words and difficult sayings by Jesus, which repelled many hearers (Luke 9:23f, John 8:39f). And their treasure of good news is intermingled with both challenge (Mark 8:34f, John 12:25f)¹⁶ and threat (Matthew 25:31f). Such characteristics would have been **counter-productive** for dishonest propagandists while they demonstrate the willingness of the evangelists to tell the truth, however personally embarrassing or inconvenient.

C. The New Testament Text is Firmly Established.

Some (e.g. Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*) charge that the Bible has been altered over time. But *textual critics* note that the New Testament documents have **far better textual support** than do the works of Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, or Tacitus. **From the beginning** they were widely disseminated with their message **debated in high profile**. And from the outset they were used as *de facto* Scripture (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 3:15,16) several centuries **before** the Roman Church settled the *official* canon in 393 C.E.¹⁷ Official material corruption, even by, as he says, an Emperor Constantine, would have been impossible without causing public outcry in their knowledge of the real past which they knew.

The popular charge of "thousands of errors" fails to distinguish between manuscripts and the Bible, and it misses the trivial nature of such so-called "mistakes," amounting as they do to mere misspellings and accidental word omissions. These are entirely consistent with hand-copied transmission. The seemingly high figure, while technically accurate, rests on recounting each tiny error repeatedly as it reappears in subsequent copies. Not one doctrinal dispute is affected by any discrepancy.¹⁸ Indeed, textual critic Sir Frederic Kenyon notes:

*The interval between the dates of the original composition and [our oldest manuscripts] becomes so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.*¹⁹

IN SUMMARY, there is no need to treat the NT with "kid gloves" and special pleading. With the single addition of an *openness to the possibility* of the miraculous, readers are encouraged to subject the NT to the **same level** of scrutiny Classical historians apply to non-biblical literature.²⁰

¹⁵ Gary Habermas. *The Verdict of History*. (Nelson, 1988), p.169. Cited are 39 ancient extra-biblical sources, including 17 non-Christian, that witness from outside the New Testament to over **100 details** of Jesus' life.

¹⁶ G.K. Chesterton. *Orthodoxy*. (Image, 1959), p.157.

¹⁷ The closest we get to the original documents of each of the mentioned classical writers is between 900 and 1300 years. The *Koran* was written just short of 600 years, and the *Book of Mormon* 2500 years after events they claim to describe. By contrast, entire manuscripts of the N.T. can be dated to within 300 years of its close. Complete N.T. books can be dated to within 100 years of its close. Nearly the entire N.T. can be found in quotations from the generation just after the Apostles. See F.F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (I.V.P. 1972), pp.14f. ** Such facts utterly refute even the possibility for the ignorant premise (the Roman Church drastically altered the "primitive" teaching of the early Christians) that grounds Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*. (Doubleday, 2003), p.231

¹⁸ Bruce Metzger. "The Documentary Evidence." Lee Strobel, ed. *The Case for Christ*. (Zondervan, 2016), pp.93f.

¹⁹ F.F. Bruce. Op.cit. (17), p.20.

²⁰ Historian Chauncey Sanders lists three tests in his Introduction to Research in English Literary History. (Macmillan, 1952), pp.143f, ** and seven factors are cited by C. Behan McCullagh in his Justifying Historical Descriptions. (Cambridge, 1984), pp.19f, as criteria for valid analysis of historical documents. ** On the basis of these criteria, John Warwick Montgomery in History and Christianity. (Bethany, 1965), and ** William Lane Craig in "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?" M. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, ed. Jesus Under Fire. (Zondervan, 1995), pp.141f, respectively, vindicate the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. ** Applying the Federal Rules of Evidence used in the United States Courts of Law, attorney Pamela Binnings Ewen "proves" the resurrection of Jesus based on a *preponderance* of evidence. See her Faith on Trial. (Broadman and Holman, 1999). In personal correspondence to me she further said the evidence would actually prevail under the standard of a *criminal trial* (beyond a reasonable doubt).

Among those who work **outside** of the normal canons of historical research is **The Jesus Seminar**, a gathering of the skeptical-minded whose conclusions are published in Robert Funk, ed. The Five Gospels (FG): The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. (Polebridge, 1993). Their emotionally driven desire to *stick it to the fundamentalists* (p.1f,5) should not be confused with valid historical inquiry. Far from even attempting historical fairness, their project is a stacked deck of hostile **presuppositions** and questionable assumptions designed to yield only the outcome they desire. The position my essay represents does not fall under the same charge since the presuppositions on which mine rests are capable of yielding a number of possible conclusions, including those which, if true, would damage historic Christianity. Critics who are enamored with Cartesian doubt (FG, p.32) would do well to apply the same doubt to the following criteria:

First, they reject miracle stories out-of-hand as impossible (implied FG, p.2). Thus, their whole enterprise is poisoned at the outset because, in advance of any inquiry, many "conclusions" are already decided in the negative.

Second, they **presume** the Four Gospels to be dated long after the fact, error-ridden, and inferior to other contemporaneous sources (FG, p.4). Yet they are eager to give credit to spurious works appearing more than a century after the close of the N.T. For example, they give the highly problematic apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* at least equal weight with the canonical Gospels (FG, p.15f, 26). They also argue that a so-called *Gospel of Q* (pp.13f), which they allege is older than our Four Gospels, portrays a "primitive" and non-miraculous Jesus with no messianic trappings (pp.32f).

Third, they **presume** the first Christians were not interested in history, and willingly put words into Jesus' mouth to fulfill their own needs. Under their *distinctive discourse* criterion (FG, p.30f), the only words they accept as authentically from Jesus are those that differ from the concerns of both the early Church and the surrounding Judaistic culture.

Fourth, they **presume** the Christian community invented words and events in Jesus' life to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. For example, John Dominic Crossan describes the Gospels "not as *history remembered*, but *prophecy historicized*," in Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography. (Harper-Collins, 1994), p.145.

Fifth, they view apologetic attempts with suspicion and **presume only** scholarship producing *negative* results is academically sound (Crossan. Ibid. p.XI).

For firsthand reading of *Jesus Seminar* writers see also Marcus Borg. The God We Never Knew. (Harper, 1997). ** Marcus Borg in Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright. The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions. (Harper, 1999). ** John Dominic Crossan. The Birth of Christianity. (Harper, 1998). ** Ibid. Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography. (Harper Collins, 1994), ** and Robert Funk, ed. The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do? (Polebridge, 1998).

IN REBUTTAL, the above opposition to miracle is based on an outmoded 19th century view of science and, in the context of naturalistic criteria, commits the logical fallacy of *begging the question* (assuming what one seeks to prove). This essay is not an appeal to uncritically accept every miracle claim we encounter. But Chesterton, (Op.cit. (16), p.150) rightly assigns the term *dogmatist* where it actually belongs by writing, "Somehow...an extraordinary idea has arisen that *disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way. The believers in miracles accept them...because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them...because they have a doctrine against them.*"

Second, their saddling of the burden of proof onto the Gospels instead of onto the critics violates the entire tradition of historical research up to the present. Wayne Booth argues rightly that "*Abstract commands to 'doubt pending proof' [ought to be replaced] with [what is] the ancient and natural command to 'assent pending disproof,'*" in Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent. (U. of Chicago Press, 1974), p.101. ** Louis Gottschalk writes, "*A document should be assumed to be trustworthy unless, under burden of proof, it is shown to be untrustworthy,*" in Understanding History: A Primer in Historical Method. (Alfred Knopf, 1969), p.89. ** The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* was heavily influenced by gnosticism, (2nd century, secret knowledge cults) and is therefore dated by the majority of scholars to the mid-next century **after Christ**. See John Meier. A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. v.I. (Doubleday, 1991), pp.124-166. ** Likewise, the *Seminar's* reliance on the *Gospel of Q* is not sound. While other Gospels undoubtedly circulated (Luke 1:1), Q is nonetheless merely a hypothetical document; not an actual text that can be examined.

Principles behind their **third** presumption were **rejected by secular historians** decades ago (Edgar Krentz. The Historical Critical Method. (Fortress, 1975), p.78f). It absurdly leaves researchers with a Jew stripped of His ethnicity and reduced to a teacher whose followers rarely quoted their leader. Their portrayal also fails to reconcile the negative reactions of His contemporaries against an alleged eccentric that resulted in His crucifixion, or for Him in a movement that turned their world upside-down (Acts 17:6). The notion that the first Christians were not interested in Jesus' earthly words would require a level of evidence that the critics have utterly failed to produce. And who is supposed to have invented those world-changing words critics allege were put into His mouth? Writes John Bright, "*It is far easier to credit such...insight to Jesus Himself—who... was one of the great creative minds in history—than to His early disciples, who were, for the most part, humble and very ordinary men.*" The Kingdom of God. (Abingdon, 1953), p.209. ** The so-called "synoptic problem" (Funk. Five Gospels. (above), pp.10f) is actually irrelevant to the matter of Jesus' resurrection since it does not follow from the notion of "borrowing" they describe, that their material had to have been invented. Furthermore, the *passion* sections of the synoptic Gospels differ so much from each other in details that their contents cannot have arisen from cross-borrowing on any count.

Fourth, for reasons described on pages 8 and 12, there were no motives for Jews to have been interested in a crucified peasant that would have led them to *invent* words and deeds corresponding to Messianic prophecy.

Fifth, assuming as true (science has disproved even the possibility of miracles) what they also put into service to bolster their argument (e.g. "Jesus wasn't raised because miracles are impossible") commits the logical fallacy of *begging the question*.

III. THE FACTS SUPPORTING JESUS' RESURRECTION IN HISTORY

The most powerful sign of all that Jesus is the Son of God is His resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:29-36, Romans 1:4). Here again we are faced with a question of huge implications: Did it happen? Is the resurrection story the great exception to the "usual dreary end of human life?" Some regard the resurrection of Jesus as superstition. But consider the evidence, both direct and circumstantial,²¹ that supports it as one of the certain events in history. Each of these pieces calls for something **extraordinary** to account for their occurrence.

- **Jesus was seen alive after His death.** On eleven occasions, over forty days, as described in all four Gospels, people saw, heard, and, on occasion, touched the risen Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:6 adds that on one occasion there were over 500 witnesses. Such broad and extensive testimony is utterly **without parallel** in ancient history and fulfills one of the major criteria used in historical investigation to establish credibility.²²
- **Jesus' tomb was found empty** on the third day after His burial. It is worth noting that the owner of the tomb was well-known, and its location was public (Matthew 27:57-60). The Jerusalem (not far off Siberia!) location meant the tomb was immediately accessible to Jesus' opponents to scrutinize rigorously.
- **Jesus' opponents utterly failed to produce the body or discredit their story.** This despite strong motivation and the potential opportunity to humiliate the early believers.
- **Jesus came to be worshipped.** A vehemently monotheistic people turned Jesus the *human being* into the central object of their devotion. Indeed, this same Jesus who had tired (John 4:6), hungered (Matthew 21:18), and thirsted (John 19:28) came to be named **God and Lord** of the entire cosmos (Colossians 1:15f).
- **Crucifixion was called a victorious death.** An *apparent* weakling and failure (Mark 15:29) came to be regarded as the deliverer of **all** humankind (1 Corinthians 15:21,22).
- **There was human transformation from fear to confidence.** Those who had witnessed Jesus' awful death left their hiding place behind (John 20:19f) to boldly and publicly proclaim His resurrection (Acts 4:37f). Their message could not be suppressed.

So momentous was this single event in the First Century, its effects have been described as a "*widening circle of ripples*" from "*a boulder crashing into the pool of history*."²³ In one of the oddest turns in history, a message resting on the death of a condemned outcast came to be proclaimed as the ground for good news (1 Corinthians 1:17). Equally amazing was the extent of the transformation of the Mediterranean world following from its proclamation (Acts 17:6). The impetus for this movement was the conviction that the same Jesus who was crucified was now seen alive again. These facts are admitted even by knowledgeable skeptics.²⁴

The resurrection story, of course, has had its critics, ever since *Day One*. From the account of the first guards in Matthew 28:11f, all the way to the present, there have been efforts to explain away the

²¹ Even the "criteria" of the Jesus Seminar is addressed. See Funk. Op.cit. (20), p.26.

²² For a larger set of "widely-acknowledged historical facts" see Gary Habermas and Antony Flew. Did Jesus Rise from the Dead: The Great Debate. (Harper and Row, 1987), pp.19f. ** See also Wm. Lane Craig., both Reasonable Faith 3rd. ed. (Crossway, 2008) ch.8. ** and On Guard. (David C. Cook, 2010), ch. 9. ** N.T. Wright. The Resurrection of the Son of God. (Fortress, 2003), unites the claims both that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus was actually seen alive in bodily form by the end of that first [Easter] day as "historically secure" (pp.686) because he insists that both need to be highlighted together in order to compel faith(pp. 691f)

²³ Karl Barth. The Word of God and the Word of Man. (Harper, 1957), p.63.

²⁴ Will Durant. The Story of Civilization. v.III. (Simon and Schuster, 1972), pp.553f. ** Arnold Toynbee. The Crucible of Christianity. (World, 1969), p.234.

resurrection. Yet each new attempt is more perverse than those which came before,²⁵ while still failing to account for the range of indisputable facts. Let's look at the **weaknesses of six objections** most frequently leveled by critics.

OBJECTION: "THE ACCOUNTS ARE MYTH AND NOT HISTORY."

ANSWER: Granting variations in usage, by myth critics generally mean the Gospels have distorted history by cloaking an originally "primitive" Jesus under layers of legend and pious imagination.²⁶ Yet there are at least **FOUR REASONS** why the mythological interpretation fails.

- There's **not enough time**. Myth requires a number of generations to fashion. There are **no parallels** in other literature of myth developing and being believed among eye-witnesses and within the short time-frame in which the New Testament was formed.²⁷
- Many of these eyewitnesses to His public ministry were **hostile toward the Jesus** the Gospels describe (Matthew 12:22f). These opponents had both the motives and the means to expose falsehoods about Him had the first disciples attempted them.²⁸ Yet their opportunity did not produce a serious correction.²⁹

²⁵ John Shelby Spong. Resurrection: Myth or Reality? (Harper, 1994), writes that Peter felt so bad about Jesus' death that he *imagined Him back to life* (p.255). ** Gerd Luedemann argues similarly in The Resurrection of Jesus. (Fortress, 1994), p.97f. ** William Lane Craig vs. Robert Greg Cavin. Dead or Alive? A Debate on the Resurrection of Jesus. (Simon Greenleaf University, 1995). Dr. Cavin of U.C. Irvine argues that Jesus had an *unknown identical twin brother* who began a hoax about the resurrection. ** Barbara Thiering. Jesus The Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Doubleday, 1992), argues from a "coded language" that Jesus was drugged, crucified by the Dead Sea, yet He survived. He married Mary Magdalene, and then another, and then died of old age. ** Amazingly, Bertrand Russell's Why I Am Not a Christian. (Touchstone, 1957), ignores the historical question of Jesus altogether. ** Joseph Campbell, Op.cit. (2), virtually avoids Jesus' resurrection. His single, indirect, reference falsely calls the Gospel accounts poetry (p.68). ** an interpretation Jesus' contemporaries clearly rejected. See Gary Habermas. Op.cit. (15).

²⁶ Rudolf Bultmann. Jesus Christ and Mythology. (Scribner's, 1958). ** Robert Funk. The Acts... Op.cit. (20), p.2.

²⁷ Historical research is on the side of immediate belief in Jesus' resurrection. Dr. Borg misleads readers when he implies the resurrection stories developed over a period of 100 years (The God... Op.cit. (20), p. 95). A credal summary of the resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15:3-11) has been dated to just 3-5 years after Jesus' passion, which presupposes a *prior* public belief in it. See R. Fuller. Foundations of NT Christology. (Scribner's 1965), p. 142. ** Even the Jesus Seminar concedes this early date in Funk. The Acts... Op.cit. (20), p. 454. ** The Apostle Paul's first letters appeared within 25 years, and the Four Gospels, at the **outside** within 65 years of Jesus' ministry. See F.F. Bruce. Op.cit. (17), pp. 11f. ** Indeed, John A.T. Robinson argues that the silence of the Gospels concerning the destruction of the temple in 70 CE implies that they had been completed by then. (Redating the NT. (SCM, 1976)). For since its demise would have fueled Christian preaching that Jesus had replaced the Temple sacrifices (John 1:29 and Hebrews 10:11f) the Gospel writers would have highlighted its destruction as proof that the old system no longer availed. They also would have distinguished it from the end of the world (Luke 21:25-28) had they witnessed these events that were alleged to have been predicted. Also, the silence in the *Book of Acts* on the deaths of St's. Peter and Paul argues for a pre-70 date. And since the Gospel of Luke is part 1 of that two-volume work (Luke 1:1-3 and Acts 1:1-3), this would place Luke even earlier.

The many who assign a post-70 date to the *Gospels* do so largely on the allegation that Jesus could not have predicted the future. Why not? (see p.8). In any case the predictions of the Temple's destruction are of a general nature that could have arisen merely from reflection back on the destruction of the *first* Temple in 587 B.C.E. See C.H. Dodd's observations in Robinson. Ibid, p.27f. Yet even dates stretching into the 90's fall far short of the time that is necessary for mythological development. ** Early critics assumed that the *Gospels* would have to have been dated after 150 C.E. for the mythological interpretation to even be considered. (Tacelli and Kreeft. Handbook of Christian Apologetics. (I.V.P. 1994), p.163.

John Macquarrie. God Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology. (Harper and Row, 1967) sheds light in this problem by writing, "Myth is usually characterized by a remoteness in time and space...as having taken place long ago. [The Gospels by contrast concern] an event that had a particular definite location in Palestine...under Pontius Pilate, only a generation or so before the New Testament account of these happenings" (pp.177,80) . ** A.N. Sherwin-White. Op.cit. (14), writes, "The agnostic type of form-criticism would be much more credible if the compilation of the Gospels were much later in time...than can be the case...Herodotus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, [showing that] even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core" (pp.189,90).

²⁸ Eta Linnemann, in her book Is there a Synoptic Problem? (Baker, 1992) writes, "The eye-witnesses did not disappear...in a flash after decades. Who at that time would have dared to alter the 'first tradition' beyond recognition?" (p.65).

²⁹ William Lane Craig observes, "Conflicting traditions [to the empty tomb story] **nowhere appear**, even in Jewish polemic," in Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland. Op.cit. (20), p.149.

- The Gospels demonstrably have **no association with the mystery religions³⁰** and **mythological fantasy**. A careful comparison between ancient mythology, whether Asian or Mediterranean or Egyptian on the one hand, and the Four Gospels on the other, highlights the significant contrast between them on a number of grounds. The Gospels, for example, are consistently silent about motives while instead highlighting the *actions* of their characters that are inconsistent with the *inventing* of legendary heroes. Literary critic Erich Auerbach contrasts legend and history as follows:

Legend runs far too smoothly. All cross-currents, all frictions, all that is casual, secondary to the main events and themes, everything unresolved, truncated, and uncertain, which confuses the clear progress of action and simple orientation of the actors, has disappeared. The historical event [by contrast]...runs much more variously, contradictorily, and confusedly.³¹

- Specifically, the following seven factors in John chapter 20 are at odds with the tendency of legendary material: **1)** With great restraint, no attempt is made to describe the actual event of Jesus rising from the dead. Readers are treated only to the subsequent events. **2)** Mary neither recognized Jesus initially (v.14), **3)** nor even considered that there was anything special about Him (v.15). **4)** Indeed, even by the end of the day the *men* were still in hiding "for fear of the Jews" (v.19), **5)** while the women were portrayed as the first witnesses of the risen Jesus. Were the Gospels the free creation of paternalistic (male dominant) bias, as feminists charge, it is incredible their alleged *creators* would have *invented* women for this role. The testimony of women did not even count legally in ancient Middle Eastern cultures. **6)** Yet it was *their* courage going to the tomb on Sunday morning that effectively put the men's cowardice to shame. **7)** No other culture in history has more opposed confusing deity with humanity than they.³²

OBJECTION: "MIRACLES ARE NOT POSSIBLE."

ANSWER: The success of modern science in describing the world in terms of cosmic regularity has led some to rule out miracles as an outmoded concept. Yet that is an unwarranted philosophical **presumption** (philosophical naturalism) and **not a scientific conclusion**. And philosophy cannot dogmatically forbid miracle apart from proof that there is no reality outside of nature. Once the existence of a transcendent Creator is granted as possible, miracles deserve philosophical consideration. And indeed, on both philosophical and scientific grounds the case for the existence of God is stronger than ever.³³ The discovery of the Big Bang (BB) indicates the **Beginning** of the universe **out of nothing** (Gen. 1:1), and the over seventy five precisely fine-tuned physical parameters in the universe that are required for life to exist, point to an **Intelligent Designer**.³⁴ In addition, the alleged grounds for Darwinian

³⁰ Michael Grant writes, "Modern critical methods fail to support the Christ-myth theory. It has again and again been answered and annihilated by first-rank scholars," Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels. (Scribner's, 1977), p.200. Mithraism significantly evolved over the centuries so that those rites critics say inspired Christianity are dated **after Christ** by 1-3 centuries. The first mention of any *Mithraic Taurobolium* rite was the 2nd Century, and the rite in which blood from a slaughtered bull covered the candidate who was "reborn forever," is dated the **3rd century after Christ**. Those mysteries which **precede** Christ (Osiris, Ishtar, etc.) are only vaguely similar to Him. And Israel categorically abhorred myth for theological reasons (e.g. Dionysus in (2 Maccabees 6:1f). See J. Gresham Machen. The Origin of Paul's Religion. (Eerdmans, 1925), and ** Grant. The World of Rome. (Mentor, 1960), ch.6.

³¹ Erich Auerbach. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. (Princeton, 1953), p.19.

³² Grant. Op.cit. (31), writes, "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of deaths and rebirths of mystical gods seems so **entirely foreign** that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is **very hard to credit**" (p.199).

³³ **Philosophy:** Antony Flew. There is a God. (Harper 2007). ** Moreland etc. Op.cit. (2), ** R. Swinburne. Is There a God? (Oxford, 1996). **Science:** John Polkinghorne. The Faith of a Physicist. (Princeton, 1994).

³⁴ The fact of a beginning out of nothing means that neither time, space, matter, or energy existed through which scientific processes could work prior to the BB. Hence, **the BB was the biggest miracle of all time!** See ** Robert Jastrow. God and the Astronomers. (Norton, 1978). ** Hugh Ross. Creator and the Cosmos. (RTB, 2018). ** Ross's research is constantly updated at www.reasons.org. ** Gerald Schroeder. The Science of God. (Free Press, 1997). Schroeder's book contributed to Antony Flew's journey from atheism (see notes 20 and 35) to belief in God. See Flew's personal account of this journey in Roy Abraham Varghese, ed. There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind. (Harper One, 2007).

evolution are eroding rapidly.³⁵ But to return to the original point, the skeptical prejudice urging this objection leads to evasion rather than to that kind of critical analysis that is consistent with critical study.³⁶

OBJECTION: "THE BODY WAS STOLEN."

ANSWER: The tomb was indeed found empty.³⁷ Yet neither the Jewish nor the Roman leaders would have taken the body. To the contrary, both had every motive to produce the body publicly in order to humiliate the first disciples and nip their movement in the bud. And since the scene in question was right at Jerusalem, it was completely within their power to locate the corpse should it still have existed. Yet to their dismay, no such body was ever produced.

Because of the guards, Jesus' disciples *could not* have stolen His body even if they wanted to.



"Well I can't explain this either...but I'm sure in a few days everybody will forget all about it

The fact is, neither had any *incentive* for hiding the corpse. The dire consequences of their loyalty to Him included beating, imprisonments, and even death. No sane person chooses these for what they know is false. Under such pressures liars confess their deceptions and betray their cohorts. Yet significantly, not even one disciple is hinted to have spilled any beans. For, again, there were none to spill!!!

Some assert that Jesus was raised only *spiritually* and not bodily, so that whether the *body* was raised is irrelevant to the claim that He is alive today. Yet in biblical theology both body and spirit are **tied together** in Romans 6:9 where the aorist (simple past) tense for "being raised"--*εγερθεις*, is consistent with a *phenomenal* event. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 15:4 Paul states that, having been buried, Jesus was raised "on the *third* day." All four Gospels narrate His *bodily* resurrection. First Century Jewish anthropology rejected the body/soul dualism and the immortality of the soul as taught in Greco-Roman thought. Accordingly, they did not conceive of a *spiritual* resurrection without a body.³⁸ Indeed, the

³⁵ Atheist philosopher Dr. Thomas Nagel. "Public Education and Intelligent Design." *Philosophy and Public Affairs and Intelligent Design*. (Spr. 2008), pp.187-205. Michael Denton. *Evolution: Still A Theory in Crisis*.

³⁶ Thus, David Hume's study, "Of Miracles." *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. (Clarendon, 1902), fails to grapple even once with the specifics of Jesus' resurrection. And his arguments against miracle have been widely challenged as unsound. His contention that no amount of evidence for miracle is ever sufficient to overturn unbelief, begs the question. This is especially so since he denigrates as insufficiently critical *all* who, by belief in miracle, fall outside his self-defined *uniformity of human experience* category. He also commits a categorical error by disqualifying miracle on mere *probability* grounds while failing to give account of relevant background information, namely, Jesus' unique character and role, and God's power and purpose. ** See C.S. Lewis. *Miracles*. (Macmillan, 1960), ** Ronald Nash. *Faith and Reason*. (Zondervan, 1988), pp.225f, ** and Richard Swinburne. Op.cit. (32). p.115f. ** Even atheistic philosopher Antony Flew concedes that Hume's arguments involve "gross weaknesses" (Gary Habermas. Op.cit. (22), p.34).

³⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg. *Jesus-God and Man*. (SCM, 1968), quotes Paul Althaus approvingly that the resurrection message "could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact." (p.100). ** Paul Maier summarizes, "If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable...to conclude that [Jesus'] tomb] was actually empty...And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement." In *The Fullness of Time*. (Kregel, 1991), p.203. ** Michael Grant concludes, "if we apply the **same criteria** that we would apply to other ancient literary sources, the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty." Op.cit. (29), p.176 ** Dr. Craig cites **45 prominent New Testament scholars** who argue for the **historicity of Jesus' empty tomb**, in his "The Empty Tomb of Jesus." R.T. France and David Wenham, eds. *Gospel Perspectives*, v.II, (JSOT, 1981), p.190. ** Crossan's hesitant assertion that Jesus was not buried because those who were crucified were left to hang for the birds to eat [Jesus]. Op.cit. (20) pp.153f.) is rebutted by Raymond Brown in *The Death of the Messiah*, v.II. (Doubleday, 1994), pp.1205f, where he cites ancient references to the contrary. ** Archaeologists have uncovered remains of a crucified man who had been buried (Borg and Wright. Op.cit. (20), p.89). ** And Crossan notwithstanding, (*Who Killed Jesus?* (Harper, 1995), p.190.) the Gospel writers could not have successfully *invented* either a tomb or an *empty* tomb out of nothing. Neither could they have successfully *fabricated* the role of Joseph of Arimathea since he was a "respected member of the council" (Mark 15:43), and so a very public figure and in this matter, a covert member of hostile group.

³⁸ In a recent set of addresses, Marcus Borg proclaimed that the first Christians would have believed in Jesus' *resurrection*, even if his body had remained in the grave. Yet in a prior exchange with N.T. Wright, titled "A Conversation on the Historical Jesus," Wright exposed the falsehood of Borg's assertion with the reminder that a *resurrection* without a body would not have occurred to the

Apostle Paul encountered scoffing from the crowds in Athens **precisely for the reason** that his message involved the resurrection **of the body** (Acts 17:18, 32).

OBJECTION: "JESUS MERELY RECOVERED FROM HIS WOUNDS."

ANSWER: Crucifixion was an *excruciating* experience--indeed, these two words are clearly related. The cause of death by crucifixion was multifactorial and torturous! Besides the lacerations, these factors included exhaustion asphyxia, dehydration, and congestive heart failure.³⁹ That Jesus could by himself have survived such agony on a Roman cross and then limp out of the tomb by His own power, is improbable enough! That His bloodied body could have been overlooked so as to deceive despairing disciples that He is the "*Risen Lord of Life*," is absurd! And even attempting such a fete would have incriminated Jesus as a fraud. Only a *supernatural resurrection* could have restored their fainting hearts.

OBJECTION: "THE WITNESSES WERE JUST 'SEEING THINGS.'"

ANSWER: One point virtually all scholars acknowledge is that the first disciples were utterly convinced they had seen the risen Christ.⁴⁰ Easter was no mere add-on to bolster a moralistic story. The disciple's certitude at seeing Jesus alive again was the sole reason they resumed following Him, theologized on His Lordship, and penned the New Testament at all. So, the real question is, how do we account for the obvious conviction of the disciples? Were they just hallucinating? While sounding plausible, many factors contradict it.⁴¹ To begin with, (1) the large number of witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:5-8), (2) covering the spectrum of personality types (see John 20 -- Peter, Thomas, the two Marys), contradict the theory of hallucinations which, by definition, are not shared experiences. Also (3), the substantial and positive lifestyle change of many of the converted overthrows the hallucination theory. Non-Christian Jewish scholar, Dr. Pinchas Lapide, writes:

When this scared, frightened band of the apostles, which was just about to throw away everything in order to flee in despair...suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society...then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation.⁴²

OBJECTION: "THE STORIES ARE FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS."

ANSWER: This problem is vastly overstated. First, without conceding the actual existence of contradictions, it must be said that the truth of Jesus' resurrection does **not depend** on error-free

Jewish mind. (Regent College Videos, Vancouver, B.C.pt.3). When I publicly challenged Borg about that earlier interchange, he conceded both the truth and the weight of Wright's objection, while claiming a few Jewish Scriptures (*Daniel* 12:1-3 and *The Book of Jubilees*) to be exceptions to the prevailing Jewish view. The problem for Borg is that a few questionable exceptions do not make his point (questionable, for example, by interpreting highly symbolic *Daniel* literally in order to interpret historical narrative in the Gospels metaphorically). Borg was also caught in the contradiction that if his position that the body was irrelevant was really true, there would have been no motive for the Gospel writers *inventing* the empty tomb stories. This lecture series (including my questions to Borg) occurred on October 31, 1998 at Bethel Lutheran Church of Shoreline, Shoreline, WA.

³⁹ William Edwards, MD. and others. "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." [Journal of the American Medical Association](#). (March 21, 1986), pp.1455f. ** Consider also Mel Gibson's 2004 movie, *The Passion of the Christ*.

⁴⁰ Michael Grant. Op.cit. (31), writes, "These accounts do prove that certain people were utterly convinced that [Jesus had risen]." (p.176). ** Even historical skeptic, Rudolf Bultmann, concedes the disciples' certitude on this matter to be a "fact" in *Kerygma and Myth*. v.I, (SPCK, 1953), p.42. ** Also note John Shelby Spong (Op.cit. (25)), who admits, "The change [in the disciples—Peter in particular] was measurable and objective even if the cause of this change is debated. [It] was part of that first-century explosion of power that **cannot be denied** by any student of history" (p.26).

⁴¹ Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli. Op.Cit. (24), p.186f. Cited are 14 fatal flaws with the hallucination theory.

⁴² Pinchas Lapide. [The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective](#). (Fortress, 1988), p.125. This admission that Jesus was resurrected is conceded by an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, and therefore runs counter to his own bias. Note p.10 of my essay.

accounts. And it is fitting to clear up confusion about the word itself. In order to qualify as a contradiction, the variant accounts must be *impossible* and not merely *difficult* to reconcile. The Gospels admittedly do take work to fit together since they differ from one another in emphases and detail (e.g. Matthew focuses on Jesus' Galilean appearances while Luke gives his attention to Jerusalem). But do these variations imply incompetence or invention? To the contrary, separate reporters to any event, following *all* standards of accuracy, will edit their stories differently according to what is relevant to their readers. Indeed, when separate accounts of the same event are identical to each other, collaboration is suspected. What is noteworthy about the Gospels however is that while appearing contradictory on the surface, a number of scholars have reconciled them. Writes Dr. Sayers,

*One is often surprised to find how many apparent contradictions turn out not to be contradictory at all, but merely supplementary... Divergences appear very great on first sight... But the fact remains that **all** of the [Easter accounts], without exception, can be made to fall into a place in a single orderly and coherent narrative, without the smallest contradiction or difficulty and without any suppression, invention, or manipulation, beyond a trifling effort to imagine the natural behavior of a bunch of startled people running about in the dawnlight between Jerusalem and the garden.⁴³*

Dr. Simon Greenleaf sheds much needed light on this matter of alleged contradictions in the Gospels. As one of the greatest legal minds in the history of the United States of America and co-founder of Harvard Law School, he noted that perfectly consistent testimony from witness to witness is not expected from truthful testimony. Rather, writes Greenleaf, what is desired is

...substantial truth, under circumstantial variety. [This is indeed what is found in the Gospels where] there is enough discrepancy to show that there could have been no previous concert among them, and at the same time such substantial agreement as to show that they all were independent narrators of the same great transaction.⁴⁴

FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR JESUS' RESURRECTION

The **explosive growth** of the early Church against impossible odds cries out for an adequate cause that only this account supplies. For it wasn't the powerful, backed by wealth, prestige, and armies, but instead so-called "nobodies" with every cultural strike against them (1 Cor. 1:26f), whose message won over the Roman Empire.⁴⁵ What better explanation for this "**impossible**"⁴⁶ feat than their self-stated one that it was God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead! (Acts 2:29-36).

The notion of a *crucified* savior arising out of Judaism is so astounding that only Jesus' resurrection is capable of accounting for it. **Jewish bias against** the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels was **massive**. Consider the following three questions: What other than Easter could have persuaded so many Jews who had longed for a military-like deliverer (Zechariah 9:9-10), instead to accept this shamefully hung "loser" (Galatians 3:13) as their promised Messiah? And what other than Jesus' resurrection could have moved Jews to break with their **transcendentalist** (God standing outside and above creation) and **monotheistic**⁴⁷ convictions to **worship a mere historical figure as Almighty God**

⁴³ Dorothy Sayers. The Man Born to Be King. (Harper and Brothers, 1943), p.19f. Her comments introduce her radio plays on the life of Christ prepared for B.B.C. Radio. ** Also G. E. Ladd. I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. (Eerdmans, 1975), pp.79f, ** and John Wenham. Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict? (Baker, 1992). He says "NO!"

⁴⁴ Simon Greenleaf. The Testimony of the Evangelists. (Kregel, 1995 reprint from 1847 ed.), p.34.

⁴⁵ Estimates vary widely. They range between 300,000 believers in the Roman Empire by the end of the First Century (Kaari Ward, ed. Jesus and His Times. (Reader's Digest, 1987), p.298), ** and 30,000 believers by 250 A.D. (Kenneth Scott Latourette. History of the Expansion of Christianity, v.I. (Zondervan, 1970), p.95.

⁴⁶ Elton Trueblood. Philosophy of Religion. (Harper and Brothers, 1957), writes, "That the Christian movement could have succeeded, so that the humble men who fished on the shores of the Sea of Galilee are today better known than the very Caesars who ruled the world...is so amazing it would be incredible if we did not know it to be the case" (p.140). ** See also St. Augustine. The City of God. Vernon Bourke, ed. (Image, 1958), pp.510,11.

⁴⁷ Monotheism, drawing on Deuteronomy 6:4 ("The LORD our God is one Lord"), set Israel's belief in contrast with the polytheism of its' neighbors and appears to exclude in principle Jesus' claim to be God. But the word in question is ambiguous and can be

(John 20:28, Philippians 2:6)? And what other than Easter can account for the change of their worship day from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2), and their Passover meal to the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-23)? *Invented* myth would have been impotent to overthrow entrenched tradition.⁴⁸

In addition, the **conversion of Saul of Tarsus** (who came to be named Paul) points to a momentous miracle almost all by itself. Without question something major turned Saul's orientation on its head. Having begun as a violent enemy of the Church (Acts 8:3; 9:1), he was **utterly turned around** into becoming Jesus' servant. Henceforth choosing suffering for Christ's sake (2 Cor. 11:23f), Paul gave up all he had, endured persecution, and preached "Christ crucified" in city after city all the way to Rome, where he was martyred. For reasons described above, his new faith was miles apart from his former Judaism. Neither was his conversion impelled by a personal sense of guilt since he expressed himself as a former proud and comfortable Pharisaic Jew (Galatians 1:13-15, Philippians 3:4-7). Nothing less than an actual encounter with the risen Christ has remotely explained his major about-face.

The **other Apostles** too, overcame fear to brave suffering, imprisonment, and death as they proclaimed the Good News of the Risen Christ across their world. Is it thinkable these people would persevere even to their deaths for merely metaphor?⁴⁹ Clearly, the stakes for proclaiming Christ were so high as to preclude easy-believism on the part of these first disciples. Dr. Greenleaf gives insight into the intensity of those persecutions that yielded only the genuine:

Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, [early Christians received] nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, persecution, stripes, imprisonments, torments, and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate, and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay rejoicing. As one after another was put to a miserable death, the survivors [continued] their work with increased vigor and resolution...The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of like heroic constancy...and unblenching courage...If it were morally possible for them to have been deceived in this matter, every human motive operated to lead them to discover and avow their error...From these [considerations] there is no escape but in the perfect conviction and admission that they were good men, testifying to that which they had carefully observed...and well knew to be true.⁵⁰

THAT CONCLUSION WHICH LEADS TO A NEW BEGINNING

I urge you to review each facet of the evidence we considered. While no *single* strand can bear the weight alone, when added all together, the case for Jesus' resurrection is exceedingly strong. A.M. Ramsey notes that "...certain facts are unaccountable apart from the resurrection, and that different lines of historical testimony so converge as to point to [it] with overwhelming probability"⁵¹

J.N.D. Anderson, late Dean of the School of Law at the University of London, passionately writes,

"If the resurrection is true, then it is the supreme fact of history, and to fail to adjust one's life to its implications means irreparable loss."⁵²

translated several ways. Interestingly, that passage's Hebrew word for *one*, *echad* (אֶחָד), is also used in Genesis 2:24 ("two become one flesh"), where it means unity rather than absolute singularity. Thus, while Jewish bias opposed Jesus' claim to be God's Son, the word in question allows the possibility. See N.T. Wright. (Op.cit. (6), p.259. ** Also, Johannes Botterweck, ed. Theological Dictionary of the OT. (Eerdmans, 1974), v.I, pp.201ff.

⁴⁸ Millar Burrows. More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Viking, 1958), writes, "Jesus was so *unlike* what all Jews expected the Son of David to be that His own disciples found it almost impossible to connect the idea of the Messiah with Him" (p.68). It is as the New Testament implies, Jesus' resurrection that singly overcame that "impossibility" (Acts 2:24).

⁴⁹ Dr. Maier notes, "All the disciples endured daunting hardships for their faith, many suffering martyrdom." Op.cit. (36), p. 337. ** Harold Mattingly. Christianity and the Roman Empire. (Norton, 1967), pp. 32f. ** Durant. Op.cit. (24), pp. 91f.

⁵⁰ Greenleaf. pp.31f. ** See also ** See also John Calvin. Institutes of the Christian Religion, v.I. (Westminster, 1960), pp.91f.

⁵¹ A.M. Ramsey. The Resurrection of Jesus. (Westminster, 1946), p.37.

⁵² J.N.D. Anderson. The Evidence for the Resurrection. (I.V.P. 1966), pp.4,5.

Indeed, this essay is not about mere historical curiosity, but about an event of **enormous consequences to you**. Jesus' resurrection affirms that **He is exactly who He claims to be, that is, God the Son, the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity**. This further means that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15-20), the expression of the love of the Creator of the universe in human form. It also means that **He is the way to heaven** that God has provided for sinners (Acts 4:12). It affirms that His grisly death on the cross has **saving purpose and power** (1 Peter 2:24). It guarantees there will be a **Last Judgment** (Acts 17:31), and that there is both a **heaven and a hell** (Revelation 1:18).⁵³ Yet Jesus Christ is shown to make good on the **forgiveness of sins** (1 John 1:7-9) and **everlasting salvation** (John 11:25,26) for everyone who believes in Him. Everyone is affected by these implications. Therefore, you cannot afford to remain indifferent regarding Jesus' claims. The evidence supporting His claims **calls for your consideration and response**.

Speaking very personally, I have known Christ many years by faith. He early on became my source of confidence, joy, and meaning. I love belonging to Him and knowing Him as Savior and Lord. So, I wholeheartedly recommend Him to you too. Will you join me and say yes to His invitation?

Jesus says, "*Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and [fellowship with you]*" (Revelation 3:20). If you are persuaded to meet and receive the Living Christ, invite Him into your life with a prayer like the following. I encourage you to find fellowship in a church that proclaims His message (Hebrews 10:24,15) and become baptized into Him (Romans 6:1f). May God bless your new and eternal life in Him!

Dear Lord Jesus, I entrust myself to you to save me by your death and resurrection. I surrender my life to you. And I welcome you into my heart as my new Master. Please forgive my sins, receive me into your everlasting kingdom, and make me into a new person according to your will. Amen

I am eager to engage in dialogue with any reader. Whether you wish to challenge my thesis, have certain points clarified, share what has been helpful to you, or inquire into how to become a Christian, you may contact me at the address below:

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⁵³ Green. Op.cit. (1), pp. 17,18,

