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Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

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"Man," writes Loren Eiseley, "is the Cosmic Orphan." He is the only creature in the universe who asks, Why? Other animals have instincts to guide them, but man has learned to ask questions. "Who am I?" he asks. "Why am I here? Where am I going?"

Ever since the Enlightenment, when modern man threw off the shackles of religion, he has tried to answer these questions without reference to God. But the answers that came back were not exhilarating, but dark and terrible. "You are an accidental by-product of nature, the result of matter plus time plus chance. There is no reason for your existence. All you face is death. Your life is but a spark in the infinite darkness, a spark that appears, flickers, and dies forever."

Modern man thought that in divesting himself of God, he had freed himself from all that stifled and repressed him. Instead, he discovered that in killing God, he had also killed

himself.

Against this background of the modern predicament, the traditional Christian hope of the resurrection takes on an even greater brightness and significance. It tells man that he is no orphan after all, but the personal image of the Creator God of the universe; nor is his life doomed in death, for through the eschatological resurrection he may live in the presence of God forever.

This is a wonderful hope. But, of course, hope that is not founded in fact is not hope, but mere illusion. Why should the Christian hope of eschatological resurrection appear to modern man as anything more than mere wishful thinking? The answer lies in the Christian conviction that a man has been proleptically raised by God from the dead as the forerunner and exemplar of our own eschatological resurrection. That man was Jesus of Nazareth, and his historical resurrection from the dead constitutes the factual foundation upon which the Christian hope is based.

Of course, during the last century liberal theology had no use for the historical resurrection of Jesus. Since liberal theologians retained the presupposition against the possibility of miracles which they had inherited from the Deists, a historical resurrection was *a priori* simply out of the question for them. The mythological explanation of D. F. Strauss enabled them to explain the resurrection accounts of the New Testament as legendary fictions. The belief in the historical resurrection was a hangover from antiquity which it was high time for modern man to be rid of. Thus, in liberal theology's greatest study of the historicity of the resurrection, Kirsopp Lake's *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1907), Lake carefully plots the legendary development of the resurrection narratives from

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the root historical event of the women's visit to the wrong tomb. He concludes that it is not the end anyway: what is vital for Christian theology is the belief in the immortality of the soul, the belief that our departed friends and relatives are still alive and that in time we shall be re-united with them. Thus, the NT has been replaced by the *Phaedo*.

Liberal theology could not survive World War I, but its demise brought no renewed interest in the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, for the two schools that succeeded it were united in their devaluation of the historical with regard to Jesus. Thus, dialectical theology, propounded by Karl Barth, championed the *doctrine* of the resurrection, but would have nothing to do with the resurrection as an *event of history*. In his commentary on the book of Romans (1919), the early Barth declared, "The resurrection touches history as a tangent touches a circle—that is, without really touching it." Existential theology, exemplified by Rudolf Bultmann, was even more antithetical to the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Though Bultmann acknowledged that the earliest disciples believed in the literal resurrection of Jesus and that Paul in I Corinthians 15 even attempts to prove the resurrection, he nevertheless pronounces such a procedure as "fatal." It reduces Christ's resurrection to a nature miracle akin to the resurrection of a corpse. And modern man cannot be reasonably asked to believe in nature miracles before becoming a Christian. Therefore, the miraculous elements of the gospel must be demythologized to reveal the true Christian message: the call to authentic existence in the face of death, symbolized by the cross. The resurrection is merely a symbolic re-statement of the message of the cross and essentially adds nothing to it. To appeal to the resurrection as historical evidence, as did Paul, is doubly wrong-headed, for it is of the very nature of existential faith that it is a leap without evidence. Thus, to argue historically for the resurrection is contrary to faith. Clearly then, the antipathy of liberal theology to the historicity of Jesus' resurrection remained unrelieved by either dialectical or existential theology.

But a remarkable change has come about during the second half of the 20th century. The first glimmerings of change began to appear in 1953. In that year Ernst Käsemann, a pupil of Bultmann, argued at a Colloquy at the University of Marburg that Bultmann's historical skepticism toward Jesus was unwarranted and counterproductive and suggested re-opening the question of where the historical about Jesus was to be found. A new quest of the historical Jesus had begun. Three years later in 1956 the Marburg theologian Hans Grass subjected the resurrection itself to historical inquiry and concluded that the resurrection appearances cannot be dismissed as mere subjective visions on the part of the disciples, but were objective visionary events.

Meanwhile the church historian Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen in an equally epochal essay deferred the historical credibility of Jesus' empty tomb. During the ensuing years a stream of works on the historicity of Jesus'

resurrection flowed forth from German, French and English presses. By 1968 the old skepticism was a spent force and began dramatically to recede. So complete has been the turn-about during the second half of this century concerning the resurrection of Jesus that it is no exaggeration to speak of a reversal of scholarship on this issue, such that those who deny the historicity of Jesus' resurrection now seem to be the ones on the defensive. Perhaps one of the most significant theological developments in this connection is the theological system of Wolfhart Pannenberg, who bases his entire Christology on the historical evidence for Jesus' ministry and especially the resurrection. This is a development undreamed of in German theology prior to 1950. Equally startling is the declaration of one of the world's leading Jewish theologians Pinchas Lapid, that he is convinced on the basis of the evidence that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. Lapid twits New Testament critics like Bultmann and Marxsen for their unjustified skepticism and concludes that he believes on the basis of the evidence that the God of Israel raised Jesus from the dead.

What are the facts that underlie this remarkable reversal of opinion concerning the credibility of the New Testament accounts of the resurrection of Jesus? It seems to me that they can be conveniently grouped under three heads: the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, and the origin of the Christian faith. Let's look briefly at each.

First, the resurrection appearances. Undoubtedly the major impetus for the reassessment of the appearance tradition was the demonstration by Joachim Jeremias that in I Corinthians 15: 3-5 Paul is quoting an old Christian formula which he received and in turn passed on to his converts. According to Galatians 1:18 Paul was in Jerusalem three years after his conversion on a fact-finding mission, during which he conferred with Peter and James over a two week period, and he probably received the formula at this time, if not before. Since Paul was converted in AD 33, this means that the list of witnesses goes back to within the first five years after Jesus' death. Thus, it is idle to dismiss these appearances as legendary. We can try to explain them away as hallucinations if we wish, but we cannot deny they occurred. Paul's information makes it certain that on separate occasions various individuals and groups saw Jesus alive from the dead. According to Norman Perrin, the late NT critic of the University of Chicago: "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based." This conclusion is virtually indisputable.

At the same time that biblical scholarship has come to a new appreciation of the historical credibility of Paul's information, however, it must be admitted that skepticism concerning the appearance traditions in the gospels persists. This lingering skepticism seems to me to be entirely unjustified. It is based on a presuppositional antipathy toward the *physicalism* of the gospel appearance stories. But the traditions underlying those appearance stories may well

be as reliable as Paul's. For in order for these stories to be in the main legendary, a very considerable length of time must be available for the evolution and development of the traditions until the historical elements have been supplanted by unhistorical. This factor is typically neglected in New Testament scholarship, as A. N. Sherwin-White points out in *Roman Law and Roman Society in the New Testament*. Professor Sherwin-White is not a theologian; he is an eminent historian of Roman and Greek times, roughly contemporaneous with the NT. According to Professor Sherwin-White, the sources for Roman history are usually biased and removed at least one or two generations or even centuries from the events they record. Yet, he says, historians reconstruct with confidence what really happened. He chastises NT critics for not realizing what invaluable sources they have in the gospels. The writings of Herodotus furnish a test case for the rate of legendary accumulation, and the tests show that even two generations is too short a time span to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical facts. When Professor Sherwin-White turns to the gospels, he states for these to be legends, the rate of legendary accumulation would have to be 'unbelievable'; more generations are needed. All NT scholars agree that the gospels were written down and circulated within the first generation, during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. Indeed, a significant new movement of biblical scholarship argues persuasively that some of the gospels were written by the AD 50's. This places them as early as Paul's letter to the Corinthians and, given their equal reliance upon prior tradition, they ought therefore to be accorded the same weight of historical credibility accorded Paul. It is instructive to note in this connection that no apocryphal gospel appeared during the first century. These did not arise until after the generation of eyewitnesses had died off. These are better candidates for the office of 'legendary fiction' than the canonical gospels. There simply was insufficient time for significant accrual of legend by the time of the gospels' composition. Thus, I find current criticism's skepticism with regard to the appearance traditions in the gospels to be unwarranted. The new appreciation of the historical value of Paul's information needs to be accompanied by a reassessment of the gospel traditions as well.

Second, the empty tomb. Once regarded as an offense to modern intelligence and an embarrassment to Christian theology, the empty tomb of Jesus has come to assume its place among the generally accepted facts concerning the historical Jesus. Allow me to review briefly some of the evidence undergirding this connection.

(1) *The historical reliability of the burial story supports the empty tomb.* If the burial account is accurate, then the site of Jesus' grave was known to Jew and Christian alike. In that case, it is a very short inference to historicity of the empty tomb. For if Jesus had not risen and the burial site were known:

(a) the disciples could never have believed in the resurrection of Jesus. For a first century Jew the idea that a man might be raised from the dead while his body remained in the tomb was simply a contradiction in terms. In the words of E. E. Ellis, "It is very unlikely that the earliest Palestinian Christians could conceive of any distinction between resurrection and physical, 'grave emptying' resurrection. To them an *anastasis* without an empty grave would have been about as meaningful as a square circle."

(b) Even if the disciples had believed in the resurrection of Jesus, it is doubtful they would have generated any following. So long as the body was interred in the tomb, a Christian movement founded on belief in the resurrection of the dead man would have been an impossible folly.

(c) The Jewish authorities would have exposed the whole affair. The quickest and surest answer to the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus would have been simply to point to his grave on the hillside.

For these three reasons, the accuracy of the burial story supports the historicity of the empty tomb. Unfortunately for those who wish to deny the empty tomb, however, the burial story is one of the most historically certain traditions we have concerning Jesus. Several factors undergird this judgment. To mention only a few.

(i) The burial is mentioned in the third line of the old Christian formula quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15.4.

(ii) It is part of the ancient pre-Markan passion story which Mark used as a source for his gospel.

(iii) The story itself lacks any traces of legendary development.

(iv) The story comports with archeological evidence concerning the types and location of tombs extant in Jesus' day.

(v) No other competing burial traditions exist.

For these and other reasons, most scholars are united in the judgment that the burial story is fundamentally historical. But if that is the case, then, as I have explained, the inference that the tomb was found empty is not very far at hand.

(2) *Paul's testimony supports the fact of the empty tomb.* Here two aspects of Paul's evidence may be mentioned.

(a) In the formula cited by Paul the expression "he was raised" following the phrase "he was buried" implies the empty tomb. A first century Jew could not think otherwise. As E. L. Bode observes, the notion of the occurrence of a spiritual resurrection while the body remained in the tomb is a peculiarity of modern theology. For the Jews it was the

remains of the man in the tomb which were raised; hence, they carefully preserved the bones of the dead in ossuaries until the eschatological resurrection. There can be no doubt that both Paul and the early Christian formula he cites presuppose the existence of the empty tomb.

(b) The phrase "on the third day" probably points to the discovery of the empty tomb. Very briefly summarized, the point is that since no one actually witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, how did Christians come to date it "on the third day?" The most probable answer is that they did so because this was the day of the discovery of the empty tomb by Jesus' women followers. Hence, the resurrection itself came to be dated on that day. Thus, in the old Christian formula quoted by Paul we have extremely early evidence for the existence of Jesus' empty tomb.

(3) *The empty tomb story is part of the pre-Markan passion story and is therefore very old.* The empty tomb story was probably the end of Mark's passion source. As Mark is the earliest of our gospels, this source is therefore itself quite old. In fact the commentator R. Pesch contends that it is an incredibly early source. He produces two lines of evidence for this conclusion:

(a) Paul's account of the Last Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23-5 presupposes the Markan account. Since Paul's own traditions are themselves very old, the Markan source must be yet older.

(b) The pre-Markan passion story never refers to the high priest by name. It is as when I say "The President is hosting a dinner at the White House" and everyone knows whom I am speaking of because it is the man currently in office. Similarly the pre-Markan passion story refers to the "high priest" as if he were still in power. Since Caiaphas held office from AD 18-37, this means at the latest the pre-Markan source must come from within seven years after Jesus' death. This source thus goes back to within the first few years of the Jerusalem fellowship and is therefore an ancient and reliable source of historical information.

(4) *The story is simple and lacks legendary development.* The empty tomb story is uncolored by the theological and apologetical motifs that would be characteristic of a later legendary account. Perhaps the most forceful way to appreciate this point is to compare it with the accounts of the empty tomb found in apocryphal gospels of the second century. For example, in the gospel of Peter a voice rings out from heaven during the night, the stone rolls back of itself from the door of the tomb, and two men descend from Heaven and enter the tomb. Then three men are seen coming out of the tomb, the two supporting the third. The heads of the two men stretch up to the clouds, but the head of the third man overpasses the clouds. Then a cross comes out of the tomb, and a voice asks, "Hast thou preached to them that sleep?" And the cross answers, "Yea". In the Ascension of Isaiah, Jesus comes out of the tomb sitting on the shoulders

of the angels Michael and Gabriel. These are how real legends look: unlike the gospel accounts, they are colored by theological motifs.

(5) *The tomb was probably discovered empty by women.* To understand this point one has to recall two facts about the role of women in Jewish society.

(a) Woman occupied a low rung on the Jewish social ladder. This is evident in such rabbinic expressions as "Sooner let the words of the law be burnt than delivered to women" and "Happy is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female."

(b) The testimony of women was regarded as so worthless that they were not even permitted to serve as legal witnesses in a court of law. In light of these facts, how remarkable must it seem that it is women who are the discoverers of Jesus' empty tomb. Any later legend would certainly have made the male disciples to discover the empty tomb. The fact that women, whose testimony was worthless, rather than men, are the chief witnesses to the empty tomb is most plausibly accounted for by the fact that, like it or not, they were the discoverers of the empty tomb and the gospels accurately record this.

(6) *The earliest Jewish polemic presupposes the empty tomb.* In Matthew 28, we find the Christian attempt to refute the earliest Jewish polemic against the resurrection. That polemic asserted that the disciples stole away the body. The Christians responded to this by reciting the story of the guard at the tomb, and the polemic in turn charged that the guard fell asleep. Now the noteworthy feature of this whole dispute is not the historicity of the guards but rather the presupposition of both parties that the body was missing. The earliest Jewish response to the proclamation of the resurrection was an attempt to explain away the empty tomb. Thus, the evidence of the adversaries of the disciples provides evidence in support of the empty tomb.

One could go on, but perhaps enough has been said to indicate why the judgment of scholarship has reversed itself on the historicity of the empty tomb. According to Jakob Kremer, "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb" and he furnishes a list, to which his own name may be added, of twenty-eight prominent scholars in support. I can think of at least sixteen more names that he failed to mention. Thus, it is today widely recognized that the empty tomb of Jesus is a simple historical fact. As D. H. van Daalen has pointed out, "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions." But assumptions may simply have to be changed in light of historical facts.

Finally, we may turn to that third body of evidence supporting the resurrection: the very origin of the Christian Way. Even the most skeptical scholars admit that the

earliest disciples at least believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Indeed, they pinned nearly everything on it. Without belief in the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity could never have come into being. The crucifixion would have remained the final tragedy in the hapless life of Jesus. The origin of Christianity hinges on the belief of these earliest disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. The question now inevitably arises: how does one explain the origin of that belief? As R. H. Fuller urges, even the most skeptical critic must posit some mysterious X to get the movement going. But the question is, what was that X?

If one denies that Jesus really did rise from the dead, then he must explain the disciples' belief that he did rise either in terms of Jewish influences or in terms of Christian influences. Now clearly, it can't be the result of Christian influences, for at that time there wasn't any Christianity yet! Since belief in Jesus' resurrection was the foundation for the origin of the Christian faith, it can't be a belief formed as a result of that faith.

But neither can the belief in the resurrection be explained as a result of Jewish influences. To see this we need to back up a moment. In the Old Testament, the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead on the day of judgment is mentioned in three places (Ezekiel 37; Isaiah 26, 19, Daniel 12.2). During the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the belief in resurrection flowered and is often mentioned in the Jewish literature of that period. In Jesus' day the Jewish party of the Pharisees held to belief in resurrection, and Jesus sided with them on this score in opposition to the party of the Sadducees. So the idea of resurrection was itself nothing new.

But the Jewish conception of resurrection differed in two important, fundamental respects from Jesus' resurrection. In Jewish thought the resurrection *always* (1) occurred after the end of the world, not within history, and (2) concerned all the people, not just an isolated individual. In contradistinction to this, Jesus' resurrection was both within history and of one individual person.

With regard to the first point, the Jewish belief was always that at the end of history, God would raise the righteous dead and receive them into His Kingdom. There are, to be sure, examples in the Old Testament of *resuscitations* of the dead; but these persons would die again. The resurrection to eternal life and glory occurred after the end of the world. We find this Jewish outlook in the gospels themselves. Thus, when Jesus assures Martha that her brother Lazarus will rise again, she responds, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11.24). She has no idea that Jesus is about to bring him back to life. Similarly, when Jesus tells his disciples he will rise from the dead, they think he means *at the end of the world* (Mark 9.9-13). The idea that a true resurrection could occur prior to God's bringing the Kingdom of Heaven at the end of the world

was utterly foreign to them. The greatly renowned German New Testament scholar Joachim Jeremias writes,

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 late Judaic literature does it concern a resurrection to *doxa* (glory) as an event of history.

The disciples, therefore, confronted with Jesus' crucifixion and death, would only have looked forward to the resurrection at the final day and would probably have carefully kept their master's tomb as a shrine, where his bones could reside until the resurrection. They would not have come up with the idea that he was already raised.

As for the second point, the Jewish idea of resurrection was always of a general resurrection of the dead, not an isolated individual. It was the people, or mankind as a whole, that God raised up in the resurrection. But in Jesus' resurrection, God raised just a single man. Moreover, there was no concept of the people's resurrection in some way hinging on the Messiah's resurrection. That was just totally unknown. Yet that is precisely what is said to have occurred in Jesus' case. Ulrich Wilckens, another prominent German New Testament critic, explains:

For nowhere do the Jewish texts speak of the resurrection of an individual which already occurs before the resurrection of the righteous in the end time and is differentiated and separate from it; nowhere does the participation of the righteous in the salvation at the end time depend on their belonging to the Messiah, who was raised in advance as the 'First of those raised by God.' (1 Corinthians 15:20)

It is therefore evident that the disciples would not as a result of Jewish influences or background have come up with the idea that Jesus alone had been raised from the dead. They would wait with longing for that day when He and all the righteous of Israel would be raised by God to glory.

The disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection, therefore, cannot be explained as the result of either Christian or Jewish influences. Left to themselves, the disciples would never have come up with such an idea as Jesus' resurrection. And remember: they were fishermen and tax collectors, not theologians. The mysterious X is still missing. According to C. F. D. Moule of Cambridge University, here is a belief nothing in terms of previous historical influences can account for. He points out that we have a situation in which a large number of people held firmly to this belief, which cannot be explained in terms of the Old Testament or the

Pharisees, and these people held onto this belief until the Jews finally threw them out of the synagogue. According to Professor Moule, the origin of this belief must have been the fact that Jesus really did rise from the dead:

If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes, a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole of the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with? . . . the birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church. . . . *remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the church itself.*

The resurrection of Jesus is therefore the best explanation for the origin of the Christian faith. Taken together, these three great historical facts--the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, the origin of the Christian faith--seem to point to the resurrection of Jesus as the most plausible explanation.

But of course there have been other explanations proffered to account for the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, and the origin of the Christian faith. In the judgment of modern scholarship, however, these have failed to provide a plausible account of the facts of the case. This can be seen by a rapid review of the principal explanations that have been offered.

A. The disciples stole Jesus' corpse and lied about the resurrection appearances. This explanation characterized the earliest Jewish anti-Christian polemic and was revived in the form of the conspiracy theory of eighteenth century Deism. The theory has been universally rejected by critical scholars and survives only in the popular press. To name only two considerations decisive against it: (i) it is morally impossible to indict the disciples of Jesus with such a crime. Whatever their imperfections, they were certainly good, earnest men and women, not impostors. No one who reads the New Testament unprejudicially can doubt the evident sincerity of these early believers. (ii) It is psychologically impossible to attribute to the disciples the cunning and deriding-do requisite for such a ruse. At the time of the crucifixion, the disciples were confused, disorganized, fearful, doubting, and burdened with mourning--not mentally motivated or equipped to engineer such a wild hoax. Hence, to explain the empty tomb and resurrection appearances by a conspiracy theory seems out of the question.

B. Jesus did not die on the cross, but was taken down and placed alive in the tomb, where he revived and escaped to convince the disciples he had risen from the dead. This apparent death theory was championed by the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century German rationalists, and was even embraced by the father of modern theology, F. D. E. Schleiermacher. Today, however, the theory has been entirely given up: (i) it would be virtually impossible

medically for Jesus to have survived the rigors of his torture and crucifixion, much less not to have died of exposure in the tomb. (ii) The theory is religiously inadequate, since a half-dead Jesus desperately in need of medical attention would not have elicited in the disciples worship of him as the exalted Risen Lord and Conqueror of Death. Moreover, since Jesus on this hypothesis knew he had not actually triumphed over death, the theory reduces him to the life of a charlatan who tricked the disciples into believing he had risen, which is absurd. These reasons alone make the apparent death theory untenable.

C. The disciples projected hallucinations of Jesus after his death, from which they mistakenly inferred his resurrection. The hallucination theory became popular during the nineteenth century and carried over into the first half of the twentieth century as well. Again, however, there are good grounds for rejecting this hypothesis: (i) it is psychologically implausible to posit such a chain of hallucinations. Hallucinations are usually associated with mental illness or drugs; but in the disciples' case the prior psycho-biological preparation appears to be wanting. The disciples had no anticipation of seeing Jesus alive again; all they could do was wait to be reunited with him in the Kingdom of God. There were no grounds leading them to hallucinate him alive from the dead. Moreover, the frequency and variety of circumstances belie the hallucination theory: Jesus was seen not once, but many times; not by one person, but by several; not only by individuals, but also by groups; not at one locale and circumstance but at many; not by believers only, but by skeptics and unbelievers as well. The hallucination theory cannot be plausibly stretched to accommodate such diversity. (ii) Hallucinations would not in any case have led to belief in Jesus' resurrection. As projections of one's own mind, hallucinations cannot contain anything not already in the mind. But we have seen that Jesus' resurrection differed from the Jewish conception in two fundamental ways. Given their Jewish frame of thought, the disciples, were they to hallucinate, would have projected visions of Jesus glorified in Abraham's bosom, where Israel's righteous dead abode until the eschatological resurrection. Thus, hallucinations would not have elicited belief in Jesus' resurrection, an idea that ran solidly against the Jewish mode of thought. (iii) Nor can hallucinations account for the full scope of the evidence. They are offered as an explanation of the resurrection appearances, but leave the empty tomb unexplained, and therefore fail as a complete and satisfying answer. Hence, it seems that the hallucination hypothesis is not more successful than its defunct forebears in providing a plausible counter-explanation of the data surrounding Christ's resurrection.

Thus, none of the previous counter-explanations can account for the evidence as plausibly as the resurrection itself. One might ask, "Well, then, how *do* skeptical scholars explain the facts of the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, and the origin of the Christian faith?" The fact of the

matter is, they *don't*. Modern scholarship recognizes no plausible explanatory alternative to the resurrection of Jesus. Those who refuse to accept the resurrection as a fact of history are simply self-confessedly left without an explanation.

These three great facts--the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, and the origin of the Christian faith--all point unavoidably to one conclusion: The resurrection of Jesus. Today the rational man can hardly be blamed if he believes that on that first Easter morning a divine miracle occurred.

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