

JESUS' RESURRECTION AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM: AN APOLOGETIC (PART II)*

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I. A Contemporary Apologetic: An Outline

As noted in our survey of contemporary approaches to the resurrection appearances, the pivotal point is ascertaining the cause of the disciples' faith. As R. Fuller asserts:

The very fact of the church's kerygma therefore requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the "rise of the Easter faith" but the cause of the Easter Faith.¹ (*italics added*)

Fuller finds this cause in the literal (though nonbodily) resurrection appearances of Jesus, which he terms "revelatory encounters."² Yet it was related that more radical scholars (such as R. Bultmann and W. Marxsen) do not believe that it is possible to ascertain what occurred. For Bultmann, it is not even important to know what caused the disciples' faith. But J. Macquarrie, a major interpreter, asserts that Bultmann's dismissal of the resurrection is an entirely arbitrary one:

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¹R. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 169. Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 124-25.

² Fuller, 170.

The fallacy of such reasoning is obvious. The one valid way in which we can ascertain whether a certain event took place or not is not by bringing in some sweeping assumption to show that it could not have taken place, but to consider the historical evidence available, and decide on that.³

Similarly, both R. E. Brown and G. O'Collins are examples of those who charge Marxsen with hypercriticism for his *ad absurdum*, reductionistic treatment of the resurrection in that he avoids making any specific conclusions concerning the nature of the disciples' experiences in spite of having early and reliable material. Therefore, Brown and O'Collins regard Marxsen's contribution at this point as rather minimal.⁴

The chief purpose for the remainder of this essay will be to determine, by continuing both to investigate and utilize critical methodology, if the cause of the original eyewitnesses' faith can be further ascertained. If such verification is found, it will corroborate the earlier apologetic (which can still be presented in a very strong form) and also serve as a more conclusive refutation of radical scholars who deny that such a cause can be discovered.

A. An Early Christian Creed

It was pointed out above that the resurrection was the center of the earliest Christian teaching. This is crucially based, for instance, on 1 Cor 15:3ff., where virtually all scholars agree that Paul recorded an ancient creed(s) concerning Jesus' death and resurrection which is actually much earlier than the book in which it is recorded. That this material is traditional and earlier than Paul is evident from numerous considerations, such as the usage of the technical terms "delivered" and "received" (which indicate the imparting of oral tradition), the parallelism and somewhat stylized content, the proper names of Peter and James, the non-Pauline words, and the possibility of an Aramaic original. Further pointers to the presence of traditional material include the Aramaic name Cephas (see the parallel in Luke 24:34), the threefold usage of "and that" (similar to Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew means of narration), and the two references to the fulfillment of the Scriptures.⁵

³ J. Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 185-86.

⁴ R. E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973) 96; G. O'Collins, *What Are They Saying about the Resurrection?* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 100-15.

⁵ In particular, see Fuller, 9ff.; P. Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983) 97-99. See also Brown, 81, 92; Robinson, 125; P. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963)

Concerning the date of this creed, critical scholars generally agree that it has a very early origin. J. Jeremias terms it "the earliest tradition of all."⁶ U. Wilckens declares that it "indubitably goes back to the oldest phase of all in the history of primitive Christianity."⁷ In fact, many scholars date Paul's receiving of this creed from two to eight years after the crucifixion itself, or from about A.D. 32-38.⁸ Most of those who comment on the issue hold that Paul most likely received this material during his visit in Jerusalem with Peter and James) who are included in the list of appearances (1 Cor 15:5, 7; Gal 1:18-19).⁹

There are at least four indications that the content of this gospel creed (if not the actual words themselves) is actually apostolic in nature. (1) As we just said, Paul recorded very early material which recounts the appearances of Jesus to the disciples (vv 4-7). Further, he probably received the list directly from a couple of them. (2) Paul himself is the eyewitness and apostolic source behind the appearance recorded in 15:8. (3) Paul asserts that the apostles as a whole were themselves currently teaching the same message concerning Jesus'

126-27; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1951, 1955) 296; cf. W. Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 80; G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 182; J. Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation," *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) 306.

⁶ Jeremias, 306.

⁷ U. Wilckens, *Resurrection* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew, 1977) 2.

⁸ For some scholars who accept such a dating, see H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962) 96; O. Cullmann, *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 65-66; L. Goppelt, "The Eastern Kerygma in the New Testament," *The Easter Message Today* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964) 36; W. Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 90; Fuller, 10, 14, 28, 48; C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 16; A. M. Hunter, *Jesus: Lord and Saviour* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 100; Brown, 81; T. Sheehan, *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986) 110, 118; G. E. Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 105. H. Kung dates this confession from A.D. 35-45 in his work *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 348. N. Perrin holds that it is no later than A.D. 50, but he does not venture a closer approximation. See Perrin's *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 79. O. Collins asserts that he is not aware of any scholars who place the date for Paul's reception of this material after the A.D. 40s (112). It should be carefully noted that the major conclusions drawn here would still follow, even with such a slightly later date.

⁹ Goppelt notes that it is *usually* held by scholars that this creed is Palestinian in form (36). For those who generally favor the Jerusalem scenario, see the list of scholars in n. 8. However, Grass prefers Damascus as the locale, necessitating an even earlier date (96), whereas Kung, Perrin, and Sheehan do not appear to answer the question in their immediate contexts.

appearances (1 Cor 15:11, 14, 15). (4) Paul specifically checked the nature of the gospel (which included the resurrection, 1 Cor 15:1-4) with the apostolic leadership and found that the content of his teaching was accurate (Gal 1:11-2:1-10).¹⁰ These are strong reasons to conclude that this creedal data is authoritative and apostolic. As far as this writer knows, no contemporary scholar holds that Paul was completely mistaken at all three of these junctures.

Accordingly, this creedal statement is an invaluable report of the original eyewitnesses' experiences. As German historian H. von Campenhausen contends concerning this pre-Pauline material, "This account meets all the demands of historical reliability that could possibly be made of such a text."¹¹ A. M. Hunter likewise repeats the same assessment.¹² C. H. Dodd adds the point that anyone who would assert the unlikely claim that Paul was mistaken regarding the apostolic nature of the gospel message must bear the burden of proof.¹³

A point to be made here is that, even if one doubts the conclusion concerning the actual date and specific location of this creedal material, there is still an excellent foundation for this data being early and apostolic in nature, and hence authoritative. We conclude that this pre-Pauline report of Jesus' resurrection appearances and the attendant data clearly link the eyewitness content of the gospel with its later proclamation, and all of the evidence thus far shows that the participants actually did see the risen Jesus, both individually and in groups.

B. The Visual Nature of Jesus' Appearances

One major advantage of the critically ascertained and accepted historical facts listed in part 1 is that these data deal directly with the issue of the disciples' experiences. On a more limited scale, the minimal amount of recognized facts may be used in arguing decisively against each of the naturalistic theories, although details cannot be pursued here.

These minimal facts also provide some of the strongest evidences for the literal appearances of the risen Jesus such as the disciples'

¹⁰ For the possible meaning of ἱστορησαί in Gal 1:18 and its importance in ascertaining the inquiring nature of Paul's visit to Peter in Jerusalem, see the intriguing study by W. R. Farmer, "Peter and Paul, and the Tradition Concerning 'The Lord's Supper' in 1 Cor 11:23-25," in the *Criswell Theological Review*, 2 (1987), esp. 122-30. For the Petrine and apostolic nature of this confession, see 135-38.

¹¹ H. von Campenhausen, "The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb," *Tradition and Life in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 44; as cited by Ladd, 105.

¹² Hunter, 100.

¹³ Dodd, 16.

early eyewitness claims which have not been explained away on alternative grounds, their transformation into persons who were even willing to die for their faith in this specific Gospel content, and the claimed visual experiences and corresponding transformations of Paul and James. The fact of the resurrection as the very center of the earliest preaching and the evidences for the empty tomb¹⁴ are also significant in this regard. Therefore, the critically ascertained historical data include material which further verify the disciples' report concerning their witnessing of Jesus' resurrection appearances, all in the absence of viable alternative schemes.

Due to similar studies of the relevant facts, most critical scholars have concluded that the disciples' experiences were definitely visual in nature, for no other conclusion satisfies all the data. Historian M. Grant asserts that an investigation can actually "prove" that the earliest witnesses were convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus.¹⁵ C. Braaten explains that even recent critics and skeptics agree with the conclusion that, at least for the early believers, the Easter appearances were real events in space and time.¹⁶ R. Fuller labels the disciples' belief in the risen Jesus as "one of the indisputable facts of history." Then Fuller states that we can also be sure that the disciples had some sort of visionary experiences and that this "is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree."¹⁷

Thus, as W. Pannenberg asserts, "few scholars, even few rather critical scholars, doubt that there had been visionary experiences."¹⁸ But since the hypothesis of hallucinations (or other subjective theories) fails badly in its attempt to explain the data¹⁹ as recognized by critical scholars,²⁰ the facts certainly favor the view that the original disciples

¹⁴ For other defenses of the empty tomb besides that of von Campenhausen, see E. L. Bode, "The First Easter Morning," *Analecta Biblica* 45 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970) 155-75; W. L. Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 2.173-200. For a succinct account, see R. H. Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977) 23-29.

¹⁵ M. Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribners, 1977) 176.

¹⁶ C. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 78.

¹⁷ R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of the New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribners, 1965) 142.

¹⁸ W. Pannenberg, "The Historicity of the Resurrection: The Identity of Christ" *The Intellectuals Speak Out about God* (ed. R. A. Varghese; Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984) 260.

¹⁹ For details, see G. R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1976), 127-45.

²⁰ For examples of such scholars, see K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 4.1.340; R. E. Brown,

experienced some sort of appearances of the risen Jesus. In other words, while we will mention the issue of corporeality below, the actual core elements of the disciples' experiences indicate their perception of actual appearances of the risen Jesus. And in fact, as J. D. G. Dunn points out, there is widespread agreement among contemporary theologians of just this conclusion: Jesus appeared to his disciples, and not just as a spirit.²¹ And this must *be carefully* stated: this is not true simply because critics say that it is, but because the *facts dictate this conclusion*. In other words, while critical conclusions at this point are helpful, the most important consideration is that the factual data demonstrate that Jesus appeared to his disciples after his death.

Since this data can be *established by critical procedures* which utilize the *minimal amount* of knowable historical facts, contemporary scholars should not reject such evidence by referring to "discrepancies" in the NT texts or to its general "unreliability." Not only are such critical claims problematical on other grounds not discussed here, but it has been concluded that the resurrection can be historically demonstrated *even when the minimum amount of critically admitted historical facts is utilized*. Neither should it be concluded, as is popular today, merely that "something" occurred which is indescribable due to naturalistic premises, or to the nature of history itself, or because of the "legendary character" or "cloudiness" of the NT texts. Neither should it be said that Jesus lives on through his teachings but not literally. Again, these and other such views are confronted by *the historically ascertainable data which are, in turn, admitted by virtually all scholars and which are adequate* historically to demonstrate the literal resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Briefly stated, instead of simply relating what they believe we *cannot* know concerning the NT resurrection accounts, critics should concentrate on what even they admit can be known about these texts. The factual basis is enough to show that Jesus' resurrection is by far the best historical explanation of this data. While critics may still have questions concerning other issues in the NT, the minimal facts are adequate in themselves to show that the same Jesus who had died by crucifixion shortly before had later appeared to his followers.

However, evangelicals must go beyond this critical consensus to include not only the testimony of Paul, but also that of the Gospels. In speaking of the nature of the apostles' experiences, it should be noted

"The Resurrection and Biblical Criticism," *Commonweal* (1967) 233; Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, 94-97; Bornkamm, 185; Lapide, 124-26; N. Clark, *Interpreting the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 100-101. .

²¹ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 73-75.

again that most critical scholars in the first four models stress the descriptions of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. Yet, some critics do recognize the fact that the Gospels likewise contain some early material concerning the resurrection appearances of Jesus. For instance, Luke 24:34 is believed to be based on tradition perhaps as early as that of the creed recorded by Paul in 1 Cor 15:3ff.²²

After applying form-critical techniques to the Gospels, Dodd shows that these books contain several reports of the resurrected Jesus which rely on early tradition. He cites the appearances recorded in Matt 28:8-10, 16-20; John 20:19-21, and, to a lesser extent, Luke 24:36-49, as being based on such early material. However, he states that the other Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances lack the mythical tendencies of much ancient literature and, thus, also merit careful consideration in a formulation of the appearances of the risen Jesus.²³ At any rate, I wish to add that there are numerous reasons why the Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances should be utilized as records of what the eyewitnesses actually saw, along with Paul's account. Evangelicals cannot be content to offer only critical conclusions such as those of Dodd, but must go beyond them, although such cannot be done in this essay.

As already stated, most critical theologians still hold either, that the resurrection can be accepted by faith as an actual event or that some sort of appearances (abstract or bodily) may be postulated as historical realities. Although it is beyond the limits of this essay to attempt to describe the actual characteristics of Jesus' resurrection body or to endeavor to reconcile the various accounts, it may be stated that the combined testimony of the NT is that Jesus rose in a literal, physical body which was transformed.²⁴ This is the report of the earliest eyewitnesses.

We have outlined several sets of arguments for Jesus' resurrection, namely, the failure of the naturalistic alternative theories, the positive evidences, the early pre-Pauline creedal material, and a minimal-facts argument based on data ascertained and recognized as historical by virtually all scholars. I think that evidence such as this conclusively shows that the reported claims of the earliest eyewitnesses have been vindicated: Jesus was literally raised from the dead and appeared physically to a number of his followers, both individually and in groups.

²² Jeremias, 306; Bultmann, 1.45; Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, 93.

²³ C. H. Dodd, "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form-Criticism of the Gospels," *More New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1968).

²⁴ We will return briefly to the importance of this topic in the next section.

II. New Prospects for Future Study

Actually, evangelicals have long been involved in defending the historicity of the resurrection appearances of Jesus. While some have questioned the need to indulge constantly in these apologetics, such is required by the new faces of contemporary criticism. Critics apparently realize that this event is the center of the Christian faith, as explained in part 1 of this essay. Accordingly, it appears that new attempts to deal with it on critical grounds can take many forms. While this is not to imply that there are "devious liberals" who lie awake at night attempting to invent schemes against Jesus' resurrection, it is simply true that those who formulate alternative renditions of the Christian message should somehow respond to the chief Christian miracle claim. Accordingly, there is an important need to continue to combat new attempts that question the historicity of this event.

The new faces of critical thought pose many challenges to belief in the resurrection. At the same time, still other recent developments provide exciting positive prospects for the future study of this event. Both such potential denials and affirmations need to be briefly addressed in turn.

One area of recent concern is the response of the so-called New Age movement. We cannot pause here in order to provide a detailed definition, except to say that, to the extent to which this is a common movement at all, it might be characterized as a conglomeration of differentiated views which appear chiefly to combine elements of Eastern philosophy with certain Western, often scientific, perspectives.

Of interest here are the regular sorts of charges made from this or another syncretistic viewpoint. Typically, queries can perhaps be said to come from two primary directions. Fairly frequently, the resurrection is even admitted, with the questioner centering on the uniqueness of Jesus. In other words, the historical event is allowed, presumably because great religious personages are believed to be attended by spectacular signs, while, for this very reason, Jesus is believed to be one of a number of God's messengers.

On the other hand, a less frequent move is to question the resurrection itself. While one of the older naturalistic theories might still be utilized, another option, especially given the background of an alternative religious perspective, is to charge that other religious personages were also raised from the dead.

Each of these and similar challenges needs to be met on its own grounds. If the resurrection is granted as an actual historical event but Jesus' uniqueness is questioned, the Christian believer ought to con-

concentrate on the latter. Indeed, Jesus made numerous unique claims in comparison to those of other religious persuasions,²⁵ but it seems that such are too seldom defended in any great detail by evangelicals. And if the resurrection is an historical fact and if Jesus made unique claims, then it may be argued that the former further confirms the truthfulness of the latter.²⁶

However, if a critic is comparing Jesus' resurrection to lesser phenomena on the part of other teachers, this provides another place to start. If naturalistic theories are proposed, it is probably an indication that the individual is not aware of the teachers' historical fates. Lastly, those who claim that others have also been raised from the dead ought to be thoroughly challenged. It is one thing to claim such a resurrection; it is quite another to demonstrate it in historical terms.²⁷

A second tendency which appears to be regaining popularity in certain quarters is to argue that gnostic sources generally either downplay the death and resurrection of Jesus or present a spiritual resurrection instead of a bodily one. It is claimed that these texts should be given some consideration along with the more traditional sources.²⁸

Again, such charges warrant a serious critique. Contrary to the claims of the proponents of this thesis, the gnostic writings are much later than canonical texts; they do not demonstrate pre-Gospel traditions that are relevant to our discussion; they lack eyewitness testimony; and they are opposed to Jesus' own teachings.²⁹ Further, there is no necessary denial of Jesus' death and resurrection here at all. H. Koester, a chief supporter, still affirms both Jesus' death by crucifixion and the reality of his appearances, although the latter are not defined.³⁰

²⁵ For some important studies on the uniqueness of Jesus' claims vis-a-vis those in other religions, see N. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); S. Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); S. Neill, *The Supremacy of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984).

²⁶ G. R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), esp. chaps. 2-5 and appendices 1-3.

²⁷ Besides our earlier arguments, on the last point in particular, see G. R. Habermas, "Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions," *Religious Studies*, 25. 167-77.

²⁸ For some contemporary background to this debate, see C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986); and C. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

²⁹ For a technical discussion, see Tuckett's work above. For an overview of some of the problems involved in such claims, see G. R. Habermas, *The Verdict of History: Conclusive Evidence for the Life of Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), esp. 36-42, 62-72.

Interestingly in terms of our earlier study, W. Farmer notes in a brief critique of some of these trends that Bultmann's influence is still apparent.³¹

A third development to be briefly addressed is the predominant tendency in much of contemporary theological thought to divorce literal appearances of Jesus from a physical resurrection body. Thus it is more typically believed that Jesus was actually raised from the dead, but not corporeally. We have already discussed in part 1 of this article how the latter is a minority view among critical scholars, largely due to a mistrust of the Gospel accounts. It has been suggested that evangelicals need to counter this tendency by bolstering the credibility of the Gospels in general, and the resurrection accounts in particular. We cannot stop after doing only the first, which is more frequently the practice. But for critical scholars, the individual texts need to be ascertained before they can be utilized to argue to the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus. And here the goal is actually twofold-both to argue the case against critical scholars and to keep these views from making any further penetration into the evangelical camp itself.³² To be sure, other challenges to the biblical teaching of Jesus' resurrection might also be mentioned.³³ But these three are perhaps more potentially threatening because of their current influence.

At the same time, there are also new, positive prospects for future study. Christians should always be willing to investigate areas which potentially illuminate the glorious event of Jesus' resurrection. Many (if not most) evangelical studies on the resurrection appear to

³⁰ H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; History and Literature of Early Christianity; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 2.84, 86.

³¹ For a brief but insightful critique, see W. R. Farmer, "The Church's Stake in the Question of 'Q,'" *Perkins Journal of Theology*, 39 (1986) 9-19.

³² For the importance of this doctrine and a statement of the classic orthodox position, see N. L. Geisler, "The Significance of Christ's Physical Resurrection," *BSac* (1989) 148-70; N. L. Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).

³³ For example, the rather radical nature of T. Sheehan's thesis is set forth in his volume *First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity*. This and other works of his were almost immediately greeted by what could only be described as a barrage from many critics. See, for an example, A. Plantinga, "Sheehan's Shenanigans: How Theology Becomes Tomfoolery," *The Reformed Journal* (April, 1987) 19-25; R. E. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (New York: Paulist, 1985), chap. 3 esp. 58-65; D. Tracy, "Levels of Liberal Consensus," *Commonweal* (1984) 426-31; D. Tracy, "To Trust or Suspect," *Commonweal* (1984) 532-34; A. Greeley, "The Ways of Knowing," *Commonweal* (1984) 431-33; A. Greeley, "The Provisional Path to Mystery," *Commonweal* (1984) 503-32; J. M. Cameron, "A New, New Testament," *The New York Review* (1986) 23-27. Cf. book reviews by P. Maier in *The Christian Century* (1987) 28-30, and by W. M. Thompson in *Commonweal* (1986) 377-79.

stress apologetic interests. As stated above, we need to continue such endeavors, including solid spadework in the appropriate historical, philosophical, theological, and exegetical areas. However, I would suggest that evangelicals also need to explore other meaningful avenues of study with regard to the resurrection of Jesus.

It appears to me, for example, that the interface between the resurrection of Jesus and the practical Christian life needs to be explored in much more detail. Does the truth of the resurrection address major concerns such as doubt or the fear of death? Why did this event contribute so singularly to the transformation of the lives of the first Christians in the early chapters of Acts? What did Paul mean in Phil 3:10 by the possibility of possessing the power of Christ's resurrection? Or, how do Jesus' appearances provide believers with a foretaste of heaven?

On the other hand, theoretical interests are still important. Further critical research needs to be done in the philosophy of history. Another major interest in some recent discussions concerns an infinite God acting in finite space and time. A related issue is the relationship between the resurrection and the laws of physics--how would a miraculous act of God be understood in the world of post-Einsteinian science?³⁴

In a more apologetic vein, the NT thesis is that the resurrection is the chief evidence for crucial areas of Christian theology. We are repeatedly told that the resurrection ensures the truthfulness of great doctrines such as the person and deity of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-24; Rom 1:3-4), the gospel message (Acts 17:30-31), and the reality of heaven (1 Pet 1:3-5). In particular, the resurrection of Jesus is the pattern for the believer's resurrection, as well.³⁵

In the NT, Jesus' resurrection was both at the center of the gospel proclamation and was also the chief buttressing evidence. It is possible (if not likely) that this event still does not occupy the central position that it did in the early church.

Above, we made one possible suggestion how the resurrection might be utilized along with the unique claims of Jesus. These two subjects work together to answer critical queries. Another way to use the resurrection may be most effective in proclaiming the gospel, especially to skeptics. According to virtually all scholars who study the subject, Jesus' central teaching was the Kingdom of God and its

³⁴ On this last subject, see T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); cf. O'Collins, 76-81.

³⁵ See Rom 6:8-9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:20; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2; 1 Thess 4:14. See Jesus' own words in John 14:19.

entrance requirements.³⁶ Since the resurrection is an historical event, it can be argued that this indicates God's approval of Jesus' teachings.³⁷ As such, we have a strong, twofold reason for accepting Jesus' call to salvation.

First, if God approved of any of Jesus' teachings, such would most assuredly pertain to his message concerning the Kingdom of God and the essentials for the entrance to eternal life, since this was his chief proclamation. In other words, as Jesus' central teaching and the subject which he said he was most desirous to communicate, God's approval through the event of the resurrection would extend most of all to it.

Second, not to miss the forest for the trees, the resurrection is unlike any other miracle in that its very occurrence involves eternal life. This cannot be said of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, the feeding of the 5,000, or the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Even in the last case, although God showed that he could raise the dead, eternal life was not a necessary result since Lazarus died again. But uniquely in the case of Jesus, his resurrection was the manifestation of eternal life. He was raised in a physical body which was transformed, especially in his appearance to Paul. Being in the best position to explain this significance, Jesus indicated that he was immortal; he would never die again. In a sense, then, when the disciples witnessed the resurrection appearances of Jesus, they were actually confronted with walking, talking, eternal life. Jesus further explained that such existence was a reality for all of his followers.

Here, it would seem, is an example of utilizing the truth of Jesus' resurrection to show that, in a twofold sense, eternal life is a reality. It was both Jesus' central teaching and was actually illustrated by the resurrection itself. As such, the resurrection evidences God's answer to man's deepest needs.³⁸

Therefore, at a number of crucial points, believers are confronted with both challenges to belief and positive prospects for future study of Jesus' resurrection. It is imperative that further work continue to be done on this subject of central importance to the Christian faith.

³⁶ This is frequently repeated as the central focus of Jesus' own message. See, for instances, Mark 1:14-15; 2:11; 10:45; Luke 19:10; 22:29; John 3:3; 12:41-50. Virtually all critical scholars agree that the Kingdom of God was, indeed, Jesus' central message. For details, see n. 38.

³⁷ Further details concerning a couple of possible ways to reason this point are found in Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*, chaps. 1-3.

³⁸ For this argument in more complete form see Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*, chaps. 4-5; appendix 3.

Conclusion

In this two-part essay I initially endeavored to identify in an introductory manner the current state of contemporary theological thought with regard to the resurrection appearances of Jesus. Then, after stating a more traditional defense of these occurrences, I made some suggestions about a contemporary apologetic, dealing specifically with the early creedal material in I Cor 15:3ff. and the visual nature of Jesus' appearances. But then it was pointed out that there are also some recent challenges to belief in the resurrection which must be dealt with by believers. We cannot either deny the importance of apologetic efforts or fail to respond to ongoing indictments.

Further, as important as apologetic efforts are, there are also additional areas to be pursued in regard to resurrection studies. The relation between this grand event and theology on the one hand, and the practical Christian life on the other, are crucial examples.

One overall purpose of this study has been, in a small way, to introduce the comprehensiveness of the resurrection. I like to use the illustration of a multifaceted diamond to describe this event. Just as a diamond may be turned at various angles to expose its brilliance, so believers need a vision of the awesomeness of the resurrection event. It, too, has various "faces" which can, alternately, confront and answer critical objections, enjoy the spotlight of historical (and other) investigation, and at the same time address needs in the life of the believer such as dealing with doubts, fear of death, and obtaining daily power. Further, this event is also at the center of the Christian gospel and ensures the believer's eternal life.

Seen from still a different angle, God's grace is manifest in the resurrection. Is it simply a coincidence that this level of evidence is available for this event? For example, what if such data were available to study, say, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea rather than the resurrection? While such would admittedly be important, I would think that it is more than coincidence that all of this data converges at just the point of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the central claim in all of Scripture. Then, when it is remembered that the resurrection also addresses the deepest practical fears and needs of Christians, as well, we perhaps begin to understand its multifaceted nature. It was the center of the early church's gospel proclamation, and we need a vision of how it still occupies this position of importance in both theoretical and practical aspects today. For the believer, it forms the connection between Jesus and eternity itself.

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