

JESUS' RESURRECTION AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM: AN APOLOGETIC*

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There is widespread agreement among scholars today across a broad theological spectrum that the resurrection of Jesus is the central claim of Christianity. This has long been asserted by orthodox believers, based on NT passages such as 1 Cor 15:12-20. But it is also admitted by higher critical scholars, as well.

For instance, W. Marxsen points out that, of all the current issues which face Christian theology, "the question of Jesus' resurrection plays a decisive part; one might even say the decisive part." In fact, if we are uncertain or obscure about the faith and hope which are "closely connected" to the resurrection, then "there is a risk of jeopardizing more or less everything to which a Christian clings."¹

He is not alone in such an assessment. J. Moltmann asserts that "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God. In the NT there is no faith that does not start *a priori* with the resurrection of Jesus."² G. Bornkamm likewise admits the ultimate importance of this event: ". . . there would be no gospel, not one account, no letter in the NT, no faith, no church, no

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¹ W. Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 12.

² J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. by J. W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 165.

worship, no prayer in Christendom to this day without the message of the resurrection of Christ. . . ."³

Therefore, considering the issue of Jesus' resurrection is of prime importance. I agree with those who assert that the historicity of this event is a major question, for it is upon this aspect that the truthfulness of Christian theology depends.⁴ Repeated treatments and evaluations of this occurrence appear in Christian studies, but such are justified both by its centrality and by the new faces of contemporary criticism.

In light of this importance, the major purpose of this essay is fourfold. First, we will describe several contemporary approaches to the resurrection, dividing these into five groups, or models, for the sake of clarity. Second, a more-or-less traditional apologetic for the resurrection will be briefly summarized. Third, a contemporary apologetic will be presented in order to strengthen further the earlier case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. The force of this latter effort is that *even by utilizing contemporary critical principles*, this event can still be shown to be historical. In fact, the major theme of this essay is to point out how the resurrection can be historically demonstrated *even by such skeptical standards* of investigation. Fourth, we will suggest several areas for future concentration in resurrection studies.

I. *Contemporary Approaches*

Before turning to an apologetic for the resurrection, it will be advantageous to cite various recent approaches to this event. The overall critical approach has changed substantially in recent decades. Rarely held are the naturalistic alternative theories of the 19th-century liberal theologians, as will be mentioned below (see section II). Rather, contemporary scholars have approached this event from a different perspective, although they occasionally do revert to select older arguments.

³ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. by I. and F. McLuskey with J. M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 181.

⁴ It should be carefully noted that the historicity of the resurrection is in view in this essay and not the question of whether the resurrection was a miracle performed by God. However, for a refutation of D. Hume and other naturalistic positions which disallow miracles, see G. Habermas, "Skepticism: Hume" in *Biblical Errancy* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980). For more details on the identification of the resurrection as a miracle, see G. R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980; repr., Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), especially chaps. 2-3.

Today, most critical theologians find much less history in the gospels than their 19th-century counterparts, to be sure. Yet, a substantial number of historical facts are recognized with regard to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Virtually all scholars today agree that Jesus died by crucifixion and that his body was afterwards buried. Due to his death, his disciples were despondent, believing that all hope was gone. At this point many contemporary scholars add that the burial tomb was found empty a few days later, but that it did not cause belief in the disciples.

It is virtually unanimous that, soon afterwards, the disciples had experiences which they were convinced were appearances of the risen Jesus. These experiences transformed their lives as they believed that Jesus was literally alive. These experiences also emboldened them to preach and witness in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had been crucified and buried only a short time previously. Here it was the message of Jesus' resurrection which was the central proclamation for these eyewitnesses.

History also relates that, due to this testimony, the Christian church grew, featuring Sunday as the primary day of worship. Some scholars add here that one of the early church leaders was James, the brother of Jesus, who was a skeptic until he believed he saw the risen Jesus. Basically all agree that a persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, was converted to Christianity by an experience which he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

These are a minimum number of facts agreed upon by almost all critical scholars who study this topic, whatever their school of thought. From this summary, at least eleven separate facts can be considered to be knowable history (while another is additionally recognized by many): (1) Jesus died due to crucifixion and (2) was buried afterwards. (3) Jesus' death caused the disciples to experience despair and lose hope, believing that their master was dead. (4) Although not as widely accepted, many scholars acknowledge several weighty arguments which indicate that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered to be empty just a few days later.

Almost all critical scholars further agree that (5) the disciples had real experiences which they thought were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. Due to these experiences, (6) the disciples were transformed from timid and troubled doubters afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold preachers of his death and resurrection who were more than willing to die for their faith in him. (7) This message was the center of preaching in the earliest church and (8) was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, the same city where Jesus had recently died and had been buried.

As a direct result of this preaching, (9) the church was born, (10) featuring Sunday as the special day of worship. (11) James, a brother of Jesus who had been a skeptic, was converted when he believed that he saw the resurrected Jesus. (12) A few years later, Paul was also converted to the Christian faith by an experience which he, likewise, thought was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Such facts are crucial in terms of our contemporary investigation of Jesus' resurrection. With the possible exception of the empty tomb, the great majority of critical scholars who study this subject agree that these are the minimal historical facts surrounding this event. As such, any conclusions concerning the historicity of the resurrection should at least properly account for them.

Now, it needs to be carefully noted that the actual resurrection of Jesus, in the sense of his exit from the tomb, is nowhere narrated in the NT.⁵ The teaching that he actually rose from the dead was a conclusion drawn from the fact that he had literally died, followed by his appearances in a transformed body to numerous individuals and groups.

Therefore, the pivotal fact from our list, recognized as historical by virtually all scholars, is the original experiences of the disciples. It is almost always admitted that the disciples had real experiences and that "something happened." Yet, while contemporary scholars rarely employ naturalistic alternative theories, various views exist concerning the ability to ascertain the exact nature of these experiences.

At the risk of oversimplification, at least five models may be delineated in the contemporary theology of the last 25 years, each representing a critical position on the issue of the historicity of the resurrection appearances of Jesus. These models move from those which disallow or seriously question the actual appearances to those which firmly support attempts to demonstrate them in historical bodily terms.

Granted, there are numerous possible angles from which to study and view the resurrection of Jesus (and it is perhaps true that evangelicals are sometimes guilty of placing too much emphasis on historicity), so it ought not be pretended by any means that this is the only worthwhile perspective.⁶ Yet, many evangelicals think that such

⁵ However, the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (*ca.* 150-180 A.D.) does record Jesus' exit from the grave, assisted by two young men (presumably angels). For the extant text of this fragment, see R. Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 78-82.

⁶ G. O'Collins notes six contemporary models of the resurrection, only one of which stresses the aspect of historicity. In a sense, then, I am dividing the historical aspect into five distinct sections. See *What Are They Saying About the Resurrection?* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 7-34.

is at least a crucial starting point, agreeing with Paul (1 Cor 15:12-20) that any theological meaning for this event depends on the question of historicity.

It should be carefully noted before we begin our survey that it is always risky to attempt to identify the positions of a broad cross-section of scholars on almost any issue. This is particularly true with regard to the resurrection, since there are numerous subtle shades of meaning which may be apparent (or not so apparent!) even to the trained eye. In fact, it is rather frustrating to read certain noted scholars on this topic and to come away still attempting to understand their positions. So, while such is a potentially hazardous process, it may be helpful, as long as it is understood that there will necessarily be some overlap (since some scholars have similarities to more than one model, for instance) and that such can be identified only in fairly approximate terms. But even these broader categorizations may still serve our purpose, while at the same time revealing some "strange bedfellows."

The first model is characterized by those scholars who manifest the tendency either to dismiss or at least seriously to question the facticity of the resurrection appearances. While these persons are more radical in their criticism, they still generally accept facts such as those delineated above as historical and usually (perhaps surprisingly) reject the naturalistic explanations for the appearances. Yet, they also tend to dismiss any literal claims either that Jesus' tomb was empty or that he was actually seen by his followers, preferring only to conclude that the nature of the original eyewitnesses' experiences cannot be ascertained.

For instance, R. Bultmann and his followers claim that the real cause of the disciples' transformation is obscured by the various NT texts. Regardless, it is not crucial to inquire into the nature of these experiences.⁷ Similarly, W. Marxsen also believes that the reconstitution of these encounters cannot and should not be attempted, including whether the disciples actually perceived appearances of the risen Jesus. However, it makes little difference for the chief point, is that, regardless of what happened, faith is still warranted.⁸

Sometimes this first model is more characterized by what it does not (or cannot) say than by what it does state. So it is with the view of H. Koester, who asserts -that it is not his concern to inquire into the nature of Jesus' appearances. But they can best be characterized as the "catalyst" that started the early Christian missionary activity and

⁷ See R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by K. Grobel (New York: Scribner's, 1951, 1955) 1.45.

⁸ Marxsen, chaps. 3-4, especially 96, 111, as well as 77, 119, 147, 152.

the planting of churches. At any rate, the resurrection revealed nothing new, but it did change life for the first believers.⁹

For H. Kung, the resurrection is not to be considered as "a supernatural intervention which can be located and dated in space and time." Again, it is "not an event in human space and human time." All that can be known is that Jesus died, followed by the rise of faith and the Easter message of the disciples. But nothing objective can be apprehended or checked out with regard to either the resurrection itself or Jesus' appearances.¹⁰

In P. Van Buren's earlier thought, he held that "something happened" which changed the disciples' outlook from discouragement to faith. Although these experiences were more than subjective and were expressed in terms of actual appearances of the risen Jesus, their nature still cannot be ascertained.¹¹

While some recent trends still reflect this first perspective, the position as a whole appears to be much less popular today. It is quite possible that the view was heavily influenced by the work of R. Bultmann to the extent that it is suffering a similar fate in terms of the decrease in new thinkers who are supporting these options.¹² Perhaps symbolic of this last point is the conclusion reached by N. Perrin, who is often viewed as a major American representative of Bultmann's position due to his frequent similarities to the latter's interpretations on NT topics such as the resurrection of Jesus. But strangely enough, in a volume on this subject written at the very end of his career, Perrin concluded that the tradition behind Jesus' appearances was firmly based. In fact, his synopsis of what actually happened appears at least to allow for some sort of objective visions whereby Jesus commissioned the apostles for a new mission. Beyond this, Perrin

⁹ H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 1.84, 86.

¹⁰ H. Kung, *On Being a Christian*, trans. by E. Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 348-53.

¹¹ P. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 126-34.

¹² Some scholars hold positions which are at least related in some regards. T. Sheehan's thesis (see part IV below) exhibits a number of similarities to Bultmann's view, including a clear rejection of the resurrection of Jesus in any literal sense, as stated in *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986), especially part 2. Yet, neither does Sheehan explicitly espouse a naturalistic theory. NT exegete H. Conzelmann is another scholar who is strongly influenced by Bultmann's work. Some of his thoughts on the resurrection appearances of Jesus are found in his commentary on *I Corinthians*, trans. by J. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 251ff.

does not think that anything further can be said.¹³ Here it seems clear that Perrin has moved beyond Bultmann.

In the second model, scholars are distinguished from the first group not only by displaying more interest in the nature of the disciples' experiences, but often by the acceptance of the literal resurrection itself.¹⁴ But although the naturalistic theories are generally rejected, this group still insists that these experiences cannot be historically verified but can only be accepted by faith.

The theologians and exegetes in this second model have usually been influenced by S. Kierkegaard¹⁵ and, in the 20th-century, by K. Barth, who held that the resurrection should be accepted by faith as a literal event, but that it cannot be ascertained by any historical investigation. Barth emphatically rejected the naturalistic alternative theories and asserted that Jesus appeared empirically to his disciples, yet these occurrences happened in a different sphere of history and cannot be verified historically.¹⁶

Similar views were held by other neo-orthodox theologians such as E. Brunner¹⁷ and D. Bonhoeffer¹⁸ and are also quite popular in more recent works. For example, G. Bornkamm notes the failure of naturalistic theories but still, in a manner reminiscent of Barth, states that the resurrection appearances can only be accepted by faith apart from historical examination.¹⁹

Likewise, K. Rahner points out that just because the resurrection cannot be incorporated "into the normal world of space and time," this does not mean that this event should be denied.²⁰ For M. Barth,

¹³ N. Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 78-84.

¹⁴ It is difficult in all examples below to ascertain those scholars who espouse faith in *literal* resurrection appearances of Jesus to his followers, but it is sufficiently clear in several cases.

¹⁵ See especially Kierkegaard's work *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by D. F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) chaps. 3-4 and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by D. F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) chapter 1 and 86ff., 188-00.

¹⁶ The progress in Barth's thought on this idea is very informative. For his most authoritative statement of these views see *The Doctrine of the Reconciliation*, Volume IV, Part 1 of his *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) especially 334-36, 351-52.

¹⁷ See, for examples, E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Vol. 2 of *Dogmatics*, trans. O. Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952) 366-72.

¹⁸ D. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 71-77.

¹⁹ Bornkamm, 180-86.

²⁰ K. Rahner, *Belief Today*, chap. 3 trans. W. Whitman (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1967) 127.

the resurrection of Jesus is certainly an actual historical occurrence, but, in words quite reminiscent of his father, Karl, it is an event which occurs at the boundary of empirical scientific knowledge. . . beyond the realm of experience and sensation which is accessible to rationality and empirical investigation. . . .²¹

An extremely interesting view (at least partially because it also reaches beyond the second model) is the position of T. Torrance. A well-known interpreter of K. Barth's theology, Torrance carefully and repeatedly explains his literal acceptance of the resurrection of Jesus. He places even more stress on the historicity of the resurrection than does Barth, such as his identification of it as "an event that happens within history. . . a happening within the same order of physical existence to which we belong. . . an event in space and time. . . ."²² He even differentiates his position from that of the early Barth, whom Torrance surprisingly identifies as holding that the resurrection was "not as really historical." A footnote implies that Barth only held such a view in his earlier stages, dated 1910-31.²³ But it should be objected that Barth continued to speak of the resurrection having occurred in a different sort of history long after this.²⁴ At any rate, Torrance still agrees with Barth that the resurrection cannot be proven, but is "apprehended only by faith."²⁵ Other scholars also hold similar positions.²⁶

The third model is characterized by scholars who generally have a significant interest in more historical aspects of the resurrection. Like the second position, naturalistic theories are also rejected. But there are at least two primary differences between this and the previous view. Whereas those in the second model generally state their appropriation of the resurrection by faith, those in this third group often proceed a step further by setting forth a more-or-less abstract reconstruction of the historical nature of the appearances. Additionally, they tend to point out reasons why the empty tomb is the best

²¹ M. Barth and V. H. Fletcher, *Acquittal by Resurrection* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) vi-vii. Cf. 14-15, 29 with 25, 31 for this contrast. For an intriguing parallel, see K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Revell, 1933) 134; cf. 131-42.

²² T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 86-88; cf. also 21, 89-91, 94-95, 171-175.

²³ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁴ See footnote 16; see also K. Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, trans. C. Vahanian; (ed. J. L. Leuba; New York: Meridian, 1958) 105-8.

²⁵ Torrance, 18-19; also 220.

²⁶ For example, see H. Thieliicke, "The Resurrection Kerygma" in *The Easter Message Today*, trans. S. Attanasio and D. L. Cuder (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964), especially 59, 70-71, 73, 77.

explanation for the data, as opposed, once again, to the more straightforward statement of belief in it.

The chief difference between these models, then, is the attempt of those in the third group to go beyond more-or-less generalized statements of faith in the resurrection to get behind the NT texts in an effort to ascertain at least a minimalistic understanding of what really happened, including the providing of reasons²⁷ for the acceptance of the appearances of Jesus and the empty tomb. However, it is still agreed that the resurrection itself is an eschatological event and is not demonstrable by historical methodology, although it is sometimes held that it will be verifiable in the future.

It might be said that the popularity of this third position in recent decades dates from the 1956 publication of a volume on the resurrection by H. Grass. Arguing that the gospel accounts of Jesus' corporeal resurrection appearances are legendary, Grass contended that the application of critical procedures to the NT texts reveals that Jesus actually appeared to his disciples, but in a spiritual form which would not even have been photographable.²⁸ Unlike most in this group, Grass also rejects the accounts of the empty tomb.²⁹ Other scholars have followed this lead in interpreting Jesus' appearances as spiritual, rather than physical, phenomena.

J. Moltmann holds that the disciples witnessed visionary³⁰ appearances of the risen Jesus, which involved spoken messages and charged his hearers with a mission of service in the world. These events, which are not actually verifiable, occurred in eschatological history and are subject to future verification.³¹ U. Wilkens likewise concludes that history cannot determine exactly what happened. Thus, while naturalistic theories can be refuted and the historical facticity of the empty tomb upheld, Jesus' appearances were private revelations, indications of a future, eschatological existence.³²

²⁷ I am not implying that those in the third model engage in formal apologetics, which these scholars also eschew. However, regardless of their intent here, there is a tendency among some of these individuals to provide numerous reasons, including some "evidences," for their position, in contrast to those in the second model.

²⁸ H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (2nd ed.; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962) 93; 226-49; cf. 232.

²⁹ Grass, 93.

³⁰ The term "visions" is often employed without sufficient care. We are not utilizing the word as a synonym for hallucinations or some entirely subjective phenomena.

³¹ J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. J. W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 172, 181, 188, 100, 197-98, 202; *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, trans. M. D. Meeks (New York: Scribner, 1969) 49-55.

³² U. Wilkens, *Resurrection*, trans. A. M. Stewart (Edinburgh: S. Andrew, 1977), especially 116-25.

R. Fuller notes that the disciples' transformations necessitate an adequate cause. This source is Jesus' appearances, which are historically defined as visionary experiences of light and auditions of meaning communicated to the earliest witnesses. The messages both proclaimed that Jesus had been raised to a new eschatological existence and further, imparted a mission to his followers, such as Paul's commission to preach to the Gentiles. Such phenomena were not subjective visions, but actual experiences. But even though they provided the source for the Easter faith and message, they are removed from historical demonstration.³³

J. Jeremias similarly holds that the resurrection appearances of Jesus were spiritual visions of shining light by which the disciples experienced Jesus as the risen Lord.³⁴ Preferring to view the resurrection as an historical question, G. O'Collins postulates that Jesus' appearances ought to be termed "Christophanies" since they involved manifestations of Jesus as "glorified and divinized as fully as that is possible." And once again, such appearances cannot be known except in faith.³⁵ Others concur on these and other similar points.³⁶

The fourth model is comprised of scholars who hold that the available textual data is sufficient to demonstrate the probability that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was literally raised from the dead. Probably the best known recent theologian to accept this conclusion is W. Pannenberg, who argues against naturalistic theories and, as just noted, concludes that the historical facts demonstrate the likelihood of both the empty tomb and the literal appearances of Jesus. Yet, Pannenberg dismisses a corporeal resurrection body in favor of appearances which are described in terms of a spiritual body which appeared from heaven, but was recognized as Jesus, who imparted an audition and, at least in Paul's case, was accompanied by a phenomenon of light.³⁷

³³ R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 46-49, 169-72, 181.

³⁴ J. Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation" in *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribner's, 1971), especially 308-9.

³⁵ O'Collins, 14,55,62.

³⁶ Interestingly enough, and although his position is difficult to identify, Jewish scholar P. Lapede firmly accepts the facticity of Jesus' resurrection and the subsequent appearances even though they are recognized by faith. Furthermore, he also provides some good reasons to accept these conclusions. See P. Lapede, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), especially 92, 95-99, 118, 125, 127-28.

³⁷ See, in particular, W. Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, trans. L. L. Wilkens and D. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), especially 88-106.

A. M. Hunter utilizes textual considerations and applies some initial historical investigation to conclude that Jesus' resurrection can be demonstrated by the facts.³⁸ J. A. T. Robinson points out that while historical studies cannot ascertain the exact details, they may be sufficient to formulate a probable case for this event.³⁹ R. Brown, after an extensive study of the textual data, likewise supports the facticity of Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁰

J. D. G. Dunn carefully examines the pros and cons for both the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances of Jesus. He concludes that it is almost impossible to reject the disciples' visionary experiences, which cannot be explained by alternative theorization. The empty tomb, he states, is "almost as difficult to deny."⁴¹ In a similar but less systematic way, L. Goppelt also finds that the data favor both the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances of Jesus. He critiques Grass for not going far enough in his conclusions.⁴² A. M. Ramsey is even clearer in his defense of the empty tomb and the appearances. He also takes a more positive perspective on the gospel data.⁴³

In the fifth and last model to be discussed, scholars agree with the previous group that the evidence refutes the naturalistic theories, that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty and that Jesus actually appeared to his followers. But the primary difference between the last two models is that, additionally, the scholars in this fifth group hold that Jesus rose bodily, as well. There are many different conceptions of the term "body," but it will be specified that the word is being used here in the sense employed by the gospels. There we find that Jesus rose in the same body in which he was crucified, but that it had been transformed, as well.

Having very briefly delineated this last point, it must now be admitted that it is sometimes very difficult to ascertain who holds to this specific concept of Jesus' resurrection body and who does not. Some of the scholars whom we have already discussed also hold that Jesus was raised bodily. This appears to be clear, for example, in the

³⁸ For example, see A. M. Hunter, *Jesus; Lord and Savior* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 98-107. .

³⁹ J. A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1917) 120-29.

⁴⁰ R. E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973) 125-29.

⁴¹ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 66-78.

⁴² L. Goppelt, "The Easter Kerygma in the New Testament" in *The Easter Message Today*, 44-52.

⁴³ A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (London: Collins, 1961) 35-74.

works of K. Barth and T. Torrance.⁴⁴ M. Barth, Goppelt, and Ramsey likewise make this point, but at least the last two regard the view taken by Luke and John as being too drastic.⁴⁵

Most of the scholars who comprise this fifth model are evangelicals. Rather than attempting to identify each one separately, we will simply cite examples of distinctive contributions by some of those who have written entire volumes on this subject. G. E. Ladd and W. Craig have set a defense of the resurrection in the context of a brief apologetic for both the gospels and Paul's testimony, specializing in their endeavors to face contemporary critical challenges fairly.⁴⁶ G. Osborne has defended the resurrection against the critical questioning of the NT testimony by his attempts to inquire concerning any positive value which can be derived from redaction criticism.⁴⁷

D. Fuller, after a masterful survey of contemporary thought on the resurrection, has championed Luke-Acts as a sufficient answer to critical objections.⁴⁸ Even though attempted harmonies of the Easter traditions in the NT are looked at disdainfully by most critical scholars, this has not deterred J. Wenham from comprising one of the most ambitious works on a possible outline of events.⁴⁹

Lastly, although not primarily on the resurrection, at least two other volumes need to be mentioned. R. Gundry's influential work on NT anthropology has a chapter devoted to the crucially important subject of Paul's agreement with the gospel authors on Jesus' resurrection body. N. Geisler's treatise on contemporary critical challenges to the belief in miracles serves as an excellent summary of seldom-known, but influential, objections to these events.⁵⁰ Many other evangelicals have also published defenses of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.⁵¹

⁴⁴ See K. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 4.1, especially 351-42; Torrance, 26, 164, 171.

⁴⁵ M. Barth and V. Fletcher, 9,11, cf. p. vi; Goppelt, 43, 47-49; Ramsey, 108-9.

⁴⁶ G. E. Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) see chaps. 7-8; W. L. Craig, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection: Our Response to the Empty Tomb* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), especially 44-61, 70-86, 95-108.

⁴⁷ G. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), see chaps. 2-6 and 233-72.

⁴⁸ D. P. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), especially chaps. 7-8.

⁴⁹ J. Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

⁵⁰ R. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), especially chap. 13; N. L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁵¹ For just a few of the more recent volumes containing these defenses; written at various levels and for varying audiences, see C. C. Anderson, *The Historical Jesus: A*

Contemporary critical thinkers have generally based their most crucial discussions on the resurrection almost exclusively on the writings of Paul, and 1 Corinthians 15 in particular. Evangelicals have too long been largely ignored by the critical community for their "over-commitment" to the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances as credible sources. But it is certainly time that evangelical scholars do a more thorough job stating why we think these gospel accounts, in particular, deserve equal emphasis along with the testimony of Paul and others. To date, too many evangelicals have been complacent, largely attempting to write to each other, repeating old presentations of evidence for Jesus' resurrection without really grappling with contemporary concerns. For this we deserve criticism.⁵²

In retrospect, there appears to be the possibility of some intriguing connections between these five models, although it is difficult to be dogmatic here. The third group seems to be a more recent development from the second, where it is possible that the latter was judged to have placed too much emphasis on the disjunction between history and faith. Model four is a modern, critical defense of the resurrection which might be viewed at least partially as a reaction to the first and second models while not going as far as the traditional, orthodox view represented by the fifth group. Conversely, models one and five may be viewed as antitheses, while two and four are rivals on the issue of historicity.

It is also very important to note that of these five models, only the first is generally characterized by a rejection of (or agnostic attitude towards) the literal resurrection of Jesus. Just as significant is the observation that the first view not only appears to be losing ground, but varying positions which support the facticity of the resurrection appearances are presently quite popular.⁵³ It is for this reason that

Continuing Quest (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); N. Anderson, *Jesus Christ: The Witness of History* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985); F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960); Green, *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); A. J. Hoover, *The Case for Christian Theism: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1960); P. L. Maier, *First Easter* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); J. McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernardino: Here's Life, 1981); J. W. Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964, 1965); J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); R. Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); C. Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case* (Chicago: Moody, 1967); and M. Tenny, *The Reality of the Resurrection* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

⁵² I am not speaking of the volumes in notes 46-51, many of which have made serious contributions in these areas.

⁵³ Once again, this is a broad survey, hence necessitating generalities rather than detailed expositions of these five positions. Concerning the second group in particular, it

much of the remainder of this essay will be addressed, in a special sense, to the first viewpoint (although it will be related to the others as well).

II. *A Traditional Apologetic: A Summary*

Before proceeding to a more contemporary defense, it is advantageous that a brief summary be given of a more-or-less traditional apologetic for the resurrection of Jesus, perhaps including some new angles. Arguments for the historicity of the resurrection appearances have traditionally been based on two major lines of support. First, naturalistic theories have failed to explain away this event, and, second, there are evidences which indicate that Jesus' resurrection literally occurred.

That naturalistic theories have failed is evident for several reasons. Initially, each individual alternative hypothesis has been shown to fall prey to various criticisms and has been disproven by the known historical facts. In other words, theses such as those relying on fraud, swoon, hallucinations, legends, spiritualistic, or psychological experiences have individually been refuted by several key objections which render each one quite improbable.⁵⁴

Another indication of the failure of the naturalistic theories is that each one was disproven by the 19th century liberals themselves. These scholars refuted each other's hypotheses, thereby leaving no viable alternative. For example, D. Strauss delivered the historical death blow to the swoon theory held by K. Venturini, H. Paulus and others.⁵⁵ On the other hand, F. Schleiermacher and Paulus pointed out errors in Strauss' hallucination theory.⁵⁶ However, the major decimation of the hallucination theory came at the hands of T. Keim.⁵⁷ The fraud and legend theories were disproven by later critical research.⁵⁸

has already been noted that it is difficult to ascertain in all instances if the resurrection is being accepted as a literal event. At any rate, since many in this group do accept a literal resurrection, a rejection of this event is therefore not a characteristic of the second group as a whole, as it is with the first.

⁵⁴ It is impossible in the scope of this essay to deal with each of these naturalistic theories and their refutations. For details, see G. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1976), especially 114-71.

⁵⁵ Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879) 1.412; see also A. Schweitzer's assertion that Strauss administered the death blow to such rationalistic thought in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 56.

⁵⁶ F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 2.420; Schweitzer, 54-55.

⁵⁷ J. Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1908, 1965) 219.

⁵⁸ For examples, see R. Fuller, 46-49; Bornkamm, 185.

By such critiques these scholars pointed out that each of these theories was disproven by the known data.

After 19th century liberals decimated each other's views individually, 20th century critical scholars have generally rejected these theories as a whole, judging that they are incapable of explaining the facts. This contemporary approach is a characteristic of 20th century schools of thought across a wide theological spectrum.

For instance, K. Barth pointed out that each of these liberal hypotheses is confronted by many inconsistencies and concluded that "to-day we rightly turn up our nose at this. ..." ⁵⁹ Brown likewise asserts that 20th-century critical scholars have rejected these theories, holding that they are no longer respectable. He adds that such contemporary thinkers ignore these alternative views and any popularized renditions of them, as well. ⁶⁰ Such rejections are also manifested by theologians as diverse as Tillich, Pannenberg, Bornkamm and Robinson. ⁶¹ That even such critical scholars have rejected these naturalistic theories is a final epitaph on the failure of these views. But, as pointed out above, that these theses have been disproven by the factual data remains the chief reason for their failure.

The second major point in our traditional apologetic for Jesus' resurrection concerns the many positive evidences which corroborate the historical and literal nature of this event. Our earlier list of accepted historical facts contains at least ten such evidences. Thus, their factual basis is generally admitted by virtually all scholars (with the exception of the empty tomb which is nonetheless attested by many). However, because of limitation, these ten will simply be stated with very little elaboration.

The key evidence for Jesus' resurrection is (1) the disciples' experiences which they believed to be literal appearances of the risen Jesus, especially since these reports cannot be explained by naturalistic theories, as just noted. We will concentrate further on the nature of these experiences in the next article. Other positive evidences include (2) the transformation of the disciples into bold witnesses who were willing to die for their faith, (3) the historical facts in support of the empty tomb and (4) the central nature of the resurrection message, all of which require adequate explanations. Additionally, (5) the disciples proclaimed this message in Jerusalem itself, which is the last place one

⁵⁹ K. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 4.1, 340.

⁶⁰ R. Brown, "The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism." *Commonweal*, Nov. 24, 1967, especially 233.

⁶¹ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) I especially 2.156; Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, 88-97; Bornkamm, 181-85; Robinson, 123-25.

would expect. Yet, in repeated confrontations with the authorities, (6) the *Jewish leaders could not disprove their message*. Further, (7) the very existence of the *church*, (8) featuring *Sunday* as the primary day of worship demands historical causes, as well.

Two major facts arguing for the historicity of the resurrection are that two skeptics, (9) *James* and (10) *Paul*, became believers after having experiences which they also believed were appearances of the risen Jesus. Fuller concludes that even if the appearance to James was not recorded by Paul (1 Cor 15:7), such an occurrence would still have to be postulated anyway in order to account for both James' conversion and subsequent promotion to a position of authority in the early church. The same could be said even more emphatically concerning Paul.⁶²

When combined with the failure of the naturalistic theories, this minimum of ten evidences provides a strong case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. This is especially so in that these evidences were based on critically recognized historical data; they can be shown to be factual. In particular, when the eyewitness experiences of the disciples, James, and Paul are considered along with their corresponding transformations,⁶³ the historical resurrection becomes the best explanation for the facts, especially since the naturalistic theories failed. Therefore, it may be concluded that the resurrection is a historical event.

⁶² R. Fuller, 37, 46-47.

⁶³ This does not even include the experience of the more than 500 persons who claimed to see the risen Jesus and concerning whom Paul asserted that most were still alive and therefore could be questioned.

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