

Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Lüdemann's Hallucination Hypothesis

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Gerd Lüdemann's provocative hypothesis that early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection was the product of hallucinatory experiences originally induced by guilt-complexes in Peter and Paul is assessed and contrasted with the traditional resurrection hypothesis in terms of the usual standards of hypothesis testing: explanatory power, explanatory scope, plausibility, ad hoc-ness, accord with accepted beliefs, and superiority to rival hypotheses.

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Gerd Lüdemann has become one of the most prominent and sharpest critics of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. After igniting a firestorm of controversy in his native Germany, Lüdemann's writings have leapt the Atlantic to spark debate in this country as well. His conclusions are important not just for New Testament scholarship, but for dogmatic theology as well. As one who has previously defended the historical credibility of the event of Jesus's resurrection, {1} I propose in this paper to assess critically Lüdemann's historical reconstruction of the events of Easter.

Before we begin, it is perhaps worth mentioning that there are a number of dogmatic issues on which we *do* agree, which deserve to be highlighted. First, I agree, in Lüdemann's words, that "The resurrection of Jesus is the central point of the Christian religion." {2} Second, I agree that if someone asks "What *really*

happened?", it is not enough to be told to "just believe." {3} Third, I agree that the historian's task is very much like that of the trial lawyer: to examine the witnesses in order to reconstruct the most probable course of events. {4} Fourth, I agree that if someone does not believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus, he should have the honesty to say that Jesus just rotted away—and that he should not be persecuted for having had the courage to say it. {5} Fifth, I agree that if someone does not believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus, then he should have the honesty to say that he is not a Christian—just as Lüdemann has done. {6} Finally, sixth, I agree that if someone does believe in Jesus's literal resurrection, he should admit that he believes in a miraculous intervention of God in the natural world. {7}

Despite these areas of agreement, however, we obviously have wide-ranging differences, too. I maintain that any adequate historical hypothesis about the resurrection must explain four facts: Jesus's honorable burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection. I shall first summarize some of the evidence for each of these facts and then examine Lüdemann's treatment of them.

The Inductive Evidence

The Burial

Fact #1: *After his crucifixion Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in the tomb.* My statement of this fact represents the core of the burial narrative. I do not include secondary details, such as Joseph's Christian commitments. Such circumstantial details are inessential to the historicity of Jesus's honorable burial. The fact of Jesus's honorable burial is highly significant because it implies that the location of Jesus's tomb was known in Jerusalem. In that case, it is extremely difficult to see how the disciples could have proclaimed Jesus's resurrection in Jerusalem if the tomb had not been empty.

We may summarize some of the evidence for Fact #1 as follows:

1. Jesus's burial is attested in the very old tradition quoted by Paul in I Cor. 15.3–5.
2. The burial is part of very old source material used by Mark in writing his gospel.
3. As a member of the Sanhedrin, which condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.
4. The burial story itself lacks any traces of legendary development.
5. No other competing burial story exists.

With respect to the first supporting line of evidence, we know that in the second line of the pre-Pauline formula in 1 Cor. 15.3–5 Jesus's burial is mentioned. Lüdemann recognizes this early evidence for the burial but questions whether the burial referred to is the same event as the burial by Joseph of Arimathea. {8} A comparison of the four-line formula transmitted by Paul with the Gospel narratives on the one hand and the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles on the other makes the answer clear:

I Cor 15.3–5	Acts 13.28–31	Mk. 15.37–16.7
Christ died . . .	Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed.	And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.
he was buried . . .	they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb	And he [Joseph] bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb.
he was	But God raised him from the dead . . .	"He has risen, he is not here; see the

raised . . .

place where they laid him."

he . . . and for many days he appeared to those who
appeared . . . came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem,
. . . who are now his witnesses to the people.

"But go, tell his disciples and Peter that
he is going before you to Galilee; there
you will see him."

This remarkable correspondence of independent traditions reveals that the four-line formula is a summary in outline form of the basic events of Jesus's passion and resurrection, including his burial in the tomb. Lüdemann holds that this early formula dates from just two years after the crucifixion. {9} It thus represents fantastically early evidence for Jesus's honorable burial.

With respect to the second supporting line of evidence, I take it for granted that Mark is working with a pre-Markan passion narrative, and I claim that the burial account was part of that passion narrative. This latter claim is relatively uncontroversial, I think, since the burial is an essential part of the story line, common to all the Gospels, bringing the passion narrative toward its conclusion. Even if we do not postulate a full-blown pre-Markan passion narrative, we must, in light of the independence of John's Gospel from the Synoptics, recognize a pre-Markan burial tradition of Jesus's entombment by Joseph of Arimathea. {10} And even among the Synoptics, the sporadic and uneven nature of Luke and Matthew's verbal agreements with Mark, their omissions from Mark, and their numerous agreements with each other against Mark suggest that Mark's narrative was not their only source, but that they had additional sources for the burial and empty tomb accounts. {11} This multiplicity of independent sources is important because, as Marcus Borg explains, "if a tradition appears in an early source *and* in another independent source, then not only is it early, but it is also unlikely to have been made up." {12} It is remarkable that in the case of the burial we have some of the earliest sources behind the New Testament (*e.g.*, the pre-Pauline formula and the pre-Markan passion story) as well as a number of others.

The third point concerns the enigmatic figure Joseph of Arimathea, who suddenly appears to provide an honorable burial for Jesus, in contrast to the two criminals crucified with him. The late Raymond Brown stated this point forcefully in his magisterial *The Death of the Messiah*:

That the burial was done by Joseph of Arimathea is very probable, since a Christian fictional creation from nothing of a Jewish Sanhedrist who does what is right is almost inexplicable, granted the hostility in early Christian writings toward the Jewish authorities responsible for the death of Jesus While high probability is not certitude, there is nothing in the basic pre-Gospel account of Jesus's burial by Joseph that could not plausibly be deemed historical. {13}

Given his status as a Sanhedrist—all of whom, Mark reports, voted to condemn Jesus—, Joseph is the last person one would expect to care properly for Jesus. Moreover, his association with Arimathea, an obscure town with no theological or historical significance, further lends historical credibility to the figure of Joseph. In a sense, this third line of evidence for the burial is an example of the application of the criterion of dissimilarity. For given the hostility in the early Church toward the Jewish leaders, who had, in Christian eyes, engineered a judicial murder of Jesus, the figure of Joseph is startlingly dissimilar to the prevailing attitude in the Church toward the Sanhedrin. Therefore, Joseph is unlikely to have been a fictional creation of the early Church.

The fourth line of evidence concerns the lack of any traces of legendary development in the burial story as transmitted by Mark. The burial narrative is this-worldly, perfunctory, and lacking in theological reflection. The stark simplicity of the Markan account is in contrast with what one might expect to find in late, legendary accounts (such as in the Gospel of Peter). Given the early age of the pre-Markan passion story, it is implausible to see Mark's account as an unhistorical legend, nor does it evince any signs of being such.

Finally, the fifth supporting line of evidence for the burial account is that no other competing burial story exists. If the Markan account is at its core a legendary fiction, then it is odd that we find no trace of

alternative, competing legendary accounts, not to speak of traces of what really happened to the corpse. One might profitably contrast here the competing myths/legends about what happened to the bodies of such pagan figures as Osiris and Empedocles. In the absence of any check by historical facts, alternative legendary accounts can arise simultaneously and independently. If the burial narrative is purely legendary, why is there no competing account of Jesus's burial, say, by some faithful disciple(s) of Jesus or by his family or by Romans at the direction of a sympathetic Pilate? Whence the unanimity of the tradition in the absence of a historical core? Feeling the force of this question, Lüdemann thinks to discern a separate tradition of burial by the Jews in Jn. 19.31–37; Acts 13.29. {14} But as Broer points out, these cannot be the same because in the one Romans are asked to dispatch the bodies and in the others the Jews are said to have done so. {15} More fundamentally, the ascription in Acts of the burial to the Jews is part of a wider tendency by Luke to polemicize against the Jewish authorities and which leads him to ascribe even Jesus's *crucifixion* to the Jews (Acts 2.23; 2.36; 4.10)! {16}

Together these mutually reinforcing lines of evidence provide a strong *prima facie* case for accepting the historicity of Jesus's burial by Joseph of Arimathea in the tomb. For these and other reasons, the majority of New Testament critics concur with the late John A. T. Robinson that the honorable burial of Jesus is "one of the earliest and best –attested facts about Jesus." {17}

Notice that anti–miraculous historiographical principles do not even come into play in assessing the historicity of the burial account, for it is as down to earth as the crucifixion account. Any historian *qua* historian can ask the question, "What was done with Jesus's corpse?" just as straightforwardly as he can ask, "How did Jesus of Nazareth die?" If, then, Lüdemann will deny the force of the cumulative evidence for Jesus's honorable burial, he needs to have at least equally compelling evidence to the contrary.

In response to this evidence, Lüdemann admits that it would be "going too far" to deny that Joseph of Arimathea is historical, {18} but, he says, "We can no longer know where Joseph (or Jews unknown to us) put the body." {19} His main reason for denying Joseph's laying Jesus in the tomb is that the later gospels tend to exalt Joseph, calling him "a good and just man" (Lk. 23.50) or even "a disciple" (Jn. 19.38). But even if the later gospel writers exhibit this tendency, that does not seem to be a good reason for denying the historical fact reported in the pre–Markan source of Joseph's interment of Jesus in the tomb. Indeed, if anything, it serves principally to underscore point (4) above, the primitiveness of the pre–Markan account. In fact, if Lüdemann is willing to grant Joseph's historicity, then how can we deny his role in the burial, since the principal proof of his historicity is precisely that a fictional burial account would not link Jesus's honorable burial with a Sanhedrist? It is precisely his link with Jesus's burial that makes Joseph's historicity plausible. Thus, the tendency of later gospel writers to exaggerate Joseph's devotion to Jesus has not led most scholars to deny the fundamental reliability of the burial story.

The Empty Tomb

Fact #2: On the Sunday following the crucifixion Jesus's tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers. Among the reasons which have led most scholars to this conclusion are the following:

1. The empty tomb story is part of the very old source material used by Mark.
2. The old tradition cited by Paul in I Corinthians implies the fact of the empty tomb.
3. The story is simple and lacks signs of legendary embellishment.
4. The fact that women's testimony was worthless in first century Palestine counts in favor of the women's role in discovering the empty tomb.
5. The earliest Jewish allegation that the disciples had stolen Jesus's body shows that the body was in fact missing from the tomb.

The first supporting line of evidence refers once more to the pre–Markan passion narrative and claims that the empty tomb account was included in that narrative. {20} This precludes the story's being a late–developing legend. Lüdemann, however, lists four reasons why Mark 16.1–8 is in his opinion "worthless" as an argument for the historicity of the empty tomb: {21} (1) Such an argument assumes that the burial site

was known, which is seriously in doubt. (2) The argument assumes contrary to v. 8 that the women did say something. (3) The passage, does not, strictly speaking, tell of the discovery of the empty tomb but rather proclaims the resurrection at the empty tomb. And (4) How will one avoid Kirsopp Lake's inference that the women went to the wrong tomb? These objections are not so weighty as Lüdemann seems to think. First, we have seen good reason to accept the historicity of Jesus's honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea, so that unless Lüdemann can provide some reason for assessing negatively the women's presence at the crucifixion and burial—which he has not, to my knowledge, done—there is no reason to think that the women could not have come to the burial site on Sunday morning. The women's silence and terror reflect a Markan motif of stunned human reaction to the presence of the divine {22} and is not intended in any case to be taken as an enduring silence; otherwise Mark would have no story to tell! Lüdemann's third objection makes a fatuous distinction, since proclamation of Jesus's resurrection at his empty tomb entails an empty tomb. The angel's proclamation actually draws attention to the emptiness of the tomb: "He is risen; he is not here! Behold—the place where they laid him!" (Mk. 16. 6) As for Lake's theory, one of the reasons it generated almost no following is that it succumbs to the obvious objection that the Jewish authorities would have been only too glad to point out the women's mistake once the disciples began to preach the resurrection. So it is difficult to see how on the basis of such misgivings Lüdemann's verdict can be justified that the empty tomb narrative in Mark is historically worthless.

With respect to the second supporting line of evidence, Lüdemann hopes to avert the implication of the empty tomb by denying that the burial is an autonomous event. {23} But the Greek text belies this claim. For each line is prefixed by a grammatically unnecessary ο τ ι which serves to distinguish and order serially the separate events. It is fanciful to think that either the ex-Pharisee Paul or the early Jerusalem fellowship from which the formula sprang could have asserted that Christ "was buried and he was raised" and yet think that his corpse still lay in the tomb. {24} Moreover, a comparison once more of the four-line formula with the Gospel narratives on the one hand and the sermons in Acts on the other reveals that the third line is a summary of the empty tomb narrative, the "he has been raised" mirroring the "he is risen!"

The third supporting line of evidence has reference once more to the Markan empty tomb narrative. Like the burial account, it is remarkably straightforward and unembellished by theological or apologetic motifs likely to characterize a later legendary account. The resurrection itself is not witnessed or described, and there is no reflection on Jesus's triumph over sin and death, no use of Christological titles, no quotation of fulfilled prophecy, no description of the Risen Lord. Even if we excise the angelic figure as, say, a purely literary figure which provides the interpretation of the vacant tomb, then we have a narrative that is all the more stark and unadorned (cf. John 20.1–2). This suggests that the story is not at its core a legend. To appreciate how restrained Mark's narrative is, one has only to read the account in the Gospel of Peter, which describes Jesus's triumphant egress from the tomb, accompanied by angelic visitants, followed by a talking cross, heralded by a voice from heaven, and all witnessed by a Roman guard, the Jewish leaders, and a multitude of spectators!

The fourth supporting line of evidence is essentially an appeal to the criterion of embarrassment, again one of the important criteria of authenticity. Given the second-class status of women in first century Palestine and their inability to serve as witnesses in a Jewish court, it is amazing that they should appear here as the discoverers and chief witnesses to the fact of Jesus's empty tomb, for so unreliable a witness was an embarrassment to the Christian proclamation. Any later, legendary account would surely have made male disciples discover the empty tomb. Indeed, critics often see the story of Peter's inspection of the empty tomb (along with another disciple) as just such a legendary progression. The fact that it is women, whose testimony was worthless, rather than men who are said in the earliest narrative to be the discoverers of the empty tomb is best explained by the fact that the tradition here is reliable. {25}

Finally, we have the evidence of the earliest Jewish polemic against the resurrection, referred to in Matthew's guard story, as evidence for the empty tomb. Lüdemann grants that the Jewish polemic does show Jewish belief in the empty tomb; but he dismisses this evidence because, he asserts, the Jews came to think that the tomb was empty only through Christian tradition. We can rule out the suggestion that they knew of the empty tomb as a historical fact, he asserts, because Jesus did not have a regular burial and so no one knew what had happened to the corpse. {26} But wholly apart from the fact that we have good

reasons to accept the honorable burial of Jesus, the point remains that even if the burial account were a legend and no one knew what had happened to Jesus's corpse, when the disciples began to proclaim in Jerusalem "He is risen from the dead!" (Mt. 27. 64), their Jewish antagonists would not have invented for the Christians the empty tomb by saying that the body had been stolen. Lüdemann has to explain why, if no one knew where the body had been laid, the Jewish opponents of the Christians would have alleged that the body had been stolen. As for the assertion that Jews knew only of the Christian tradition of the empty tomb, this claim fails to reckon with the tradition history lying behind Matthew's story. That the story is not a Matthean creation out of whole cloth is evident by the many non-Matthean linguistic traits in the narrative. {27} Behind the story evidently lies a developing pattern of assertion and counter-assertion:

Christian: "He is risen from the dead!"

Jew: "No, his disciples stole away his body."

Christian: "The guard at the tomb would have prevented any such theft."

Jew: "No, the guard fell asleep."

Christian: "The chief priests bribed the guard to say this."

This pattern probably goes right back to controversies in Jerusalem following the disciples' proclamation of the resurrection, for as John Meier observes, "The earliest fights about the person of Jesus that raged between ordinary Jews and Christian Jews after Easter centered on the Christian claims that a crucified criminal was the Messiah, that God had raised him from the dead . . ." {28} The non-Matthean vocabulary and evident tradition history behind the dispute makes this assumption plausible. But if Jerusalem is the fount of this on-going dispute, then the question presses why the Jewish opponents of the Christian Way, confronted with spurious claims about an empty tomb, would, instead of denouncing such a fiction, have claimed instead that the disciples had stolen the body out of a tomb which did not exist and no one could point to.

So we have a pretty strong *prima facie* case for accepting the fundamental reliability of the account of the empty tomb. Hence, in the words of Jacob Kremer, "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb." {29} Lüdemann, however, regards the story as "an apologetic legend." {30} But so far as I can see, he offers no positive evidence for this assertion. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this hypothesis can be sustained, given the multiple, independent attestation enjoyed by the empty tomb narrative. Rather Lüdemann's scepticism is based upon four assumptions, each of which strikes me as very dubious. (1) He assumes that the only primary source we have for the empty tomb is Mark's gospel. {31} But this is almost certainly wrong. At least Matthew and John have independent sources about the empty tomb, it's also mentioned in the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles (2.29; 13.36), and it's implied by Paul (I Cor. 15.4). According to Klaus Berger, "The reports about the empty tomb are related by all four gospels (and other writings of early Christianity) in a form independent of one another. . . . we have a great abundance of reports, which have been separately handled down." {32} (2) Lüdemann assumes that when Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled back to Galilee; {33} that is why women appear as the discoverers of the empty tomb. But the flight of the disciples is rightly dismissed by the historian Hans von Campenhausen as a scholarly fiction. {34} Not only is there no evidence for this assumption, itself inherently implausible, but Lüdemann's *own theory* contradicts this assumption, since it is crucial for his theory that at least Peter remained in Jerusalem, where he denied Jesus. In any case, if the story of the women's discovery of the empty tomb is a pure legend, then why could we not have a purely legendary account of the discovery of the empty tomb by male disciples? (3) Lüdemann assumes that the Jewish authorities, who he takes to have disposed of Jesus's corpse, suffered a sort of collective amnesia about what they did with the body of Jesus. Even if Joseph (or the Jewish authorities) only gave Jesus a dishonorable burial, why did they not point to his burial place as the easiest answer to the disciples' proclamation of the resurrection? Lüdemann admits, "Jews showed an interest in where Jesus's corpse had been put, and of course a proclamation of Jesus as the Risen One . . . provoked questions about his body from opponents or unbelievers." {35} So why, when the disciples began to preach the resurrection of Jesus, did the Jewish authorities not say where they had put Jesus's body? Lüdemann's answer: they forgot! {36} Again, this is less than convincing. (4) Finally, Lüdemann assumes that belief in the empty tomb arose as an inference from the belief that Jesus was risen from the dead. {37} While Lüdemann is quite right, I think, to recognize, in contrast to scholars who hold that belief in the resurrection of Jesus did not for first century

Jews or Christians imply anything's happening to the corpse, still his suggestion cannot be the whole story because it leaves unexplained the inference that Jesus's corpse, contrary to custom, had been laid *in a tomb*. Belief in the resurrection would, indeed, imply that the corpse would no longer be around, but it would not, without further ado, lead one to infer that there was an empty tomb to show for it. Thus, Lüdemann still has not explained belief in the empty tomb.

In sum, we have good grounds for believing that Jesus's tomb was found to be empty by a group of his women followers.

The Post–Mortem Appearances

Fact #3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead. This is a fact which is almost universally acknowledged among New Testament scholars, for the following reasons:

1. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus's resurrection appearances which is quoted by Paul in I Cor. 15. 5–7 guarantees that such appearances occurred.
2. The appearance traditions in the gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of such appearances.

With respect to the first supporting line of evidence, it is universally accepted on the basis of the early date of Paul's tradition as well as the apostle's personal acquaintance with many of the people listed that the disciples did experience post–mortem appearances of Christ. Among the witnesses of the resurrection appearances were Peter, the immediate circle of the disciples known as "the Twelve," a gathering of 500 Christian believers (many of whom Paul evidently knew, since he was aware that some had died by the time of his writing), Jesus's younger brother James, and a wider group of apostles. "Finally," says Paul, "as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (I Cor. 15.8).

The second supporting line of evidence appeals again to the criterion of multiple attestation. The Gospels independently attest to post–mortem appearances of Jesus, even to some of the same appearances found in Paul's list. Wolfgang Trilling explains,

From the list in I Cor. 15 the particular reports of the Gospels are now to be interpreted. Here may be of help what we said about Jesus's miracles. It is impossible to 'prove' historically a particular miracle. But the totality of the miracle reports permits no reasonable doubt that Jesus in fact performed 'miracles.' That holds analogously for the appearance reports. It is not possible to secure historically the particular event. But the totality of the appearance reports permits no reasonable doubt that Jesus in fact bore witness to himself in such a way. {38}

The appearance to Peter is independently attested by Paul and Luke (I Cor. 15.5; Lk. 24.34), the appearance to the Twelve by Paul, Luke, and John (I Cor. 15.5; Lk. 24:36–43; Jn. 20.19–20), the appearance to the women disciples by Matthew and John (Mt. 28.9–10; Jn. 20.11–17), and appearances to the disciples in Galilee by Mark, Matthew, and John (Mk. 16.7; Mt. 28. 16–17; Jn. 21). Taken sequentially, the appearances follow the pattern of Jerusalem–Galilee–Jerusalem, matching the festival pilgrimages of the disciples as they returned to Galilee following the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread and traveled again to Jerusalem two months later for Pentecost.

Lüdemann himself concludes, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus's death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." {39} Thus, we are in basic agreement that following Jesus's crucifixion various individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Christ alive from the dead. The real bone of contention will be how these experiences are best to be explained.

Origin of the Christian Way

Fact #4: *The original disciples believed that Jesus was risen from the dead despite almost every predisposition to the contrary.* Three aspects of the disciples' disposition following Jesus's crucifixion put a question mark behind the faith and hope they had placed in Jesus:

1. Jesus was dead, and Jews had no anticipation of a dying, much less rising, Messiah.
2. According to Jewish law, Jesus's execution as a criminal showed him out to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God.
3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead before the general, eschatological resurrection of the dead.

It is important to appreciate, with respect to the first aspect of their situation, that in Jewish expectation Messiah would conquer Israel's enemies and restore the throne of David, not be shamefully executed by them. Jesus's ignominious execution at the hands of Rome was as decisive a disproof as anything could be to a first century Jew that Jesus was not Israel's awaited Messiah, but another failed pretender. Failed Messianic movements were nothing new in Judaism, and they left their followers with basically two alternatives: either go home or else find a new Messiah. These were no doubt hard choices, but nevertheless they were the choices one had. After surveying such failed Messianic movements before and after Jesus, N. T. Wright remarks,

So far as we know, all the followers of these first-century Messianic movements were fanatically committed to the cause. They, if anybody, might be expected to suffer from this blessed twentieth century disease called 'cognitive dissonance' when their expectations failed to materialize. But in no case, right across the century before Jesus and the century after him, do we hear of any Jewish group saying that their executed leader had been raised from the dead and he really was the Messiah after all. {40}

Wright raises the interesting question, if the disciples did not want simply to go home, then why did they not pick someone else, like James, to be the Messiah? As Jesus's younger brother, he would have been the natural choice. But although James eventually did emerge as the most powerful leader in the Jerusalem church, he was never called the Messiah. When Josephus refers to him, he calls him merely "the brother of the so-called Messiah" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.200). Based on the typical experience of failed Messianic movements, it is to be expected that the disciples should have either gone home or fastened upon someone else—but we know that they did not, which needs explaining.

As for the second point, Old Testament law dictated that anyone executed by hanging on a tree was under God's curse (Deut. 21.23), and Jews applied this verdict to those executed by crucifixion as well. Thus, seen through the eyes of a first century Jewish follower of Jesus, the crucifixion meant much more than the death of one's beloved Master, akin to the death of Socrates. Rather it was a catastrophe; for it meant that far from being God's Anointed, Jesus of Nazareth had actually been accursed by God. The disciples had been following a man whom God had rejected in the most unequivocal terms.

Finally, Jewish hope in the resurrection of the dead was invariably a corporate and eschatological hope. The resurrection of all the righteous dead would take place after God had brought the world as we know it to an end. Surveying the Jewish literature, Joachim Jeremias concluded,

Ancient Judaism did not know of an anticipated resurrection as an event of history. Nowhere does one find in the literature anything comparable to the resurrection of Jesus. Certainly resurrections of the dead were known, but these always concerned resuscitations, the return to the earthly life. In no place in the later Judaic literature does it concern a resurrection to do x a as an event of history. {41}

Even if the disciples' faith in Jesus had somehow managed to survive the crucifixion, they would at most have looked forward to their reunion with him at the final resurrection and would perhaps have preserved

his tomb as a shrine, where Jesus's bones might rest until the eschatological resurrection. That was the Jewish hope.

But we know that that did not happen. Despite their having most every predisposition to the contrary, it is an indisputable fact that the earliest disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that God had raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. . Lüdemann himself declares that historical analysis leads to the "abrupt origination of the Easter faith of the disciples." {42} Any responsible historian wanting to give an account of the origins of Christianity must explain the origin of this belief on the part of those who had known and followed Jesus. Most everyone will agree with Luke Johnson when he writes, "Some sort of powerful transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was and the sort of literature the New Testament is." {43} The question is: how do we best explain that experience—by the resurrection of Jesus or by hallucinations on the part of the disciples?

In summary, then, there are four facts which any adequate historical hypothesis concerning Jesus's fate must account for: his honorable burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection.

The Best Explanation

What hypothesis best explains the historical data concerning the fate of Jesus? In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, historian C. B. McCullagh lists six criteria which historians use in testing historical descriptions: *explanatory scope*, *explanatory power*, *plausibility*, *ad hoc-ness*, *accord with accepted beliefs*, and *superiority to rival hypotheses*. {44} Now we have before us two competing hypotheses, which I shall call the Resurrection Hypothesis and the Hallucination Hypothesis respectively. {45}

The Hallucination Hypothesis

According to Lüdemann, Peter, having denied Christ, was so consumed with guilt that he found psychological release in projecting a vision of Jesus, which led him to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. "Under the impression of Jesus's proclamation and death, there finally awoke in Peter the 'And yet. . . ' of faith. Thereby the crucified Jesus showed himself to be the living Jesus, so that Peter could once again apply to himself—and this time with profound clarity—God's word of forgiveness present in Jesus's work." {46} Peter's experience was infectious in the early Christian community, and soon others, too, who did not share Peter's trauma, also saw hallucinations of the Risen Lord. When Jewish opponents objected and asked where the body was, "it could immediately be reported that the women had found the tomb empty and later that Jesus had even appeared to the women at the tomb." {47} Much later, the legend of the discovery of Jesus's empty tomb arose. Meanwhile, Saul of Tarsus struggled inwardly with guilt as he labored under the yoke of the Law, and his zeal in persecuting Christians was a manifestation of a secret inner attraction to the Christian message. According to Lüdemann, ". . . if one had been able to analyze Paul prior to his Damascus vision, the analysis would probably have shown a strong inclination to Christ in his subconscious; indeed, the assumption that he was unconsciously Christian is then no longer so far-fetched." {48} On the Damascus road the pent-up struggle erupted in a hallucination of Jesus, resulting in Paul's wholesale conversion to the faith he once persecuted. "The guilt complex which had arisen with the persecution was resolved through the certainty of being in Christ." {49}

Let us examine how this hypothesis fares as an explanation of the facts when assessed by McCullagh's six criteria

Criterion 1: *Explanatory Scope*. This is the central failing of the Hallucination Hypothesis. Offered only as a way of explaining the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, its explanatory scope is too narrow because it offers nothing by way of explanation of the empty tomb. In order to explain the empty tomb, one must conjoin some independent hypothesis to the Hallucination Hypothesis. Now, of course, Lüdemann denies the fact of the empty tomb. But that is a matter of establishing one's inductive data base, and we saw in our discussion there that Lüdemann's handling of the evidence for the burial and empty tomb were less than

convincing. In a sense, his denial of the burial and empty tomb of Jesus is born out of necessity; for once you admit these facts, then the inadequate explanatory scope of the Hallucination Hypothesis becomes patent, and the theory is in deep trouble. For that reason Lüdemann finds himself in the awkward position of denying so banal a fact as Jesus's honorable burial, recognized by most scholars as historical. Criterion 2: *Explanatory Power*. Here we grant for the sake of argument that Peter did experience a hallucination of Jesus after his death due to the psychological factors postulated by Lüdemann. The question then becomes whether this explanation has sufficient power to account for the post-mortem appearances and the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus's resurrection. There two reasons to think that these facts are not well-explained by the Hallucination Hypothesis.

First, with respect to the appearances, the *diversity of the appearances* is not well-explained by means of such visions. The appearances were experienced many different times, by different individuals, by groups, at various locales and under various circumstances, and by not only believers, but also by unbelievers like James the brother of Jesus and the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus.

This diversity is very difficult to explain by recourse to hallucinations. For hallucinations require a special psychological state on the part of the percipient. But since a guilt complex *ex hypothesi* obtained only for Peter and Paul, the diversity of the post-mortem appearances must be explained as a sort of contagion, a chain reaction. But Lüdemann is unable to provide any example of this. {50} It is important to keep in mind that it is the diversity that is at issue here, not merely individual incidents. Even if one could compile from the casebooks an amalgam consisting of stories of hallucinations over a period of time (like the visions in Medjugorje), mass hallucinations (as at Lourdes), hallucinations to various individuals, and so forth, the fact remains that there is no single instance in the casebooks exhibiting the diversity involved in the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. It is only by compiling unrelated cases that anything analogous might be constructed.

One might mention three specific cases which are not well-explained by the Hallucination Hypothesis:

- *James*: Jesus's brother did not believe that his elder sibling was the Messiah or even anybody special during his lifetime (Mk. 3.21, 31–35; 6.3; Jn. 7.1–10). But unexpectedly we find Jesus's brothers among those gathered in the upper room in Christian worship following the resurrection appearances (Acts 1.14), and in time James emerges as a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12.17; Gal. 1.19). We learn from Josephus that James was eventually martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ during a lapse in the civil government in the mid-60s. This remarkable transformation is in all probability due to the fact, recorded by Paul, that "then he appeared to James" (I Cor. 15.7). Lüdemann himself goes so far as to say that it is "certain" that James experienced a resurrection appearance of Jesus, {51} but he is strangely mute when it comes to explaining how his theory accounts for that experience. The Hallucination Hypothesis has weak explanatory power with respect to this appearance, since James, as an unbeliever and no part of the Christian community, was unlikely to experience a "secondary vision" of the Risen Jesus.
- *The 500 brethren*: Most of these people were still alive in AD 55 when Paul wrote I Corinthians and could be questioned about the experience. Lüdemann explains this appearance as a legendary reference to the event of Pentecost, which he represents as an experience of "mass ecstasy." {52} But such an explanation is weak, not only because the eyewitnesses were still around, but because the event of Pentecost was fundamentally different from a resurrection appearance. As Hans Kessler in his critique of Lüdemann's suggestion writes,

Equating this appearance with the event of Pentecost is more than questionable, especially since in Acts 2.1–13 all the characteristics of an Easter narrative are missing (above all the appearing of Christ), and, conversely, in the early Easter texts the Spirit plays no role. {53}

It would be highly implausible that an event like Pentecost (which is presumably supposed to have been more or less accurately preserved in Christian tradition as found in Acts 2) to have evolved into a resurrection appearance, given that the event had none of the basic elements of an

appearance, especially Christ's appearing! And again, the point deserves underlining that while collective hallucinations do rarely occur, it is the diversity of all these different sorts of appearances that taxes the explanatory strength of the Hallucination Hypothesis.

- *The women:* That women were the first recipients of a post-mortem appearance of Jesus is both multiply attested and established by the criterion of embarrassment. For this reason, as Kremer reports, there is an increasing tendency in recent research to regard this appearance as "anchored in history." {54} Lüdemann himself calls it "historically certain"—though his theory forces him gratuitously to deny its primacy. {55} Nowhere in the New Testament, however, not even in I Cor. 15.5, is it said that Peter was the first to see a resurrection appearance of Christ, despite the widespread assumption of his chronological priority. Rather the women have priority. They are doubtless omitted from the list in 1 Cor. 15.5–7 because naming them as witnesses would have been worse than worthless in a patriarchal culture. But this is fatal to Lüdemann's hypothesis, since then the women's experience cannot be regarded as a "secondary vision" prompted by Peter's experience. Since they did not share Peter's guilt, having remained singularly faithful to Jesus to the end, they lacked the special psychological conditions leading to hallucinations of Jesus. Thus, Lüdemann's hypothesis has no explanatory power with respect to this appearance.

In sum, the Hallucination Hypothesis does not have strong explanatory power with respect to the diversity of the resurrection appearances.

Secondly, the Hallucination Hypothesis has weak explanatory power with respect to *the origin of the disciples' belief* in Jesus's resurrection. Subjective visions, or hallucinations, have no extra-mental correlate but are projections of the percipient's own brain. So if, as an eruption of a guilty conscience, Paul or Peter were to have projected visions of Jesus alive, they would have envisioned him in Paradise, where the righteous dead awaited the eschatological resurrection. But such exalted visions of Christ leave unexplained their belief in his resurrection. The inference "He is risen from the dead," so natural to our ears, would have been wholly unnatural to a first century Jew. In Jewish thinking there was already a category perfectly suited to describe Peter's postulated experience: Jesus had been assumed into heaven. An assumption is a wholly different category from a resurrection. To infer from heavenly visions of Jesus that he had been resurrected ran counter to Jewish thinking in two fundamental respects, as we have seen, whereas Jesus's assumption into heaven would have been the natural conclusion. So far as I know, Lüdemann nowhere addresses the question of why hallucinations, had they occurred, would have led to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Thus, the hallucination theory has weak explanatory power both in that it cannot account for the diversity of the appearances and in that it cannot account for the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus's resurrection.

Criterion 3: *Plausibility.* There I are at least two respects in which Lüdemann's Hallucination Hypothesis is implausible.

First, there is little plausibility in Lüdemann's psycho-analysis of Peter and Paul. Here two points may be made:

- (a) There are *insufficient data* to do a psycho-analysis of Peter and Paul. All we have from Paul is a few autobiographical passages in his letters, and the information about Peter's psyche is, by Lüdemann's own admission, "incomparably worse." {56} We do not have in the New Testament any narrative at all of Peter's experience of seeing Jesus, but merely a pair of epigrammatic references: "then he appeared to Cephas" (I Cor. 15.5); "The Lord is risen, indeed, and has appeared to Simon" (Lk. 24. 34). Lüdemann's whole theory is based on imaginative conjectures about Peter's psychological state, of which we know almost nothing. Psychoanalysis is notoriously difficult even with a patient seated in front of oneself on the couch, but it is virtually impossible with historical figures. That is why the genre of psychobiography is rejected by historians. Martin Hengel rightly concludes, "Lüdemann . . . does not recognize these limits on the historian. Here he

gets into the realm of psychological explanations, for which no verification is really possible the sources are far too limited for such psychologizing analyses." {57}

(b) The evidence we do have suggests that *Lüdemann's psycho-analysis of Peter and Paul is mistaken*. In the first place, Lüdemann's imaginative reconstruction of Peter's emotional state following his denials and Jesus's crucifixion fails to diagnose correctly the true problem Peter faced. It was not so much that he had failed his Lord as that his Lord had failed him! Lüdemann thus fails to enter into the mindset of a first century Jew who had been following a failed Messianic pretender. As Grass has emphasized in his trenchant critique of the subjective vision hypothesis, one of the greatest weaknesses of that theory is that it cannot really take seriously what a catastrophe the crucifixion was for the disciples' faith in Jesus. {58} Ignoring the disaster of the cross, Lüdemann imagines without a shred of evidence a self-preoccupied Peter wrestling with his own guilt and shame rather than struggling with dashed Messianic expectations. And lest it be said that such shattered expectations led to Peter's hallucinating Jesus alive from the dead, let me simply remind us that no such hope existed in Israel, either with respect to the Messiah or to the final resurrection. Linking these concepts is the result, not the cause, of the disciples' experience.

As for Paul, the evidence that we have indicates that Paul did not struggle with a guilt complex under the Jewish law. Nearly forty years ago, Krister Stendahl pointed out that Western readers have the tendency to interpret Paul in light of Martin Luther's struggles with guilt and sin. But Paul the Pharisee experienced no such struggles. Stendahl writes,

Contrast Paul, a very happy and successful Jew, one who can . . . say . . . , 'As to the righteousness under the law, (I was) blameless' (Philip. 3:6). That *is* what he says. He experiences no troubles, no problems, no qualms of conscience. He is a star pupil, the student to get the thousand dollar graduate scholarship in Gamaliel's Seminary Nowhere in Paul's writings is there any indication . . . that psychologically Paul had some problem of conscience {59}

Lüdemann claims that in Rom. 7.7–25 Paul's guilt-ridden, pre-Christian experience under the Law is disclosed to us. {60} But here it has to be said that the autobiographical interpretation of Rom. 7.7–25 in terms of Paul's pre-Christian versus Christian experience is overwhelmingly rejected by contemporary Pauline interpreters and commentators. {61} Paul's use of the first person singular pronoun and past tense verbs are not indicators of autobiographical reflection; rather the "I" is the representative self assumed by Paul (cf. Rom. 3.7; I Cor. 6.15; 10.29–30; 13.1–3; Gal. 2.18–19), and the past tense verbs link his disquisition with the afore-described history of sin in the world (Rom. 5.12–14). To postulate a pre- and post-conversion divide is to create a false dichotomy in this chapter, for the switch to the present tense in v. 14 is not accompanied by a change in the attitude of the speaker (cf. v. 25). Therefore, in Kessler's words, "almost all expositors" of Rom. 7 since the late 1920s have abandoned the autobiographical interpretation adopted by Lüdemann. {62} When we turn to genuinely autobiographical passages in Paul's letters on his pre-Christian experience (Phil. 3.4–14), then, as I say, we find a quite different picture.

Lüdemann's procedure at this point is classic. In response to the objection that Paul's own testimony indicates that he was satisfied as a Jew and felt no conflict with guilt, Lüdemann rejoins that Paul's conflict was *unconscious*. {63} This typical Freudian move renders Lüdemann's psycho-analysis non-falsifiable, since any evidence against it is just re-interpreted in terms of the theory itself. The hypothesis thereby reveals itself to be sterile.

Thus, both for its want of data as well as for its misconstrual of Peter and Paul's experience, Lüdemann's attempt at psycho-biography has little plausibility.

Second, there is also little plausibility in Lüdemann's claim that the resurrection appearances were merely visionary experiences. Again, two points may be made:

(a) Lüdemann's claim rests on the implausible presupposition that *Paul's experience* on the Damascus Road is *paradigmatic for all the other post-mortem appearances*. Lüdemann admits that his construal of the post-mortem appearances as hallucinatory visions depends on the presupposition that what Paul experienced on the Damascus Road was the *same* as what all the other disciples experienced. {64} Lüdemann's hypothesis is thus like a pyramid balancing on its point, for if this presupposition is false, there is no reason to think that the disciples' experiences were visionary, and the whole theory topples. But there is no warrant for that presupposition. John Dominic Crossan correctly observes, "Paul needs in 1 Cor. 15 to equate his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. To equate, that is, 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." {65} Surprisingly, Lüdemann himself concedes that Paul in 1 Cor. 15 is "not concerned to give a precise account of . . . *what* his resurrection appearances were like . . . The only important thing for Paul . . . was *that* they had taken place." {66} But once we recognize that Paul's concern in 1 Cor 15.3–8 is with the fact of Christ's appearance, not with its mode, and realize Paul's strong motivation in his historical context for adding his name to the list of witnesses, then no reason at all remains to think that Paul's testimony implies that all the post-mortem appearances were like Paul's post-ascension encounter. But once that presupposition is gone, there is simply no reason to reduce all these experiences to visionary ones.

(b) The New Testament consistently differentiates between a vision of Christ and a resurrection appearance of Christ. Paul was familiar with "visions and revelations of the Lord" (1 Cor. 12.1). Yet Paul, like the rest of the New Testament, did not equate such visions of Christ with resurrection appearances. The appearances were to a limited circle of witnesses at the birth of the Christian movement and soon ceased, Paul's untimely experience being "last of all" (1 Cor. 15.8). Yet visions of the exalted Lord continued to be experienced throughout the Church. The question then presses: what essential difference exists between a vision of Christ and a resurrection appearance of Christ? The answer of the New Testament seems clear: a resurrection appearance was an extra-mental event, whereas a vision was merely in the mind of the percipient. To say that some phenomenon was visionary is not to say that it was illusory. Biblical scholars have found it necessary to distinguish between what are sometimes called "objective visions" and "subjective visions." An objective, or, less misleadingly, veridical vision is a vision caused by God. A subjective or non-veridical vision is a product of the percipient's imagination. A veridical vision involves the seeing of an objective reality without the normal processes of sense perception. A non-veridical vision has no extra-mental correlate and is therefore hallucinatory. Now visions of the exalted Christ such as Stephen's (Acts 7.55–56), Paul's (Acts 22. 17–21), or John's (Rev. 1.10–18) were not regarded as hallucinatory; but neither did they count as resurrection appearances of Christ. Why not? –because appearances of Jesus, in contrast to veridical visions of Jesus, involved an extra-mental reality which anyone present could experience. Even Paul's experience on the Damascus Road, which was semi-visionary in nature, could count as a real appearance because the light and the voice were experienced by Paul's traveling companions (though they were not experienced by them as a revelation of Christ). As I say, this seems to be the consistent answer throughout the New Testament to the question of what the difference was between a vision and an appearance of Jesus. And this answer is thoroughly Jewish in character: the rabbis similarly distinguished between an angelic vision and an angelic appearance based on whether, for example, food seen to be consumed by the angel was actually gone after the appearance had ceased.

Now if this is correct, it is devastating for the claim that the post-mortem appearances of Christ were visionary experiences. For then the distinction running throughout the New Testament between a vision of Christ and a resurrection appearance of Christ becomes inexplicable. Lüdemann admits that most exegetes recognize this distinction, but since he finds himself at a loss to explain it, he simply has to deny it.

Thus, Lüdemann's claim that the resurrection appearances of Jesus were visionary events is doubly implausible, both in its presupposition that all the appearances conformed to the model of Paul's experience and in its failure to render intelligible the New Testament distinction between an appearance and a vision of

Jesus. Not only that, but we have also seen that his psychoanalysis of Peter and Paul has in various respects little plausibility. Thus, the Hallucination Hypothesis does not fare well when assessed by the third criterion. Criterion 4: *Accord with Accepted Beliefs*. According to this criterion, that hypothesis is best which forces us to abandon the fewest of generally accepted beliefs. But Lüdemann's hypothesis, if accepted, would compel us to abandon a number of beliefs which are generally accepted by New Testament scholars; for example, the beliefs that:

- (i) Jesus received an honorable burial (by Joseph of Arimathea).
- (ii) Jesus's tomb was discovered empty by some of his women followers.
- (iii) Psychoanalysis of historical figures is infeasible.
- (iv) Paul was basically content with his life under the Jewish Law.
- (v) The appearance to the 500 brethren was distinct from the event at Pentecost.
- (vi) The New Testament makes a distinction between a vision of Christ and a resurrection appearance of Christ.

All of the above statements are generally accepted conclusions of New Testament scholars; yet in order to adopt Lüdemann's hypothesis we should have to reject all of them. This weighs against at least Lüdemann's version of the Hallucination Hypothesis.

Criterion 5: *Ad hoc-ness*. A theory becomes increasingly *ad hoc*, or contrived, in proportion to the number of additional assumptions it requires us to adopt. Lüdemann's Hallucination Hypothesis involves several such additional assumptions:

(i) The disciples fled back to Galilee on the night of Jesus's arrest. Lüdemann needs this assumption in order to separate the disciples from the gravesite of Jesus. Otherwise it becomes difficult to explain why they did not investigate the tomb. But this assumption has not a shred of evidence in its favor and is on the face of it implausible in the extreme.

(ii) Peter was so obsessed with guilt that he projected a hallucination of Jesus. The records tell us nothing about the state of Peter's mind following his denial of Jesus. We have no reason to think that Peter's primary concern in the face of Jesus's execution was with his failure to stand by Jesus rather than with the shattering of Jesus's Messianic claims.

(iii) The remaining disciples became so carried away that they also hallucinated visions of Jesus. We have no evidence that the other disciples, who presumably lacked Peter's guilt complex, were emotionally prepared to hallucinate visions of Jesus alive. We are simply asked to assume this.

(iv) Paul had an unconscious struggle with the Jewish Law and a secret attraction to Christianity. Since the conflict is said to have been unconscious and the struggle secret, this assumption defies support by evidence. It is completely *ad hoc*.

These are just some of the additional assumptions that one must adopt if one is to embrace Lüdemann's Hallucination Hypothesis. Thus, his theory has a certain air of contrivance about it.

Criterion 6: *Superiority to Rival Hypotheses*. The Hallucination Hypothesis is old hat in German theology, having been expounded notably by Emmanuel Hirsch back in the 1920s; but most critics remain unpersuaded. Berger complains that Lüdemann's book is comprised almost exclusively of warmed-over positions which have dominated the Bultmann school for over 50 years. {67} I think that we can say confidently that the Hallucination Hypothesis has not demonstrated its clear superiority to rival theories, including the Resurrection Hypothesis.

Often the assessment of historical hypotheses is difficult because a hypothesis may be strong relative to certain criteria but weak relative to others. The historian's craft involves assessing the relative weight of these strengths and weakness. But the Hallucination Hypothesis does not fare well when assessed by any of

our criteria. Its explanatory scope is too narrow, its explanatory power is too weak to account for the phenomena it does seek to explain, it is implausible in certain important respects, it contradicts a number of accepted beliefs, it is *ad hoc*, and it does not outstrip its rivals in meeting the above criteria. The only hope remaining for proponents of the Hallucination Hypothesis is that the Resurrection Hypothesis will fail even more miserably in meeting the same criteria, so that the Hallucination Hypothesis emerges victorious.

The Resurrection Hypothesis

The Resurrection Hypothesis asserts that "God raised Jesus from the dead." While most New Testament scholars agree with the inductive data base sketched above, many, if not most, will have grave reservations about the Resurrection Hypothesis as I have stated it because as historians they believe that they cannot offer supernatural explanations of the facts. This disturbs me not in the least. For in the first place, the question of methodological naturalism, in history as in the sciences, is a *philosophical* question, which lies outside the realm of expertise of New Testament scholars. And there are quite a few very fine philosophers who argue that methodological naturalism is unwarranted, especially for one who is a theist. {68} Second, I am quite happy to concede, for the sake of argument if need be, that my hypothesis is not a "strictly historical" conclusion. We may call it a theological hypothesis, if we want. Even if the historian *qua* historian is debarred by some methodological constraint from drawing this conclusion, that does not mean that we (or the historian in his off-hours) cannot, as men and women seeking to discover the truth about life and the world, draw it. I offer the theological hypothesis as the best explanation of the facts and am willing to submit it to the same criteria used to assess any historical hypothesis. And the resurrection Hypothesis does seem to meet McCullagh's criteria successfully.

1. It has great *explanatory scope*: it explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why the Christian faith came into being.
2. It has great *explanatory power*: it explains why the body of Jesus was gone, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite his earlier public execution, and so forth.
3. It is *plausible*: given the historical context of Jesus's own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.
4. It is *not excessively ad hoc* or *contrived*: it requires only one additional hypothesis: that God exists. And even that need not be an additional hypothesis if you already believe in God's existence, as Lüdemann and I do.
5. It is *in accord with accepted beliefs*. The hypothesis: "God raised Jesus from the dead" does not in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don't rise *naturally* from the dead. The Christian accepts *that* belief as wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.
6. It far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting conditions (1)–(5). Down through history various alternative explanations of the facts have been offered, for example, the conspiracy theory, the apparent death theory, the hallucination theory, and so forth. Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. No naturalistic hypothesis has attracted a great number of scholars.

Thus, the Resurrection Hypothesis fares very well when assessed by the standard criteria used for testing historical descriptions. Its greatest weakness is that it is *ad hoc* in requiring us to assume that God exists. But for those of us who are theists that is not an insuperable problem.

So why, we may ask, does Lüdemann reject the Resurrection Hypothesis? The answer is very simple: the resurrection is a miracle, and Lüdemann denies the admissibility of miracles. He states, "Historical criticism . . . does not reckon with an intervention of God in history." {69} Thus, the resurrection *cannot* be historical; it goes out the window before you even sit down at the table to look at the evidence.

The problem here can best be understood, I think, as a disagreement over what sort of explanations constitute live options for a best explanation of the facts. According to the pattern of inductive reasoning known as inference to the best explanation, in explaining a body of data, we first assemble a pool of live options and then pick from the pool, on the basis of certain criteria, that explanation which, if true, would

best explain the data. {70} The problem at hand is that scientific naturalists will not permit supernatural explanations even to be in the pool of live options. By contrast, I am open to scientific naturalistic explanations in the sense that I include naturalistic explanations in the pool of live options, for I assess such a explanations using the standard criteria for being a best explanation rather than dismiss such hypotheses out of hand. But Lüdemann is so sure that supernatural explanations are wrong that he thinks himself justified in no longer being open to them: they cannot even be permitted into the pool of live options. But, of course, if only naturalistic explanations are permitted into the pool of live options, then the claim or proof that the Hallucination Hypothesis is the best explanation is hollow. For I could happily admit that of all the naturalistic explanations on tap, the best naturalistic explanation is the Hallucination Hypothesis. But, of course, the question is not whether the Hallucination Hypothesis is the best naturalistic explanation, but whether it is true. After all, we are interested in veracity, not orthodoxy (whether naturalistic or supernaturalistic). So in order to be sure that he is not excluding the true theory from even being considered, Lüdemann had better have pretty good reasons for limiting the pool of live options to naturalistic explanations.

So what justification does Dr. Lüdemann give for this crucial presupposition of the inadmissibility of miracles? All he offers is a couple of one-sentence allusions to Hume and Kant. {71} He says, "Hume . . . demonstrated that a miracle is defined in such a way that 'no testimony is sufficient to establish it'." {72} The miraculous conception of the resurrection, he says, presupposes "a philosophical realism that has been untenable since Kant." {73} Now Lüdemann's procedure here of merely dropping names of famous philosophers is sadly all too typical of theologians. Thomas Morris, a philosopher, comments in his book *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*,

What is particularly interesting about the references theologians make to Kant or Hume is that most often we find the philosopher merely mentioned . . . , but we rarely, if ever, see an account of precisely which arguments of his are supposed to have accomplished the alleged demolition In fact, I must confess to never having seen in the writings of any contemporary theologian the exposition of a single argument from either Hume or Kant, or any other historical figure for that matter, which comes anywhere near to demolishing . . . historical Christian doctrine, or . . . theological realism {74}

Hume's argument against miracles was already refuted in the 18th century by Paley, Less, and Campbell, and most contemporary philosophers also reject it as fallacious, including such prominent philosophers of science as Richard Swinburne and John Earman and analytic philosophers such as George Mavrodes and William Alston. {75} Even the atheist philosopher Antony Flew, himself a Hume scholar, admits that Hume's argument is defective as it stands. {76} As for philosophical realism, this is in fact the *dominant* view among philosophers today, at least in the analytic tradition. So if Lüdemann wants to reject the historicity of miracles on the basis of Hume and Kant, then he's got a lot of explaining to do. Otherwise, his rejection of the resurrection hypothesis is based on a groundless presupposition. Reject that presupposition, and it's pretty hard to deny that the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the facts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we've seen, first, that any adequate historical hypothesis concerning Jesus's fate must explain four established facts: Jesus's honorable burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection. Second, when assessed by standard criteria used for testing historical descriptions, Lüdemann's Hallucination Hypothesis is seen to have narrow explanatory scope, to have weak explanatory power, to be implausible, to be unacceptably *ad hoc*, to contradict quite a large number of accepted beliefs, and not to outstrip its rivals in meeting these tests. By contrast, the Resurrection Hypothesis, when assessed by the same criteria, fares very well. Therefore, we ought to regard the latter as the better explanation of the facts.

Notes

{1} William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy*, 2d. ed., Texts and Studies in Religion 23 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2001); idem, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, 2d ed., Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 16 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2001).

{2} Gerd Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 1.

{3} Ibid., p. 3.

{4} Gerd Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung?*, ed. Hansjürgen Verweyen, Quaestiones Disputatae 155 (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), p. 21; cf. idem, *What Really Happened?*, p. 6.

{5} Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 27; cf. idem, "Für die Jünger war sie wichtig," *Evangelische Zeitung*, February 2, 1994; idem *What Really Happened?*, p. v.

{6} Gerd Lüdemann, *The Great Deception* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999); idem, *Jesus after 2000 Years* (London: SCM Press, 2000).

{7} Lüdemann does not exactly put it this way; he says that anyone who holds to a supernatural or miraculous element behind the events of Easter should openly admit that he is a fundamentalist (Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 7). See also Gert Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 180.

{8} Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 45.

{9} Ibid., p. 38.

{10} See further William Lane Craig, "The Disciples' Inspection of the Empty Tomb (Luke 24, 12.24; John 20, 1–10)," in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. A. Denaux, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium 101 (Louvain: University Press, 1992), pp. 614–619.

{11} Their differences from Mark are therefore not plausibly attributed to mere editorial changes. For examples of the uneven verbal agreements with Mark, see Mk. 15:46 "a tomb which had been hewn out of rock" and Mt. 17.60 "tomb which he had hewn in the rock;" of omissions see Pilate's interrogation of the centurion in Mk. 15.44–45; and of agreements against Mark see Mt. 27.58=Lk. 23.52 "This man went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." See further Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 4th ed., ed. W. Schmauch, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 398–399, 404, 408; Walter Grundman, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 8th ed., *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament* 3 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), p. 436.

{12} Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 12. Borg observes that most cases of multiple attestation in the New Testament are double; the cases of triple or more attestation are relatively few. It is all the more striking, then, that the honorable burial of Jesus is multiply attested in Paul's formula, Mark's passion source, the sermons in Acts, Matthew and Luke's sources, and John.

{13} Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994), 2: 1240–1241.

{14} Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 22.

{15} Ingo Broer, "Die Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu und das geschichtliche Verständnis des Glaubens in der Neuzeit," in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung?*, p.61. Broer observes that only a few scholars would support Lüdemann's interpretation of these passages as indicative of distinct burial traditions.

{16} See S. G. Wilson, "The Jews and the Death of Jesus in Acts," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 1: *Paul and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Richardson, Studies in Christianity and Judaism 2 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1986), p. 157; cf. Lloyd Gaston, "Anti-Judaism and the Passion Narrative in Luke and Acts," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 1: *Paul and the Gospels*, p. 129.

{17} John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 131.

{18} Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 207.

{19} Ibid., p. 45.

{20} See my *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, pp. ***.

{21} Gerd Lüdemann, "Die Auferstehung Jesu," in *Fand die Auferstehung wirklich statt?*, ed. Alexander Bommarius (Düsseldorf: Parega Verlag, 1995), p. 21.

{22} See Edward Lynn Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, *Analecta Biblica* 45 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 37–39.

{23} Lüdemann, "Die Auferstehung Jesu," pp. 18–19; idem, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 22. He also suggests, inconsistently it seems, that the four-fold o t i is indicative of disparate traditions. For arguments to the contrary, see my *Assessing the New Testament Evidence*, pp. ***.

{24} Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 24, cites Jub. 23.31 as evidence of a non-corporeal conception of resurrection in Judaism; but this verse, which states that the bones of the dead rest in the earth whereas their spirits are with God, is simply an expression of the dualism typical of Hellenistic Judaism and actually supports the idea that it is the bones which are the proper object of the resurrection.

{25} Schwager reports that in contrast to the legend hypothesis it has become customary to assess positively the women's role at the crucifixion and on Easter morning (Raymund Schwager, "Die heutige Theologie and das leere Grab Jesu," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 115 [1993]: 436).

{26} Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 124.

{27} See discussion in my "The Guard at the Tomb," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 279–280.

{28} John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3 vols., vol. 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 150.

{29} Jacob Kremer, *Die Osterevangelien-Geschichten um Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), pp. 49–50; cf. his more recent judgment that "most exegetes tend to ascribe to the tomb narratives a historical core, in whatever way this may be more precisely delineated (*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* [1993], s.v. "Auferstehung Christi I. Im Neuen Testament," by Jacob Kremer).

{30} Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 118.

{31} Lüdemann, "Auferstehung Jesu," p. 21.

{32}Klaus Berger, "Ostern fällt nicht aus! Zum Streit um das 'kritischste Buch über die Auferstehung'," *Idea Spektrum* 3 (1994): 21–22. Cf. idem, "Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi," in *Fand die Auferstehung wirklich statt?*, p. 48.

{33}Lüdemann, "Auferstehung Jesu," p. 19.

{34}Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen. *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab*, 3d rev ed., Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1966).

{35}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 116.

{36}Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 23.

{37}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 121.

{38}Wolfgang Trilling, *Fragen zur Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1966), p. 153. With respect to Jesus's miracles, Trilling had written: "We are convinced and hold it for historically certain that Jesus did in fact perform miracles The miracle reports occupy so much space in the Gospels that it is impossible that they could all have been subsequently invented or transferred to Jesus" (Ibid., p. 153). The fact that miracle-working belongs to the historical Jesus is no longer disputed.

{39}Lüdemann, *What Really Happened?*, p. 80.

{40}N. T. Wright, video-taped lecture presented at Asbury Theological Seminary, November, 1999.

{41}Joachim Jeremias, "Die älteste Schicht der Osterüberlieferungen," in *Resurrexit*, ed. Édouard Dhanis (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), p. 194.

{42}Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 27.

{43}Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p. 136.

{44}C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 19.

{45}I am not using the word "hallucination" pejoratively; rather a hallucination is a non-veridical vision. It is an appearance to its percipient which has no extra-mental correlate and is a projection of the percipient's own brain. It is therefore purely subjective and corresponds to no reality. That is what Lüdemann takes the resurrection appearances to be. A vision, he explains, is the visual appearing of persons, things, or scenes which have no external reality (Lüdemann, "Auferstehung Jesu," p. 22). He says that visions and hallucinations belong to the same realm, *viz.*, "what we ourselves bring forth, what ultimately has no basis in objective reality" (Ibid., p. 23). They are the product of "imagination and fantasy" (idem, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 28). I suspect that any preference on Lüdemann's part for the terminology of "visions" rather than "hallucinations" merely reflects a desire to make the hypothesis more palatable to religious sensibility. For a subjective vision just is a hallucination; if not, then some explanation is owed us of what the difference is between a subjective vision and a hallucination.

{46}Lüdemann, "Auferstehung Jesu," p. 25.

{47}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, pp. 174–175.

{48}Ibid., p. 26.

{49}Ibid., pp. 26–27.

{50}But see Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. G. D'Costa (Oxford: One World, 1996), 48–61, who catalogues a number of interesting cases of mass delusions in order to explain how Peter's hallucinatory experience could have been multiplied in a series of secondary visions. But it is a striking feature of Goulder's catalogue that *none* of his cases of collective behavior, such as sightings of Big Foot or of UFO's, are instances of hallucinations or subjective visions at all. No one attempts to explain Big Foot sightings by saying that people were having subjective visions of Big Foot. Rather they saw a dark form moving in the distant bushes or found large footprints in the snow or mud or in other cases simply concocted a story. Or again, UFO sightings turn out for the most part to be weather balloons, ball lightning, optical illusions, or lies, not hallucinations. Hallucinations require a very special psycho-biological preparation and are usually associated with mental illness or substance abuse. The sorts of collective behavior to which Goulder appeals are not hallucinatory experiences. But in the case of the post-mortem appearances of Jesus it is universally acknowledged that the disciples did see appearances of the Risen Lord. To be sure, there may well have also been in the early church false claims to an appearance of the Lord analogous to the mass behavior described by Goulder; but no one thinks that the Twelve, for example, had merely mistaken a distant shape for Christ or concocted the story of his appearance and then were prepared to go to tortuous deaths in attestation to its truth. Thus, the resurrection appearances remain unparalleled by Goulder's cases.

{51}Gerd Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 109.

{52}Ibid., p. 107.

{53}Hans Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten*, new ed. (Würzburg: Echter, 1995), p. 425.

{54}*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (1993), s.v. "Auferstehung Christi I. Im Neuen Testament," by Jacob Kremer.

{55}Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, p. 66.

{56}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 89.

{57}Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 342; cf. 40–41. See also Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, in collaboration with Roland Deines (London: SCM, 1991), p. 79.

{58}Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, pp. 233–243.

{59}Krister Stendahl, "Paul among Jews and Gentiles," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 12–13; cf. idem, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 80.

{60}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 80.

{61}Lüdemann himself observes that this interpretation is "given up almost everywhere" (Ibid.).

{62}Kessler, *Sucht den Lebenden*, p. 423.

{63}Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 39.

{64}Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 30: "Anyone who does not share the presupposition made here will not be able to make anything of what follows."

{65} John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), p. 169.

{66} Lüdemann, *What Really Happened?*, p. 10.

{67} Klaus Berger, "Ostern fällt nicht aus!," p. 21.

{68} See the very interesting recent discussions about the warrant for methodological naturalism in science, e.g., Paul de Vries, "Naturalism in the Natural Sciences: A Christian Perspective," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15 (1986): 388–96; Alvin Plantinga, Howard J. Van Till, Pattle Pun, and Ernan McMullin, "Symposium: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991): 8–109; William Hasker, "Evolution and Alvin Plantinga," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 44 (1992): 150–62; Alvin Plantinga, "On Rejecting The Theory of Common Ancestry: A Reply to Hasker," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 44 (1992): 258–63; Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism," paper presented at the symposium "Knowing God, Christ, and Nature in the Post-Positivistic Era," University of Notre Dame, April 14–17, 1993; J. P. Moreland, "Theistic Science and Methodological Naturalism," in *The Creation Hypothesis*, ed. J. P. Moreland (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), pp. 41–66; J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, and Richard H. Bube, "Conceptual Problems and the Scientific Status of Creation Science: a Discussion," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46 (1994): 2–25.

{69} Lüdemann, "Auferstehung Jesu," p. 16.

{70} Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 1991).

{71} Notice his failure to interact with Pannenberg's critique of "the all-powerfulness of analogical thinking in historical research and the postulate of the similarity in principle of all events" (Lüdemann, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern," p. 20; cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Auferstehung Jesu—Historie und Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 91 [1994]: 318–328).

{72} Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 12.

{73} *Ibid.*, p. 249.

{74} Thomas V. Morris, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, University of Notre Dame Studies in the Philosophy of Religion 5 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 3–4.

{75} See George Campbell, *Dissertation on Miracles* (1762; rep. ed.: London: T. Tegg & Son, 1834); Gottfried Less, *Wahrheit der christlichen Religion* (Göttingen: G. L. Förster, 1776); William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (London: R. Faulder, 1796; reprint ed.: Westmead, England: Gregg, 1970); Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); John Earman, "Bayes, Hume, and Miracles," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 293–310; George Mavrodes, "Miracles and the Laws of Nature," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 333–346; William Alston, "God's Action in the World," in *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 197–222.

{76} Antony Flew in *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 4.