

This Joyful Eastertide

A Critical Review of *The Empty Tomb*

Steve Hays



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With Gene Bridges & Jason Engwer

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Preface

The Empty Tomb¹ (hereafter ET) positions itself as a full-frontal assault on the Resurrection. I wouldn't be surprised if unbelievers reference this book as the definitive refutation of the Resurrection for years to come. Hence, it merits an extended review.

In no small measure, the ET is not so much a direct attack on the evidence for the Resurrection as it is an attack on a particular school of apologetics centered on the person of William Lane Craig—with Richard Swinburne as the runner-up.

Since Craig is a dominant if not predominant figure in this debate, he's a natural foil for the opposing side to target. Even so, this is less about the actual evidence for the Resurrection than it is about the way in which a particular school of apologetics has chosen to sample the relevant evidence and then marshal that residuum into a particular argumentative construct, according to certain methods and assumptions.

Because ET is a collaborative effort, it reflects the strengths and weaknesses of a collaborative effort. On the one hand, it benefits from contributions with differing areas of specialization.

On the other hand, various contributors sometimes employ mutually exclusive arguments in relation to one another so as to cancel each other out.

This leaves the sympathetic reader in the ironic situation that he is unable to agree with everything he reads even if he agrees with the main thesis.

So that burdens the book with an initial handicap it must somehow surmount for the unsympathetic reader who does not agree with the main thesis, or all its operating principles and procedures.

Another methodological weakness of the ET which I might as well discuss at the outset since it crops up so often is the argument from silence. One scholar has dubbed this "the fallacy of negative proof."² As he defines it:

¹ R. Price & J. Lowder, eds. (Prometheus Books 2005).

² D. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (Harper & Row 1970).

[This] occurs whenever a historian declares that “there is no evidence that X is the case,” and then proceeds to affirm or assume that not-X is the case...But a simple statement that “there is no evidence of X” means precisely what it says—no evidence. The only correct empirical procedure is to find affirmative evidence of not-X—which is often difficult, but never in my experience impossible.³

A good many scholars would prefer not to know that some things exist. But not knowing that a thing exists is different from knowing that it does not exist. The former is never sound proof of the latter. Not knowing that something exists is simply not knowing. One thinks of Alice and the White Knight:

“I see nobody on the road,” said Alice.
“I only wish I had such eyes,” the King remarked in a fretful tone.
“To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too!”⁴

Evidence must always be affirmative. Negative evidence is a contradiction in terms—it is not evidence at all. The nonexistence of an object is established not by nonexistent evidence but by affirmative evidence of the fact that it did not, or could not exist.⁵

Sorry to belabor the obvious, but since the contributors to the ET indulge in this fallacy on a regular basis, it’s worth accentuating here and now so that we will be alert to the error as we proceed.

Robert Price, the co-editor, is, or was, a member of the Jesus Seminar, and the ET comes recommended by some other members of the Jesus Seminar. The Jesus Seminar has, of course, come under scathing criticism for its buffoonery.⁶

³ Ibid., 47.

⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁶ M. Bockmuehl, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge 2001); B. Chilton & C. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill 1998); *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill 1998); *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill 1994); C. Evans, *Jesus & His Contemporaries* (Leiden: Brill 1995); J. Green & M. Turner, eds., *Jesus of Nazareth* (Eerdmans 1994); L. Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco 1997); P. Moore, ed., *Can A Bishop Be Wrong?* (Moorehouse 1998); J. Neusner, “Who Needs ‘The Historical Jesus’? An Essay-Review,” *BBR* 4 (1994): 113-126; S. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* (T&T Clark 2004); D. Wenham, ed., *Gospel Perspectives* 1-6 (Wipf & Stock 2003); M. Wilkins & J. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire* (Zondervan 1995); B. Witherington, *The Jesus Quest* (IVP 1997); N. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Eerdmans 1993);
<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/reveessay.html>
<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9410/correspondence.html>

In the ET we see the Secular Web join forces with the Jesus Seminar and Prometheus Books to deliver a mortal blow to the crowning doctrine of the Christian faith. This coordinated effort represents their best shot—as they give it all they’ve got. Their success or failure will say a lot about the intellectual resources of the Christian faith and the enemies of the Gospel respectively. If, having thrown everything at the Resurrection, the Resurrection rebounds unimpaired and even reinforced by the encounter, the vacuity and desperation of unbelief will be all the plainer.

In the interests of full disclosure, I should mention that Jeff Lowder and I happen to know each other. We were in college together. As I recall, Jeff was a computer science major while I double-majored in history and classics.

We both attended a nominally Christian college⁷ which had mandatory chapel attendance. As an alternative to chapel, SPU allowed small group cadres. Jeff started one with the provocative title of Skeptics Anonymous. In this setting, students debated the claims of the Christian faith. Jeff argued against it, while I argued for the faith.

The ET is an extension of Jeff’s side of the argument, while my review is a continuation of my side of the argument, as we both revisit our old debates—taking up where we left off a dozen years ago.

⁷ Seattle Pacific University.

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Finally, double honor goes to Dr. Anderson, not only for his helpful comments, but for his supererogatory efforts in turning my hideous Word document into a neat and tidy eBook.

Introduction

The Introduction, along with a couple of the essays, is written in the poison-tipped pen of Robert Price. Price inveighs with the vindictive, obsessive-compulsive tone typical of other apostates like James Barr, Ingersoll, Ruskin, Nietzsche, Francis Newman, Edmund Gosse, Pinnock, Feuerbach, Lessing, Spong, Colenso, Martin Gardner, Templeton, and others.

Like a man who used to worship the ground his father walked on, only to later demonize his father because he could never win his old man's approval, we see in Price the arrested adolescence of teenage rebellion, transposed to a spiritual key, and extended into middle age. "Abandon your faith so that you too can become an angry, bitter, miserable man just like me!"

Of course, the case for or against the Resurrection doesn't turn on Price's state of mind. And Evan Fales, for one, avoids all trace of invective.

But since he indulges in so many ad hominem attacks, it is worth pointing out, to answer him at his own level, that Price is type-cast for the classic psychological profile of an apostate, which includes that constitutional incapacity for self-criticism in its judgmental criticism of others which emboldens him to openly expose his emotional insecurities, oblivious to the disconnect between the image he is laboring to project and what is really coming through.

Price says that Schleiermacher rejected the notion of miracles as "mid-course corrections" entailing the temporary suspension of natural regularities. Rather, he adopted the Spinozistic view that the Creator "got it right he first time." A Resurrection turns God into a "sorcerer or a genie" (10-11).

But this is a straw man argument. No orthodox Christian posits a miracle as a "mid-course correction." Rather, all of God's miracles were preplanned for their theological symbolism. A divine miracle is no more a case of sorcery than the event of creation itself.

Price goes on to say that Schleiermacher favored the swoon theory, which is "by no means absurd" since, "people, as Josephus informs us, occasionally survived crucifixion" (11).

i) This is yet another straw man argument. The question is not the bare possibility that a victim could survive the ordeal, but the concrete circumstances surrounding the crucifixion of Christ in particular.

It is possible that Robespierre might have survived the guillotine. After all, the device could have malfunctioned. But that abstract possibility gives us no reason to suppose that the record of his decapitation is mistaken.

ii) Incidentally, is this what Josephus really says? Here are his actual words:

I saw many captives crucified; and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I...went...to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered.⁸

Now we see why Price made this vague allusion without giving the exact reference.⁹ This is, as we shall see, standard operating procedure for Price. Engage in a bit of name-dropping without direct quotes or page numbers. That's a way of covering his tracks, lest the reader be in a position to do some elementary fact-checking.

iii) In addition, it was not merely a case of surviving crucifixion—unlikely as that is. According to the Gospels, Jesus received a flogging before he was crucified—with all the attendant blood-loss, and he was impaled after having been nailed to the cross. So the swoon theory must make him survive a flogging, impaling, and crucifixion—and still have enough mojo left over to force his way out of the tomb!

Of course, liberal critics make their theories more plausible by suppressing any inconvenient evidence to the contrary. They pick and choose just what narrative details are consistent with their preconceived theories.

As with any conspiracy theory, you can't disprove it since the conspiracy theorist will make whatever arbitrary adjustments are necessary to be self-consistent. But

⁸ *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, P. Maier, ed. (Kregel 1999), 42;

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/josephus.html>

<http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/JOSEPHUS.HTM>

<http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/josephus.html>

⁹ *Vita* 70/420-21.

there's nothing to disprove in the first place since the theory is driving the evidence—driving out the evidence, to be more exact—rather than vice versa.

Price then speaks of two ironies in the conventional case for the Resurrection:

First is the implicit absurdity of the notion that Jesus is still alive, after two thousand years, in the personal, individual consciousness mode intended by the evangelical apologists...Has Jesus grown older and wiser in all these years? Is he immune from senility? Does he ever forget a face? And how on earth, having anything like a true human consciousness, can he possibly keep up with all the devotional conversations he is supposed to be having with every evangelical?¹⁰

He says it's absurd, yet he never says why it's absurd. But an adjective is a sorry substitute for an argument. In that respect, there is nothing for the Christian to defend.

Price then poses a series of childish questions—childish because these sorts of questions have answers implicit in the doctrine of the Resurrection, and have been given answers by Christians since the Scholastic era or before.

The glorified body would age up to or down to the optimal age of a sinless man or woman—like unfallen Adam and Eve. It would remain at that optimal age.

Humanly speaking, Christ would continue to learn. He would be immune to senility since senility is a consequence of the fall, whereas glorification reverses the physical effects of the fall by lifting the curse.

Could he forget a face? I don't know. Forgetfulness is not a sin, although it might be a possible byproduct of sin. Even apart from the Resurrection, Christ is impeccable.

Every evangelical doesn't claim to have "conversations" with Christ. But skipping to the larger point, Christ can process all our prayers because Christ is the God-man. Price leaves the divine mind out of the equation.

Some of these answers are admittedly speculative, but the objections are no less speculative, and speculative objections invite speculative answers. If the answers are not to be taken seriously, then neither are the objections.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

These are not, moreover, unbridled speculations, but framed by the nature of the doctrine in question.

Price then says that Jesus “must still be available or [else] there is no ‘personal relationship with Christ’” (12).

That depends on how you define a personal relationship. In this life, we know Christ by description, not acquaintance.

In addition, belief in the Resurrection is the result of a particular “type of piety.” It is not as if Christians first decide whether they want to be Pietistic or not, and then generate a doctrine to satisfy their Pietistic needs. Rather, Christians believe in the Resurrection for the simple reason that this doctrine is given in Scripture. Christian prayer is not the historical basis for the Resurrection. Rather, the Resurrection is the historical basis for Christian prayer.

Price then says that,

Jesus must have risen from the dead...because otherwise it would seem arbitrary to look forward to a clear-cut immortality of our own...the Christian is interested in some sort of reassurance, some sort of proof.¹¹

This is true, but misleading. The fact that the resurrection of Christ grounds our faith in the resurrection of the just does not imply that the Resurrection is reducible to this particular function, as though we first decided to believe in personal immortality, and then invented the Resurrection to prove it. Historically, that is not why Christians believe in the Resurrection. Rather, they do so for the simple reason that it’s given in Scripture.

There is an intimate relation between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. But the fact that orthodoxy has practical consequences is no evidence against its veracity. Indeed, many things are functional because they’re true.

Perhaps Price would say that the original basis of the Resurrection lies in some psychological need, but aside from the fact that that’s sheer armchair conjecture, and not of the most plausible variety to begin with, the further fact that Christians

¹¹ Ibid., 12-13.

believe in the Resurrection because they believe in the Bible goes to show that this conjecture is psychologically superfluous.

Price then goes on to criticize attempts to preserve a miraculous event, but rationalize it by explaining its occurrence through natural means—or means other than those spelled out in Scripture. He cites examples from parapsychology, ufology, and Velikovsky.

But this criticism is not all of a piece:

i) The natural/supernatural dichotomy is not given in Scripture itself. It may have some inferential basis in Scripture, but we need to guard against imposing on Scripture an extra-Scriptural framework.

ii) In general, Scripture doesn't have much to say about various modes of causality. It attributes ordinary providence to the action of God no less than creation or miracle.

iii) There is no rule of thumb in Scripture about whether a given miracle can or cannot be the result of second-causes, whether individually or in conjunction. That can only be determined on a case-by-case basis.

iv) Again, there are many events in Scripture which may strike us as miraculous in character, but are not labeled as miraculous in Scripture itself.

So the question of whether a miracle must be an immediate or supernatural act of God, rather than an event facilitated through the instrumentality of natural means, is not something that we can answer with a deductive definition, but only on an inductive basis.

Indeed, we're asking the wrong question. This is the wrong way of framing the discussion. It is too artificial and aprioristic.

v) There is also a categorical difference between conjectural answers to questions left open in Scripture, where the range of possible answers is bounded by the theological viewpoint of Scripture, and going outside the framework supplied by Scripture to an entirely extrinsic conceptual scheme, such as ufology.

vi) There is also a difference between scientific arguments and historical arguments.

vii) There is also a difference between saying that certain miraculous claims of Scripture may be susceptible to scientific or historical proof, and saying that our faith in such claims is contingent on scientific confirmation or historical corroboration. This goes to a distinction between defensive and offensive apologetics.

viii) Having said all that, there is, indeed, a tradition, especially since the Enlightenment, of rationalizing Biblical miracles. It's ironic that Price would bring this up since every alternative theory of the Resurrection is a transparent rationalization. Hence, by his own admission, the entirety of the ET is one run-on exercise in special-pleading from start to finish. I can only express my heart-felt thanks to the co-editor for his candid dismissal of the whole project before we ever get to chapter 1.

In this same connection he speaks of “popular apologists” who “offer scientific proof for the Star of Bethlehem.”¹² But scientific interest in the Star of Bethlehem isn't limited to the popular apologist. There are professional astronomers, astronomers by no means in the fundamentalist camp, who nonetheless take the Star of Bethlehem quite seriously as a celestial phenomenon worthy of sustained scientific investigation and intensive historical research.¹³

Moving along:

Such elements are common to the Mythic Hero Archetype and are thus embodied in tales all over the world and throughout history. One may discover them, along with other noteworthy data paralleling the career of Jesus in the gospels, in the legends of Oedipus, Apollonius of Tyana, Asclepius, Hercules, Romulus, Empedocles, and others... What we read of Jesus, we have already read concerning Adonis, Tammuz, Osiris, Attis, and others.¹⁴

This appeal is going to crop up fairly often in the book. I'll have more to say later, but for now a number of comments are in order:

i) The “Mythic Hero Archetype” is not a concrete particular, but a high-level literary construct and abstract synthesis loosely based on the work of such diverse comparative mythologists as Campbell, Cassier, Eliade, Frazer, Frye, Jaspers, Jung, Lévi-Strauss, Mowinckel, Malinowski, and Ricoeur.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ M. Kidger, *The Star of Bethlehem* (Princeton 1999); M. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem* (Rutgers 1999).

¹⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

Each comparative mythologist has his own selection-criteria and harmonistic principles. Each comparative mythologist has his own guiding philosophy. Each comparative mythologist has his own idiosyncratic synthesis.

As one scholar puts it:

It would surely not be methodologically too strict to insist that lists of motifs do not constitute a pattern or elucidate meaning. The hero pattern posited by Raglan (or those by von Hahn or Rank or the composite by Dundes) is simply a list of incidents, details, or motifs and does not correspond to any form or genre of literature, oral or written. In Dundes' presentation of the supposed pattern, the interpreter is apparently free to combine hero traits and incidents indiscriminately from different lists and to stretch or interpret the motifs in order to maximize a particular hero's correspondence to the pattern.¹⁵

And as Ronald Nash explains:

I conclude by noting seven points that undermine liberal efforts to show that first-century Christianity borrowed essential beliefs and practices from the pagan mystery religions.

Arguments offered to "prove" a Christian dependence on the mysteries illustrate the logical fallacy of false cause. This fallacy is committed whenever someone reasons that just because two things exist side by side, one of them must have caused the other. As we all should know, mere coincidence does not prove causal connection. Nor does similarity prove dependence.

Many alleged similarities between Christianity and the mysteries are either greatly exaggerated or fabricated. Scholars often describe pagan rituals in language they borrow from Christianity. The careless use of language could lead one to speak of a "Last Supper" in Mithraism or a "baptism" in the cult of Isis. It is inexcusable nonsense to take the word "savior" with all of its New Testament connotations and apply it to Osiris or Attis as though they were savior-gods in any similar sense.

The chronology is all wrong. Almost all of our sources of information about the pagan religions alleged to have influenced early Christianity are dated very late. We frequently find writers quoting from documents written 300 years later than Paul in efforts to produce ideas that allegedly influenced Paul. We must reject the assumption that just because a cult had a certain belief or practice in the third or fourth century after Christ, it therefore had the same belief or practice in the first century.

¹⁵ R. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas* (Crossroad 1989), 165.

Paul would never have consciously borrowed from the pagan religions. All of our information about him makes it highly unlikely that he was in any sense influenced by pagan sources. He placed great emphasis on his early training in a strict form of Judaism (Phil. 3:5). He warned the Colossians against the very sort of influence that advocates of Christian syncretism have attributed to him, namely, letting their minds be captured by alien speculations (Col. 2:8).

Early Christianity was an exclusivistic faith. As J. Machen explains, the mystery cults were nonexclusive. "A man could become initiated into the mysteries of Isis or Mithras without at all giving up his former beliefs; but if he were to be received into the Church, according to the preaching of Paul, he must forsake all other Saviors for the Lord Jesus Christ... Amid the prevailing syncretism of the Greco-Roman world, the religion of Paul, with the religion of Israel, stands absolutely alone." This Christian exclusivism should be a starting point for all reflection about the possible relations between Christianity and its pagan competitors. Any hint of syncretism in the New Testament would have caused immediate controversy.

Unlike the mysteries, the religion of Paul was grounded on events that actually happened in history. The mysticism of the mystery cults was essentially nonhistorical. Their myths were dramas, or pictures, of what the initiate went through, not real historical events, as Paul regarded Christ's death and resurrection to be. The Christian affirmation that the death and resurrection of Christ happened to a historical person at a particular time and place has absolutely no parallel in any pagan mystery religion.

What few parallels may still remain may reflect a Christian influence on the pagan systems. As Bruce Metzger has argued, "It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases, the influence moved in the opposite direction." It should not be surprising that leaders of cults that were being successfully challenged by Christianity should do something to counter the challenge. What better way to do this than by offering a pagan substitute? Pagan attempts to counter the growing influence of Christianity by imitating it are clearly apparent in measures instituted by Julian the Apostate, who was the Roman emperor from A.D. 361 to 363.¹⁶

While James Hannam also observes:

An argument frequently advanced against Christianity runs roughly like this:

- there are many features of Christianity that resemble features of other religions, particularly ancient pagan religions;
- Christianity has copied those features; and therefore

¹⁶ http://www.summit.org/resource/essay/show_essay.php?essay_id=29

- Christianity is not true.

It is the purpose of these notes to establish that this argument rests upon unwarranted premises and that its logic is fallacious. They will examine specifically the work of Sir James Frazer, Lord Raglan and the latest example, Dennis MacDonald.

Do many features of Christianity resemble features of other religions?

Obviously, on one level the answer has to be 'yes'. Christianity posits the existence of a personal god who takes an interest in humanity. It teaches that the individual does not cease to exist after biological death. It has a series of sacred texts which are used as a guide to doctrine and ethics and play an important role in public worship. The pre-Reformation branches of Christianity, moreover, have priesthoods, a developed theology of sacrifice and strong sacramental and ritualistic traditions.

Recognising this, however, doesn't get us very far: very many religions across human time and space exhibit and have exhibited the same characteristics. What we need are specific parallels in matters of detail. To meet this challenge, non-Christians generally advance two sets of parallels, which are not necessarily mutually incompatible but do not go particularly naturally together.

The first involves the construct of the dying-rising god. A full scholarly study of the history of this concept has yet to be written, but suffice it to say here that it was popularised by the Scottish anthropologist Sir James Frazer in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Frazer believed that primitive peoples linked the annual cycles of agriculture with 'corn spirits' (a concept which he borrowed from the German scholar Mannhardt). In its developed form, the theology of these primitive agriculturalists posited that the corn spirit died and was reborn annually, typically in the form of the divine king in whom it was incarnated. Frazer believed that the religions of the ancient Near East provided several examples of dying-rising gods who had emerged from primitive belief-systems similar to these, most notably Attis, Adonis and Osiris.

Frazer's theory is loaded with problems. Whole books criticising his theory have been written, and nowadays it is extremely difficult to find any recognised and reputable anthropologist who will accept it even in a modified form. Here are some of the major difficulties with it:

1. Frazer's sources were frequently inaccurate or irrelevant, or else he interpreted them in tendentious ways.
2. Frazer himself subscribed to discredited nineteenth-century ideas such as the evolutionist model of human societal development (which is today firmly rejected by experts and has nothing to do with the theory of biological evolution) and the notion that present-day primitive tribesmen can be studied as a means of finding out what things were like at the dawn of civilisation.

3. Evidence that has emerged since Frazer wrote has not merely failed to back up his hypotheses: it has fatally undermined them.

The greatest problem with Frazer, however, is that construct of the dying-rising god is simply a fantasy. The distinguished scholar J.Z. Smith, a man who most certainly cannot be regarded as a defender of Christianity, wrote an important article for Mircea Eliade's 'Encyclopedia of Religion' (New York 1987) in which he took various alleged examples of dying-rising gods and showed that none of them actually fits the category. (My own researches lead me to believe that the Phoenician god Melqart, whom Smith does not discuss, is the one exception—but he *is* very much the exception.) Certainly, Frazer's star witnesses of Attis, Adonis and Osiris suffer from the fatal flaw in each case of dying and then failing to be resurrected.

Even if Frazer and his followers were right about the dying-rising god, the relevance to Christianity would be doubtful. The Christian story makes no connection whatever between Christ and the agricultural year or the rhythms of the natural world. Moreover, Frazer's followers who elaborated his work with particular reference to the ancient Near East made it clear that their dying-rising gods and kings were tightly enmeshed in a series of bizarre annual rites with no conceivable parallels in Christianity.

The second 'copycat' model advanced by sceptics involves the prototypical schemas of the life of the hero sometimes drawn up by scholars.

The sceptic will typically appeal to the work of Lord Raglan, even though it's now 70 years out of date and a number of different schemas have since been proposed. There are serious problems with Raglan. In order to get mythical figures to fit his schema, you often have to cheat quite blatantly; and, in any case, real-life historical figures such as Hitler and Napoleon fit the pattern just as well as the ancient heroes whom he adduced.

In general, the 'monomyth' schemas are of limited usefulness. They prove a certain amount about the patterns followed by the lives of heroes in different cultures, but they don't prove very much, and what they do prove isn't always very comforting to the sceptic.

To begin with, if one puts all the schemas that have been proposed together and looks for common elements, the results that emerge are often vague or unhelpful. For instance, the hero will typically have a miraculous conception or birth—but it's hardly legitimate to compare the story of the virgin birth recounted in the Gospels with, say, Zeus raping Leda in the form of a swan simply because both involve some sort of supernatural element. What such 'similarities' boil down to seems to be the earth-shattering revelation that supernatural things happen to supernatural figures, which is essentially a tautology.

Secondly, where hero-stories do concur, they often concur in ways which question the utility of applying them to the story of Jesus. Incest and parricide are recurrent themes of the schemas, for example, as is the link between the hero and kingship (you can get out of this by suggesting that Jesus was the heir of King David, or that he heralded the Kingdom of God, but this is just the sort of cheating that drains the schemas of their credibility). Even Raglan's schema falls down on this point, most obviously because Jesus didn't marry a princess (a motif which appears in other schemas too).

Even if they exist, what do the parallels prove?

Many non-Christians seem to believe that, in order to be true, Christianity must be unique. This is utterly fallacious—if anything, the precise opposite is the case. If Christian doctrine were strange and deviant and had no similarities at all to that of other religious systems, it would be *more* likely to be a weird, aberrant construct, not *less*. To take one obvious example, a simple and economical explanation for the widespread human tendency to posit supernatural figures who, like Christ, mediate between man and God, is that humans correctly realise that we do need such a mediator. Hence, ironically, some of the scholars most eager to prove the existence of dying-rising gods in the ancient Near East and elsewhere were Christians.

Points of contact between Christianity and other religions are damaging to Christianity's truth claims only if actual borrowings can be proven—not if the parallel features have simply sprung from the same psychological source common to all humans—that is, from the innate religious instinct which Christians regard as a gift of God.

I cannot think of a single case in which Christianity can be shown to have borrowed a core doctrine from another religion. This does not include minor borrowings which everyone admits, such as the dating of Christmas to 25th December (an old Roman sun-festival), or the use of holy water and incense in worship, or the wearing of wedding rings, or dedicating churches to named saints (just as pagan temples were dedicated to different deities). In such cases, the borrowings were not clumsy or furtive. Rather, they were deliberate and unashamed. A good example is the Pope's use of the old Roman chief priest's title 'Pontifex Maximus', a title which the Christians deliberately appropriated to emphasise that their religion had defeated and replaced Roman paganism.¹⁷

If Price were halfway serious, he would first have to deconstruct the "Mythic Hero Archetype," for what we're really talking about is not the first-order phenomenon of the primary sources materials, but a second-order comparison between one mythologist to another.

¹⁷ <http://www.bede.org.uk/frazer.htm>

ii) Notice also that Price gives the reader no direct quotes so that he can actually make his own comparison.

iii) In addition, Price says nothing about the genre of the source material, or the relative dates of the source material, whether pre- or post-Christian, or the interval of time separating the “historical” hero from the literary hero.

These are all absolutely elementary and essential questions. Each one calls for a separate answer.¹⁸

In his standard monograph, Mettinger poses the following programmatic questions to identify a “dying-and-rising savior god”:

- a) Is the figure really a god?
- b) Did he really die, or did he temporarily disappear or visit the underworld?
- c) Did he really return to life, and if so, in what form?
- d) Is his career tied to the four seasons or agricultural cycle?
- e) Does the record of his career take the form of a ritual celebration or a narrative?¹⁹

To this I’d add another programmatic question:

- f) Is the figure a near-contemporary of the writer? Or is he a character from some indefinite time and place in the distant past?

You have only to compare Price’s sneak-and-retreat tactics to the responsible methodology of a scholar like John Walton, in his study of comparative Semitics, to see the difference:

The comparisons have been largely genre oriented. Though I have not worked within a technical definition of “genre,” the comparisons that are the focus of this volume concern literatures that serve similar functions. One must certainly acknowledge, for instance, that the patriarchal narratives are not of the same genre as the Nuzi texts or epics. Yet the comparisons that I have worked with are from those pieces of literature which, in my estimation, inform us of the same aspects of their respective civilizations.²⁰

¹⁸ For a popular refutation of parallelomania, cf. J. Komoszewski et al., *Reinventing Jesus* (Kregel 2006), Part 5.

¹⁹ T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: “Dying & Rising Gods” in the Ancient Near East* (Almqvist & Wiksell 2001).

²⁰ *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Zondervan 1990), 14-15.

Many pitfalls confront the student who attempts to do comparisons of this sort. Most dangerous is the tendency to create uniform views where none exist. To speak of “Mesopotamian thinking” or “Egyptian theology” or “Israelite world-view” is unquestionably presumptuous. It is like speaking of “European culture” today. The distinctions between the Assyrians and the Sumerians would be no less than present-day differences between the Swiss and the Italians. Furthermore, the Babylonians of Hammurabi’s time may have viewed many things differently than the Babylonians of Nebuchadnezzar’s time.²¹

Each chapter begins with a presentation of the extant ANE materials. In some cases the listing is exhaustive, while in other cases only a sampling can be given. With each piece of literature, I provide information concerning the manuscript’s description, location, designation, date, and publication (including text, transliteration, and translation).²²

Let us look at how just one scholar handles a couple of paradigm-cases. Regarding the case of Asclepius, he says:

Through Plutarch, we know of the compound of sixteen spices which Egyptian priests used to burn in the evening in order to encourage sweet dreams in their visitors. Like the “incense of Epidaurus,” this compound was a scent, not a drug.²³

Usually, however, the atmosphere was its own best narcotic. It was intoxicated, above all, by the presence of religious works of art. Since the age of the epic heroes, statues and paintings had become a fundamental influence on the way the divine world was envisioned.”²⁴

Needless to say, the cures of Christ have nothing in common with the paraphernalia dreams and incense—much less the stimulant of idolatry, which would literally be anathema to the aniconic scruples of Second Temple Judaism.

On the same subject, here’s what another scholar has to say:

The image of the god, carved from ivory and gold, included a serpent wound around his staff and a dog at his feet. Both animals figured in the cult itself, since during the night seekers would be visited by and licked by the dogs or the snakes.

²¹ Ibid., 15-16.

²² Ibid., 16.

²³ R. Fox, *Pagans & Christians* (Knopf 1986), 152.

²⁴ Ibid., 153.

Those who came seeking divine aid were required to spend a night in the sanctuary, where they might be visited by the god—either directly in an epiphany or in sacred dreams—or by his surrogates, the sacred snakes and dogs.²⁵

How many miracle cures in the canonical Gospels are mediated by a dog or a snake or incubus?

Continuing:

The framework of meaning in which these stories of Jesus' healings are told is not one which assumes that the proper formula or the correct technique will produce the desired results. Rather, the healings and exorcisms are placed in a larger structure which sees what is happening as clues and foretastes of a new situation in which the purpose of God will finally be accomplished in the creation and his people will be vindicated and at peace.²⁶

Along similar lines:

There is no suggestion that the healing had any meaning outside of itself; it is not a pointer to a spiritual transformation or a promise of anything transcendent.²⁷

Once again, contrast this with the healings effected by Christ.

Moving on to the case of Apollonius:

The author claims to be utilizing as his chief source the diary of Apollonius's traveling companion, Damis...The material allegedly drawn from Damis is so full of historical anachronisms and gross geographical errors that one could not have confidence in Damis as a reporter if there actually were a diary.²⁸

There are straightforward accounts of encounters with dragons whose eyes bear mystic gems, and of a successful trick whereby a lascivious satyr is intoxicated. A plausible explanation for the mix of the fantastic and misinformation is that Philostratus invented most of it or borrowed it in eclectic fashion.²⁹

²⁵ H. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle & Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge 1986).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁷ H. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (Yale 1983), 87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

There are some details which might indicate that the author commissioned by a vigorous opponent of Christianity to do this work was writing consciously a pagan gospel, as Eusebius of Caesarea maintains.³⁰

Let's take the case of Adonis. At a minimum, Price would need to distinguish between the Greek Adonis and the Semitic Adonis, sift through the evidence distinctive to both, using primary source materials, document their internal development over time, as well as their spatiotemporal proximity to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul.

But a serious exercise in comparative mythology, with quotes and dates and concrete details would take a lot of scholarly spadework, and lose the deceptive simplicity of Price's pretentious name-dropping.

Another fundamental weakness with this sort of myth criticism is a failure to appreciate the Palestinian character of the Gospels. To take just one example, Maurice Casey has, in painstaking detail, uncovered the Aramaic substratum which underlies the Synoptic gospels.³¹

Two lessons emerge from this study:

- i) The Synoptics derive from very primitive dominical traditions, both with respect to language and date.
- ii) The Synoptics are very faithful to their sources—which were written, not oral.

After a number of self-congratulatory claims about how noble and high-minded Price and his colleagues are, he launches into the following:

The whole problem that haunts these discussions is the failure of some religious believers to separate issues of historical scholarship from personal investment in the outcome of the investigation. We have no chance of arriving at accurate results so long as we feel, whether we admit it or not, that we cannot afford for certain possible conclusions to be true.³²

By way of reply:

³⁰ Ibid., 265.

³¹ *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge 1998); *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Cambridge 2002).

³² Ibid., 16.

i) This is tendentious way of framing the issue, for it assumes that only one side has a personal stake in the outcome—which just so happens to be the opposing side, while the other side is concerned with accurate results—which just so happens to be his own side.

ii) But aside from observing how he tries to stack the deck in his own favor, this way of framing the issue is worth engaging on its own terms. I can't read this without Pascal's wager coming to mind.

Both Price and his Christian opponent have a personal investment in the outcome, but the respective benefit of being right or cost of being wrong is far from equal.

If Price is right and the Christian is wrong, then both enjoy an identical payoff, for both will enjoy a common oblivion. So there is no comparative advantage to being right if Price is right. And there is no comparative disadvantage to being wrong if Price is right.

If Price is wrong and the Christian is right, then Price goes to hell while the Christian goes to heaven. If the Christian is right, then the benefit for him is incalculable, and if Price is wrong, the cost to him is incalculable.

The payoff for the Christian, if the Christian is right, is incomparably greater than the payoff for Price, if Price is right. Conversely, the cost to Price, if Price is wrong, is incomparably greater than it is to the Christian if the Christian is wrong.

Put another way, if Price is right, then the payoff and the penalty are identical, both for Price, and for the Christian.

Since several contributors to this volume are fond of Bayesian theory, let's assign some numbers to the respective alternatives, and let us rate them heavily in favor of Price and all his ilk. Just suppose, for the sake of argument, that Price's position has a prior probability of 95%, while the Christian's position has a prior probability of 5%.

Which would be a more reasonable research program—to invest all our time and effort investigating Price's position, or the Christian's?

Even though the initial odds are overwhelmingly in favor of Price, it would be quite irrational to even investigate his position, for there is no upside to being right on his terms, whereas there is a potentially enormous downside.

Rather, the only rational course of action would be to investigate the opposing position, for even though the odds against it are almost insurmountable, there's nothing to lose, and everything to gain—whereas a guy like Price has nothing to gain and everything to lose.

I realize that some folks will regard this as utterly crass, but why shouldn't we be utterly crass? Why should we be oh-so scrupulous and high-principled if the reward for being right is that we all get to turn into fertilizer, while the cost of being wrong is that we all get to burn in hell forever? What matters are not the odds, but the stakes.

Only a fool would worry about his precious reputation if those are the stakes. A prudent gambler will maximize his gains and minimize his risks. And as my grandfather used to say, never gamble if you can't afford to lose.³³

iii) I also realize that some folks will regard this as a gross oversimplification. There are other religious options on the table, are there not?

But other issues aside, who cares? For, as far as Price and the other contributors to this book are concerned, it does boil down to these two options. They didn't publish a 500-page book attacking Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism or Judaism or Mormonism or Scientology. It's Christianity or bust.

iv) The wager is not a substitute for faith, by which I mean, a genuine conviction regarding the truth of Christianity.

Rather, the wager is for seekers, not believers. The wager is for those who don't know where to begin. They're bewildered by the sheer diversity of choices.

The wager is a prioritizing device to narrow the search parameters. Why investigate a losing proposition? Why waste time on an option that offers nothing in return?

v) To round out this particular reply, the challenge to secularism is not whether it is probably true—or false. Rather, the challenge to secularism is whether it can possibly be true.

³³ For the relation between Pascal's Wager and modern game-theory, cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/>
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/p/pasc-wag.htm>

Take one example. According to the standard paradigm, it is true that intelligent life did not always exist in the universe.

But what is truth? Truth is a property of a belief. Truth is a relation between a believer and the object of belief.

Most secular thinkers adopt some version of the correspondence theory. If so, then truth is a relation between a truth-bearer and its object (a fact).

Philosophers differ over what functions as the truth-bearer, whether a belief, proposition, sentence, or something else.

Speaking for myself, to identify a truth-bearer with a sentence only pushes the question back step, for a sentence is simply a way of encoding a proposition—a storage and retrieval mechanism.

Likewise, the same proposition is expressible in different words.

The most plausible account is to say that a truth-bearer is a belief, which, in turn, presupposes a believer.

So you have a relation between a believer—via the truth-bearer (a belief) and the factual object to which that belief does or does not correspond.

The belief is a true belief if it corresponds to the factual object or state of affairs, and a false belief if it fails to correspond to the factual object.

But being a relation, truth cannot exist unless both relata—object and truth-bearer—coexist.

If there were no sapient beings, there would be no truth.

Further refinements are possible, between object-based and fact-based correspondence theories, but that doesn't affect the primary thesis.

Or, if you prefer the coherence theory of truth, then truth is once again a relation property—in this case, a relation between ideas. This also requires a mind.

Without a believer, nothing is true. So, was it true, at the time, that no intelligent

life existed anywhere in the universe? The proposition is self-refuting.

It is now true? “Now” with reference to what? To then? But if it wasn’t true back then, how can it now be true of a past state? See the problem?

But a Christian can ground all true beliefs in the God as the ideal believer.³⁴

I’d add that religions with an impersonal concept of the divine are in the same ditch as secularism at this juncture.

Moving on, Price says:

We must wonder if it does not actually denigrate the achievements of a figure if his greatness is taken to hinge upon the denial of the fact that he is dead. Is not his legacy great enough? I think I detect here a microcosmic version of the common argument, if you can call it that, that there must be a life after death, eternal life, because otherwise life here and now would be meaningless. The answer is simple: if you cannot find meaning inherent in life right now, as you live it in this visible world, the addition of an infinite amount more of the same isn’t about to somehow make it any more meaningful! Add a whole string of zeroes to a zero and watch what happens.

Even so, if the significance of Jesus is not clear from what we can know of his earthly life, adding on a resurrected infinite life at the right hand of God is not going to lend him some importance he did not already have.

If the truth of Jesus is limited to the teachings of, say, the Sermon on the Mount, should we be disappointed? Would a resurrected eternity of Jesus at the right hand of God in heaven add value to that teaching that it does not already possess? Ask Dr. King, or Count Tolstoy, or Mahatma Gandhi.³⁵

There are both general and specific problems with this objection:

i) At the specific level, Christians will reject this humanistic, reconstituted version of Christ for the simple reason that this is not the Christ of the Bible. And if we’re

³⁴ For a philosophical defense of this claim, cf. R. Adams, “God, Possibility, & Kant,” *Faith and Philosophy* 17/4 (October 2000), 425-440; B. Davis, *The Metaphysics of Theism & Modality* (Peter Lang 2001); B. Leftow, *Divine Ideas* (Cornell, forthcoming); G. Welty, *An Examination of Theistic Conceptual Realism as an Alternative to Theistic Activism* (MPhil thesis, Oxford 2000 [<http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/welty/>]); *Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case For Identifying Abstract Objects With Divine Ideas* (DPhil diss., Oxford, forthcoming);

<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ap85/papers/PhilThesis.html>

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

not going to believe in the historical Christ, then why in the world should we believe in a fictitious Christ?

There is more to the work of Christ than the teaching of Christ. He came to die, and to rise again—to redeem the world, and rule the world.

There is more to the mission of Christ than the work of Christ. There is also the person of Christ, as the coequal and coeternal Son of God.

ii) As a practical matter, the dreamy-eyed pacifism of a Gandhi or King or Tolstoy is no match for the glint-eyed aggression of a Hitler or Stalin or bin-Laden. Pacifism lives within the protective penumbra of military might.

iii) It is true that if life is meaningless here-below, then extending it into the after-life would not thereby render it any more meaningful. But that only follows from the fact that Price is operating with a naturalistic model of human life.

From a Christian standpoint, what is meaningless is not mundane existence, per se, but life in a fallen world without hope of redemption (e.g., Ecclesiastes).

Likewise, life would be meaningless if it were a random event, having no role in a scheme of divine creation and providence. In Eliot's phrase, it would boil down to "birth, copulation, and death."

That's the argument. The fact that Price has such a shallow grasp of Christian theology goes a long way in explaining why it was so easy for him to defect from the faith. Compare Price's flippancy with the outlook of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain back when both of them were still students at the Sorbonne:

This metaphysical anguish, going down to the very roots of the desire for life, is capable of becoming a total despair and of ending in suicide. I believe that during these last dark years, in Austria, in Germany, in Italy, in France, thousands of suicides have been due to this despair, even more than to the overburdening of other sufferings of body and soul.

I believe that thousands of deaths today are due to a complete disillusionment of the soul which believes it has been deceived by having had faith in humanity, by having believed in the triumphant power of truth and justice, of goodness and of pity—of all that which we know to be the good.

On this particular day, then, we had just said to one another that if our nature was so unhappy as to possess only a pseudo-intelligence capable of everything

but the truth, if, sitting in judgment on itself, it had to debase itself to such a point, then we could neither think nor act with any dignity. In that case everything became absurd—and impossible to accept—without our even knowing what it was in us that thus refused acceptance.

Already I had come to believe myself an atheist; I no longer put up any defense against atheism, in the end persuaded, or rather devastated, as I was by so many arguments given out as “scientific.” And the absence of God unpeopled the universe.—If we must also give up the hope of finding any meaning whatever for the word truth, for the distinction of good from evil, of just from unjust, it is no longer possible to live humanly.

I wanted no part in such a comedy. I would have accepted a sad life, but not one that was absurd. Jacques had for a long time thought that it was still worthwhile to fight for the poor, against the slavery of the “proletariat.” And his own natural generosity had given him strength. But now his despair was as great as my own.

Our complete understanding, our own happiness, all the sweetness of the world, all man’s art, could not make us accept without some reason—in no matter what sense of the word—the misery, the unhappiness, the wickedness of men. Either the world could be justified, and this could not be if real knowledge did not exist; or else life was not worth the trouble of a moment’s further notice.

Before leaving the Jardin des Plantes we reached a solemn decision which brought us some peace: to look sternly in the face, even to the ultimate consequence—insofar as it would be in our power—the facts of that unhappy and cruel universe, wherein the sole light was the philosophy of skepticism and relativism.

We would accept no concealment, no cajolery from persons of consequence, asleep in their false security. The Epicureanism they proposed was a snare, just as was sad Stoicism; and estheticism—that was mere amusement.

Thus we decided for some time longer to have confidence in the unknown; we would extend credit to existence, look upon it as an experiment to be made, in the hope that to our ardent pleas, the meaning of life would reveal itself, that new values would stand forth so clearly that they would enlist our total allegiance, and deliver us from the nightmare of a sinister and useless world.

But if the experiment should not be successful, the solution would be suicide; suicide before the years had accumulated their dust, before our youthful strength was spent. We wanted to die by a free act if it were impossible to live according to the truth.³⁶

³⁶ *The Memoirs of Raïssa Maritain* (Image Books 1961), 65-68.

As we also know, they were delivered from their suicide pact by conversion to French Catholicism.

Or consider the bleak epitaph inscribed upon the tombstone of atheism by Quentin Smith:

I do not believe my theory differs very much from that of many or most people. There is a sense that my life, actions and consequences of actions amount to nothing when I am considering the value of an infinite universe. Our emotional responses to acts or states of affairs we believe have positive or negative value occur when we are narrowly focused on “the here and now”, on the people we interact with or know about, ourselves, and the animals, plants and material things that surround us in our daily lives. In our daily lives, we believe actions are good or bad and that individuals have rights. These beliefs are false, but we know this only on the occasions when we engage in second order beliefs about our everyday beliefs and view our everyday beliefs from the perspective of infinity. Most of the time, we live in an illusion of meaningfulness and only some times, when we are philosophically reflective, are we aware of reality and the meaninglessness of our lives. It seems obvious that this has a genetic basis, due to Darwinian laws of evolution. In order to survive and reproduce, it must seem to us most of the time that our actions are not futile, that people have rights. The rare occasions in which we know the truth about life are genetically prevented from overriding living our daily lives with the illusion that they are meaningful. As I progress through this paper, I have the illusion that my efforts are not utterly futile, but right now, as I stop and reflect, I realize that any further effort put into this paper is a futile expenditure of my energy.³⁷

As William Vallicella points out:

If death is the utter annihilation of the individual person, then life is ultimately senseless and ultimately hopeless. This cannot be evaded by saying that one’s life can acquire meaning if it is placed in the service of the lives of others. For their lives too (and the lives of their progeny and their progeny’s progeny ad indefinitum) are, on the annihilationist assumption, ultimately senseless and hopeless. Human life is in every case the life of an individual; so even if human beings existed at all times, that would do nothing to insure ultimate meaningfulness.

Of course, there are proximate meanings, hopes, and purposes even if ultimately it is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

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http://www.qsmithwmu.com/moral_realism_and_infinte_spacetime_imply_moral_nihilism_by_quentin_smith.htm

One can lose oneself in them. But to do so involves self-deception: one has to mistake the proximate for the ultimate. One has to burden fleeting concerns with a meaning they cannot bear. One has to fool oneself.

For example, one has to fool oneself that writing a book, starting a company, founding a family are all ultimately meaningful when the only way they could have any ultimate meaning is if they were part of a life that had a direction that wasn't about to be cut short in a few years.

To put it bluntly, we have no future if naturalism is true. But we cannot live without meaning. An existential trilemma looms. Either we cultivate self-deception by ascribing to fleeting concerns ultimate meaning, or we recognize their transiency and ultimate meaninglessness when considered in and of themselves and put our faith and hope in a transcendent meaning, or, avoiding both self-deception and the life of faith, we embrace nihilism.³⁸

Price goes on to tell us, as if we didn't know, that the charismatic tradition obscures the historical Christ. This is true, but beside the point. That's why the early church was opposed to Montanism. It drew a firm line between the historical Christ of the Gospels and a charismatic Christ of faith. We must not allow that distinction to be erased—whether by prophetic charlatans or liberal charlatans like the Jesus Seminar.

³⁸ http://maverickphilosopher.powerblogs.com/meaning_of_human_existence/

Chapter 1

Before we get into the content of his essay, the ET says that Cavin is “currently working on a book on the resurrection.”³⁹ And what particular angle does that forthcoming book happen to take?

That Jesus had an unknown identical twin who faked the resurrection. That there was such a twin is the best explanation for the facts of (1) the empty tomb, (2) the appearances of “the risen Christ,” and (3) the origin of the Christian Way.⁴⁰

Yep, you heard him right. A secret twin faked the Resurrection. Now, in the previous chapter, Bob Price made fun of the argument offered by some folks in the ufology community who say that Jesus was a space alien. But why is that alternative theory of the Resurrection any sillier than Cavin’s? Price likes to mock Lindsell’s harmonizations, but they are models of austere sobriety compared with Cavin.

How is it that critics of the Resurrection allow themselves to indulge in alternative theories, however fanciful and forced, but when a popularizer like Lindsell offers a rather strained harmonization, they pounce?

Moving into chapter 1, Cavin’s argument is simply stated:

1. The apologetic school of Craig, Moreland, Habermas, et al., takes its point of departure from a core of historical facts gleaned from Mk 16:1-8 & 1 Cor 15:3-8.
2. The same apologetic school ascribes the following “dispositional” properties of the glorified body:
 - a) Immune to illness
 - b) Immune to aging
 - c) Immune to injury
 - d) Immune to mortal injury
 - e) Immune to physical barriers
3. Even if we stipulate to the complete accuracy of Mk 16:1-8 & 1 Cor 15:3-8, the specific dispositional properties attributed to the glorified body by this apologetic tradition are underdetermined by its chosen prooftexts.

³⁹ Ibid., 491.

⁴⁰ http://www.theism.net/authors/zjordan/debates_files/holtz.htm

For example, some of these dispositional properties are not empirical properties which would manifest themselves in the phenomenon of the empty tomb or the Easter appearances of the Risen Lord.

I actually find myself in broad agreement with Cavin. But let us be clear on what this amounts to. Cavin succeeds in exposing a limitation in a particular school of apologetics. And, in so doing, he operates within the same framework.

This, however, is not a direct attack on the evidence for the Resurrection, but only an attack upon a particular apologetic method.

To be sure, Cavin brings in a few supplementary arguments, which I'll address below, but let's begin by running through the main thesis.

1. I've never been a signatory to the idea that we should limit our database to Mk 16:1-8 & 1 Cor 15:3-8.

This was never more than a tactical concession to the unbeliever, under the assumption that what's earlier is more reliable. Obviously the NT does not restrict itself to these two testimonies, so neither should we.

The assumption is flawed. "Early" and "late" are relative terms. There are only two relevant considerations:

i) An early source can be highly unreliable. It all depends on the character of the reporter.

ii) A later source can be highly reliable. It depends, in part, on the character of the reporter as well as whether he is still early enough to be in touch with living memory—whether his own or another's.

iii) There's no reason to assume that a 40-year-old recollection is less reliable than a 10 or 20-year-old recollection. Memory does not change that much over time. If we misremember an event, it is not because our memory underwent change over time, but because we misremembered it in the first place.

In other words, whatever errors, if any, of recollection, are more likely due to a faulty short-term memory rather than a faulty long-term memory. For better or worse, long-term memory is pretty stable.

It has become a mindless tradition, shared by the apologist and the liberal alike, to simply correlate early and late with trustworthy and untrustworthy—without further qualification.

iv) I've never been of the opinion that the Bible is more believable if you dissect it and take little snippets out of context and throw the rest away and paste the remaining slips of parchment into a papier-mâché outline of what "really" happened. This is yet another mindless tradition shared by the apologist and the liberal alike. I don't see anyone applying the same technique to Josephus or Tacitus or Thucydides.

2. Let's go back through the dispositional properties. I agree with (a)-(b). But (c)-(e) need to be caveated.

i) A distinctive property of the glorified body is that it cannot sicken or age. Illness and aging are a result of the Fall. Glorification reverses the physical effects of the fall.

ii) I'd distinguish between aging and maturation. If unfallen Adam and Eve had had children, their children would have started out as babies, and grown up. But, in a fallen world, this is not what we mean by the aging process.

iii) Related to (ii) is the question of whether procreation will feature in the new earth. I'll revisit this question at a later date.

iv) Can the glorified body die? The question is ambiguous. The glorified body cannot die of "natural" causes. It cannot die due to illness or aging. It is naturally immortal—youthful and ageless.

v) From (iv) it does not follow that the glorified cannot die due to violent causes. Glorification does not render the body physiologically immune to injury. At least, the Bible never says that, and it doesn't follow from the mere fact that a glorified body is immune to illness and aging.

In principle, the glorified body could suffer injury, even mortal injury, from some external trauma. So it is possible, from a strictly physiological standpoint, that men and women could still die in the world to come.

vi) Is this a live possibility? No. For God would not allow it. Death would be incompatible with the promises of Scripture regarding the Consummation.

vii) Notice, though, that this is a providential immunity rather than a physiological immunity.

viii) You don't need some super-duper body to be immortal. Mortality is due to sin, not to nature.

There is no good reason for Cavin to saddle the Resurrection with these auxiliary hypotheses. True, he's trying to disprove the Resurrection by disproving the case for the Resurrection, as this is found in writers like Craig, Habermas, and the like. Yet he is not bound by their interpretation of Easter. Indeed, various contributors to the ET challenge their interpretation of Easter.

Christian apologetics has a stereotypical quality to it. Once a well-known writer makes a particular apologetic move, this gets snapped up by others and becomes a standardized part of the polemic.

In addition, many who take up the cause of Christian apologetics come to the discipline from the field of philosophy or history or science rather than exegetical theology. As such, their explanations sometimes suffer from an extrinsic quality, rather than emerging more organically from within the interiority of unfolding revelation and the narrative viewpoint.

Unfortunately, a lot of Christian apologetics has fallen prey to a rather Docetic conception of the glorified body. This Docetic turn in Christian apologetics needs to be exorcised once and for all. It's very odd to have a Christian apologist—many, in fact—who would vehemently oppose a Docetic doctrine of the Incarnation, only to turn around and embrace a Docetic doctrine of the Resurrection.

In fact, Richard Carrier, in chapter 5, after reviewing the Rabbinical evidence, draws a distinction similar to mine—between a change in the nature of the body, and a change in the laws of nature (115). So Cavin is indulging in a straw man argument when he appeals to this dispositional property to disprove the Resurrection.

ix) As to teleportation, several clarifications are in order: to begin with, the Bible never says that Jesus could dematerialize or pass through solid objects. Maybe he could, maybe he couldn't, but that is simply one possible inference from the data (Lk 24:31,36; Jn 20:19,26). It is not an actual teaching of Scripture. John does not

say that Jesus passed right through a wooden door. And if that is what John wanted to say, he was free to do so. Once, again, Cavin is not bound by that interpretation.

x) Did the body dematerialize? Or did the doors dematerialize? John doesn't say. One inference is as good as another.

xi) Even if Jesus did have a capacity for teleportation, why assume that this is a distinctive property of a glorified body? For one thing, this is not the first time that Jesus does a disappearing act. Even before the Resurrection, he has a mysterious power to give his enemies the slip (Lk 4:30; Jn 8:59; 10:39). Is this the same principle as Lk 24:31,36; Jn 20:19,26? The Bible doesn't say. Is this another case of teleportation? The Bible doesn't say—although it does seem uncanny.

xii) There is also the temptation of Christ, with its preternatural trips to the Temple and Mt Nebo (Mt 4:5,8).

xiii) For that matter, Christ was a wonder-worker. If he could perform nature miracles, he could presumably perform a nature miracle on himself.

xiv) In addition, there are other apparent instances of teleportation involving Elijah (1 Kg 18:12,46; 2 Kg 2:16), Ezekiel (3:14; 8:3; 11:24), and Philip (Acts 8:39-40).

xv) There is also the question of how we define teleportation. Strictly speaking, it doesn't mean "to move instantaneously from place to place" (30). For truly instantaneous relocation would entail no motion at all, in the sense of passing through a continuous stretch of space and matter. Teleportation would be a mode of illocal transport rather than some accelerated form of locomotion.

xvi) Incidentally, or not so incidentally, that is the more natural inference to draw from Jn 20. The disciples are not said to see Jesus approaching them or leaving them. Rather, he instantly appears in their midst and instantly disappears. The action is punctiliar rather than linear—discontinuous rather than continuous.

Again, the implication is not that he's normally invisible, but that he's normally elsewhere—in heaven? The ascension account is highly suggestive.

xvii) It is far preferable to stick with the explicit witness of Scripture to the firm physicality of the Risen Savior (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:39-40,42-43; Jn 20:17,20,24-29; Acts 1:4; 10:41), and explain the paranormal behavior by analogous miracles in

Scripture rather than indulge in highly speculative inferences which enjoy no Scriptural precedent and undercut the direct testimony to the nature of the Resurrection.

Of course, Cavin doesn't believe that any of this is even possible, much less actual. But, for the sake of argument, he does need to explore the exegetical and theoretical options.

Cavin also raises some scientific objections to teleportation. That is, however, to impose on Scripture a framework within which Scripture itself does not operate. Scripture has no category of natural law. At most, it has a category of providence, which makes room for the miraculous. To debate the physics of teleportation is a category mistake.

Finally, (i)-(xvii) are basically a brush-clearing exercise to make way for a more systematic explanation. For the Easter appearances conform to and hearken back to the OT Christophanies and theophanies:

In contrast [to Hellenistic translation stories], the appearance stories did correspond to the anthropomorphic theophany stories of the OT—a genre that continued to flourish in Jewish literature—not only linguistically, but also structurally and substantively. This correspondence existed, although, or precisely because, such theophanies did not report about the appearance of the departed, but about God or his angel. For both, the representation began with the “coming” and “seeing” of a stranger in human form. The appearing One made known who he was through an introductory conversation. The key moment of the drama was usually a promise or a commissioning. The account then would close with the disappearance of the appearing One. These elements of structure for this story form were found in the epiphanies of Yahweh before Abraham at Mamre (Gen 18:1-33), in the burning bush before Moses, which concluded with a commissioning (Exod 3:2-10), and before Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-14).

The comparison with this OT/Jewish genre indicates that the appearance stories of the Gospels, both the individual and the group appearance types, manifested the structural indices of a specific genre, and have appropriated this form from the tradition of those theophany stories.⁴¹

What we have, here, is a type/antitype relation between an OT Christophany or theophany and the risen Lord. The theophanic character of the Easter appearances bear witness to the deity of Christ. He is Yahweh Incarnate—both before and after his Resurrection.

⁴¹ L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1981), 1:242; cf. J. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition* (Calwer Verlag 1975), 270ff.

3. Cavin is right to point out that certain dispositional properties would not show up in the Easter appearances or the empty tomb. But that is not how Scripture works.

What you have, in Scripture, is a relation between word and sign, word-media and event-media. The theological significance of a redemptive event doesn't necessarily lie on the surface of things, to be read off in positivist fashion.

As with symbolism in general, the meaning of a symbolic event involves a conventional assignment of meaning between the historical sign and the theological significate, which is, in turn, embedded in a cultural preunderstanding. An element of overt interpretation figures at both ends of the promise/fulfillment scheme.

What we have in Scripture are not bare events, but interpreted events. That's the nature of historical writing.

Finally, Cavin introduces a couple of related objections to the denial that Jesus was a deceiver or self-deceived. Let us take these one at a time:

It is conceptually possible that a very powerful evil spirit (e.g., one of the Watchers of the pseudepigraphic Book of Enoch) or a group of technologically advanced but unscrupulous aliens (e.g., the Talosians of Star Trek) brought about the resuscitation, ascension, and glorious appearance of Jesus—either forcing him against his will to lie about the resurrection or else tricking him into believing that it had actually occurred by enthroning him, after his ascension, in a fake heaven as the “resurrected” Son of Man.⁴²

i) It's hard to know why anyone besides an ufologist should take this seriously. Since neither Cavin nor his Christian opponent believes in ETs, why is he introducing this particular thought-experiment? Why is the onus on a Christian to disprove a thought-experiment which Cavin himself doesn't believe for one moment? Since when is there a burden of proof on your opponent to disprove an artificial example which neither you nor your opponent believe?

ii) Moreover, if this is fair-play, then a Christian is free to construct a parallel thought-experiment in which everything which Cavin takes to be evidence for a secular worldview is an illusion due to the fact that we are lab rats patched into a diabolical VR program, in some infernal variant on the Matrix or Dark City.

⁴² ET, 35.

iii) Furthermore, Cavin doesn't believe in evil spirits, so even if demons are a bare possibility, they are hardly a realistic possibility from his standpoint.

They are, of course, a feature of the Christian worldview. But this presents him with a dilemma. On the one hand, the existence of evil spirits would scarcely falsify the Christian faith, for the Christian faith affirms the existence of evil spirits.

On the other hand, Cavin presumably believes that the nonexistence of the demonic disproves the Christian faith inasmuch as the Christian faith affirms their existence which, if a false belief, would falsify the Christian faith.

So Cavin needs what he believes to be a false belief to be true enough to falsify a belief-system which affirms this belief. How does that play out, exactly? Does he confer temporary, honorary truth on this belief for just long enough to falsify the Christian faith?

Panning into his second objection:

This is conceptually possible; note, even on the Christian conception of God, according to which God is of such a nature as to permit the occurrence of major theological deception, e.g., false signs and wonders capable of misleading even the elect.⁴³

On this conception, all of the billions of adherents of all of the world's religions (other than Christianity) are being deceived to the point of eternal damnation—by God's permission. Moreover, on the Christian conception God actually allows people to have unverdical experiences of being transported into "heaven" and being told things by "angels" which, unbeknownst to them, are diametrically opposed to the truth. Consider, for example, the Kabbalah mystic's experience of the Merkabah in the Seventh Hall of the Seventh Heaven and the near-death out-of-body experiences of the New Age movements wherein "revelations" are imparted that run contrary to the message of the gospel.⁴⁴

But this objection is confused at several different levels:

i) Yes, it is abstractly possible for the elect to be deceived, but that is not a live possibility, for God, in his providence, will not permit it (Mt 24:22,24).

⁴³ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40, n.26.

ii) More generally, verses dealing with the theme of divine and/or diabolical deception (e.g., 2 Thes 2:9-12; Rev 13) target the reprobate, while the elect are necessarily excluded.

iii) Likewise, it is wildly counter-contextual to apply these verses to Jesus Christ; for it is quite impossible, within the theological framework of Scripture, that Jesus, as the Anointed Son of God, would be self-deceived. Cavin's appeal shows a total disregard for the original intent and theological viewpoint of the Bible.

iv) The Bible doesn't attribute all idolatry to divine and/or demonic delusion.

v) The Bible is strictly silent on such post-Biblical phenomena as the Cabbala and the New Age movement. It lays down some general norms that are highly pertinent to such phenomena, but whether the experience of an adept is of direct diabolical inspiration is not a question addressed in Scripture.

Nothing particular rides on these last two points, but they betray a sloppy appeal to Scripture.

Chapter 2

The burden of this chapter is to turn Bayesian probability theory against the Resurrection.⁴⁵ Martin will revisit this argument in chapter 14. It is also a key feature of Lowder's case against the Resurrection (chapter 7), and further figures in Carrier's standard of cumulative probabilities in his chapter (9) on the "plausibility" of theft.

In addition, even if they don't operate with a mathematical assignment of prior probabilities, all of the essayists assume the Resurrection to be so initially unlikely that any alternative explanation is preferable to a straightforward interpretation and acceptance of the Gospel accounts. So quite a lot is riding on this principle.

Before delving into the details, a number of more general observations are in order:

i) All that Martin does in this chapter is to present one version of the theorem, and assign a generic percentile (50%) to the least upper threshold of rationality.

ii) One initial snag is that prior probabilities are always estimated against some body of background knowledge. But BT does not specify what counts as background knowledge. And Martin does nothing here to present a separate argument for this key preliminary assumption. To get off the ground he'd need to mount a non-BT argument to justify his later recourse to BT-style argumentation.

iii) Even if Martin had, indeed, acquitted himself on the preliminary stage of the argument, I fail to see the actual application of Bayes' Theory (hereafter BT) to the case at hand. Where are the numbers? And how are they generated? Martin has, again, done nothing here to systematically quantify the evidence—much less lay out a transparent process by which his percentages are derived and applied.

iv) It is highly unlikely that I will be dealt a royal flush. But just suppose that I am dealt a royal flush. Indeed, this does happen from time to time. Is it irrational for me to believe that I have a royal flush in my hand due to the wildly high initial improbability of such an outcome?

⁴⁵ For an overview of probability theories in general, and Bayesian theory in particular, cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-bayesian/>
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/probability-interpret/>

v) Frankly, the whole effort to assign numbers to historical evidence strikes me an intellectual affectation. It's attempting to transfer the standards of the mathematical sciences to a historical discipline where they don't belong.

Zooming in, Martin says that:

The initial probability of the Resurrection would be small even if theism were true...If theism is true, then miracles in this interventionist sense are possible since there is a supernatural being who could bring them about, but it does not follow that such miracles are more likely than not to occur. Indeed, God would have good reasons for never using miracles to achieve his purposes. For one thing, a violation of the laws of nature cannot be explained by science and, indeed, is an impediment to scientific understanding of the world. For another, great difficulties and controversies arise in identifying miracles.⁴⁶

Several problems with this objection:

i) The question at issue is not whether the Resurrection is probable with reference to some generic form of theism, but whether it is probable with reference to Christian theism. That is, indeed, the inseparable theological framework for the Resurrection. The Resurrection is a Christian doctrine. The Resurrection is not a surd, freestanding event, but one embedded in a Biblical worldview, with the narrative arc of OT expectation rounded out in the NT.

ii) To define a miracle as a violation of natural law is, again, to impose an extra-Scriptural framework on a Scriptural category. Scripture has a doctrine of creation and providence, which, in turn, has some adventitious affinities with natural law, but "natural law" is a far more static concept. This rigidity is what makes it law-like. Martin is casting the issue in a highly abstract and extrinsic fashion. It just doesn't connect with the concrete setting of the Resurrection.

Like Hume before him, his definition begs the question. By definition, a natural "law" is inflexible.

iii) How is a miracle an impediment to science? The proper subject-matter of natural science is ordinary providence. Science is competent within its field, but not outside it. So it's limited, like every other field of knowledge.

⁴⁶ ET, 46.

iv) Assuming that a miracle is an impediment to science, how is that an argument against a miracle? Ironically, coming from an atheist, Martin is falling prey to the naturalistic fallacy, as if nature were designed for the convenience of the human observer.

v) Why is it important to identify a miracle? What really matters is our ability to identify an event. We can classify it later. The key issue is not the identity of a miraculous event qua miraculous, but a miraculous event qua event. Did it happen?

Moving on:

For the sake of argument suppose now that we assume with Christian apologist Richard Swinburne that miracles in the traditional sense are probable given God's existence. This assumption is perfectly compatible with the thesis that in any particular case a miracle is unlikely. Consider the following analogy: it is overwhelmingly probable that in a billion tosses of ten coins all ten coins will turn up heads at least once, but it is extremely unlikely that in any given case all ten coins will come up heads.⁴⁷

Another couple of snags:

From the Scriptural standpoint, miracles are neither probable nor improbable. Rather, they are personal events which fit into the plan of God.

Bayesian probability theory is an application of classical probability theory. This was modeled on games of chance, which are designed to ensure equiprobable outcomes. But to apply that deliberately artificial scenario to the question of miracles is...well...artificial. Yet again, Martin lacks the critical sympathy to identify with the question on its own terms.

Moving on:

As far as religious believers are concerned, violations of the laws of nature are relatively rare...their relative frequency would be very low. So given the background belief that miracles are rare—a belief that is held even by theists—it follows that a claim that a particular event is a miracle is initially improbable.⁴⁸

Several more problems:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

i) He's still stuck in his natural law rut. And as far as that goes, the propensity version of probability would seem to be at least as good as the frequency version in modeling natural laws and forces.

ii) Something may be rare and also be inevitable. Suppose, in his files, an ophthalmologist has the record of a green-eyed patient. There is a low initial probability that any particular individual will have green eyes. That does not, however, imply a low probability for the accuracy of his medical records. Indeed, there's no correlation whatsoever between the probability of having green eyes and the probability of a medical diagnosis of green pigmentation being correct. One could say the same thing about a rare blood type. Certain rarities are bound to turn up sooner or later.

I don't say that miracles are rare in this sense. Just that Martin is trading on equivocal definitions of probability.

Moving on:

Now there is a way of interpreting a miracle claim in the nonintervention sense that makes a miracle extremely probable. If a theist maintains that most events which are governed by the laws of nature are arranged by God to serve as signs or to communicate messages to human beings, then miracle claims are initially probable. But this way of understanding miracles tends to trivialize the notion. Nonintervention miraculous events are usually contrasted with the great majority of other events.⁴⁹

We keep piling up problems.

i) The Bible treats every natural event as, at least in part, an act of God—although this doesn't exclude second causes.

ii) The Bible also treats the natural providential order as revelatory (e.g., Ps 19; Acts 14:17; Rom 1:18ff.).

iii) The interventionist/non-interventionist dichotomy is, again, unscriptural. It is based on the unspoken metaphor of a box. Nature and natural law are inside the box. Miracles come from outside the box.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 47-48.

iv) Not only is this dichotomy unscriptural, it is also unphilosophical. According to classical Christian theism, God is timeless. Hence, he doesn't have one causal mode for creation, a second for providence, and a third for miracle.

Martin is a perfect example of a fairly intelligent man who is so blinded by prejudice that he cannot get inside the position he is opposing.

Moving on:

Relative to background beliefs that are shared by atheists and believers alike, for example, belief in the uniformity of nature, miracles are rare events...Even thoughtful believers in miracles admit that most miracle claims turn out to be bogus on examination...For example, the Catholic Church has investigated thousands of claims of miracle cures at Lourdes, and it has rejected most of these as unproven.⁵⁰

Here we go again:

i) Is the uniformity of nature an article of faith among most Christians? Is there a credal tradition to that effect? I know of none.

ii) The probability of faith-healing at Lourdes is predicated on the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes to Bernadette—a visionary, 14-year-old peasant girl. So the probability of a faith-healing at Lourdes is contingent on the probability of the Blessed Virgin appearing to Bernadette. What is the evidence (and counter-evidence) for that proposition?

Moving on:

So far I've shown that, in general, particular miracle claims are initially unlikely even in a theistic framework. Is the claim that Jesus arose from the dead an exception to this rule?⁵¹

Notice how the deck is stacked. Martin begins with a generic theistic framework. This supplies the presumption. Then Christian theism is grafted on as a sort of afterthought which must overcome the initial presumption against it.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 48.

Now, in fairness to Martin, this is one way of doing Christian apologetics. We might call it the Thomistic model. And it happens to be Swinburne's approach. And since Martin has chosen to use Swinburne as his foil, it makes sense that this is how Martin chooses to structure his own counter-argument.

But remember that, in so doing, what he's done is not to undermine or overthrow the direct evidence for the Resurrection, but to concentrate his fire on a particular school of natural theology.

Certainly there is nothing especially compelling or terribly Scriptural about this bottom-up approach. Let us compare it with a more holistic methodology:

That linear reasoning from a starting point in natural theology is necessary for making religious faith reasonable rests upon an interesting but disputable assumption, the assumption that the order of establishing the truth of a set of propositions must mirror the logical order of the set.

Suppose I show you a box, but that you are too far away to see inside it, and that you are skeptical about my claim that there is something in the box. And suppose that what I have in the box is a grass snake. There is no reason why I should first attempt to prove to you that what I have in the box is a physical object, and then that it is animate, and then that it is reptilian, and so on.

And it may be that one way, perhaps the best way, of establishing the rationality of God is to show how the idea of God functions to integrate diverse data that are otherwise harder to explain. On this view one does not establish the rationality of belief in God as a separate exercise any more than one establishes that something is a carburetor solely by features which make no reference to its function.

So a web, at least as applied to a developed religion such as Christianity, is more like a narrative, with central characters...The story "adds up" to the extent that the action of one character is intelligible in the light of the other features of the narrative.⁵²

It ought to be evident that this organic conception is more naturally adapted to the actual phenomenology of faith and Scripture alike. All that Martin has done is, at best, to punch some holes in a cardboard version of Christianity.

Moving on:

⁵² P. Helm, *Faith With Reason* (Oxford 2000), 44-46, 51.

There does not seem to be any a priori reason to suppose that God would become incarnated and have died at one particular time and place rather than many others...there is no a priori reason to suppose that he would have become incarnated and have died as Jesus in 1C Palestine. Indeed, given the innumerable alternatives at God's disposal it would seem a priori unlikely that the incarnation and the resurrection would have taken place where and when they allegedly did.

Perhaps if Christians knew God's preferences, this would change. But they do not. They only believe that God wants to redeem humanity ...Indeed, redemption can occur without any resurrection at all, let alone the resurrection of Jesus in 1C Palestine.⁵³

There's so much wrong with this that it's hard to know where to begin:

i) Since when is apriorism a rule of historical evidence? Historical truths are truths of fact, not truths of reason.

ii) Although the setting and timing of the Christ-event could have been otherwise, his advent was not a discrete event, insulated from the headwaters of history. To the contrary, Martin disregards the age-long preparation of the Gospel in the progressive unfolding of the Messianic hope.⁵⁴

iii) To say that Christians don't know God's preference begs the question.

vi) To say that redemption can occur without any resurrection is a sheer assertion that makes no effort to engage the Biblical doctrine of redemption.

Martin also has a wooden way of handing probabilities. He says, for example,

It is more probable initially that a king will be drawn from a deck of cards than that the king of hearts will be drawn.⁵⁵

This is true, but you only have to take another comparison to see the limits of a purely mathematical analysis. The odds of a royal flush are about 1 in 650,000 whereas the odds of a straight flush are about 1 in 72,000.

⁵³ ET, 49, 52-53.

⁵⁴ Cf. T. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (2002); *The Servant King* (Regent 2003); A. Motyer, *Look To The Rock* (Kregel 2004); O. Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (P&R 2004); W. VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Zondervan 1988).

⁵⁵ ET, 50.

This means that the odds of drawing 9 straight flushes in a row are about the same as drawing one royal flush. But while I could get away with a royal flush, were I to draw 9 straight flushes in a row, casino security would be fitting me with a pair of concrete galoshes.

Probability theory is unable to capture certain common sense intuitions, especially when personal agents are in view.

In addition, Martin's argument either proves too much or too little. As one philosopher observes:

Mill rightly points out (in agreement with Campbell, Paley, and others) that mere antecedent improbability, in the sense enshrined in the calculus of chances, should not affect the acceptability of some report. If someone tells me that the last hand dealt to him in a game of bridge was AK953 of spades, QJ4 of hearts, K2 of diamonds, and AQJ of clubs, the fact that there are huge odds against just this combination of cards being dealt (I gather it is 635,013,559,599 to 1 against) provides no incentive at all to disbelief. After all, the same odds exist against any combination in a hand of bridge. (This point is at the heart of modern discussions in probability theory of what has become known as "the lottery paradox.") As Mill says, "If we disbelieved all facts which had the chances against them before hand, we should believe hardly anything."⁵⁶

From start to finish, Martin operates with a completely synthetic model of religion. But that is not the target of the book. The target is the resurrection of Christ. Martin is shooting his arrows into the clouds.

⁵⁶ C. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford 1994), 180.

Chapter 3

Theodore Drange attacks the Resurrection as theologically superfluous and even incoherent. He chooses Charles Hodge, the great 19C Reformed theologian, as his foil. There's nothing wrong with this procedure, just the execution:

There is an apparent inconsistency between the atonement and the resurrection. The atonement requires the death of Jesus to be genuine and to be a great sacrifice. But with the resurrection (and subsequent ascension to glory), the death of Jesus is shown not to be genuine and not to be a great sacrifice. Even if this inconsistency could somehow be overcome, just the appearance of it creates a kind of weakness.⁵⁷

By way of reply:

i) A merely “apparent” inconsistency, which falls short of an actual inconsistency, is a pseudo-problem.

ii) Drange is equivocating over the meaning of what constitutes a “sacrificial” death. He is using “sacrifice” in the loose, trivial, secularized sense of giving up something of personal value—whereas Christian theology is using “sacrifice” in the technical, ritual sense of a blood-offering to propitiate the deity.

So Drange manufactures an artificial inconsistency by substituting secular usage for Scriptural usage. What makes the death of Christ “genuine” is that it qualifies as a sacrificial death, in the ritual sense of the term.

Had he bothered to read Hodge on the priestly office of Christ (ST, vol. 2, chap. 6), or the satisfaction of Christ (ST, vol. 2, chap. 7), he could have spared himself this elementary blunder.

Drange then runs through the fourfold argument given by Hodge, in the “abridged” version of his Systematic Theology, for the importance of the Resurrection:

Even if it were true that Christ's resurrection is a sufficient condition for all the factors listed by Hodge (the truth of the gospel, Christ being the Son of God, &c.), it does not follow that it is a necessary condition.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 56.

There are a couple of problems with this objection, of which I'll only comment on one for now, and save the other for later. Coming from a philosophy prof., I find Drange's usage eccentric. In standard philosophical usage, a sufficient condition is inclusive of a necessary condition inasmuch as a sufficient condition is a set of necessary conditions which, in conjunction, yield a sufficient condition.

There are various refinements on this definition, but since Drange seems to be speaking in general terms, his disjunction is not self-explanatory.

Moving on:

Hodge claims that "Christ rose from the dead" entails all of the following nine propositions...But, in fact, it does not entail any of them. For each item in the list it is possible to devise a scenario in which it is false...His resurrection might have been produced by voodoo magic. Or it might have been produced naturalistically, say, through the work of highly advanced extraterrestrials.⁵⁹

By way of reply:

i) This is a misrepresentation of Hodge's argument. Drange is imposing on Hodge a logical framework of necessary and/or sufficient conditionality as well as strict implication, and then faulting Hodge for failing to pass a standard that he never set for himself.

ii) The significance of the Resurrection is a truth of fact, not a truth of reason. In Hodge's theology, God has assigned certain benefits to the Resurrection. The relation between the Resurrection and its beneficiaries is not a consequence of deductive logic, but divine intent.

iii) As a contingent existential proposition, it is, indeed, possible to devise a variety of counterfactual scenarios. In fact, St. Paul makes use of just such contrary-to-fact hypotheticals as a contrapositive argument for the Resurrection (1 Cor 15:13ff.).

iv) The business of voodoo and ETs, which we've run across once before in Cavin (are he and Drange in collusion?) is frivolous and disingenuous since Drange hardly regards his fanciful alternatives as live options.

Drange would presumably counter that this is relevant if Hodge is making a case from the logical necessity of the Resurrection. But, of course, Drange has done

⁵⁹ Ibid., 56-67.

nothing to show that this is either what Hodge had in mind, or ought to have in mind.

Moving on:

A more charitable reading of Hodge's first point would be to interpret the list of relationships to be statements to the effect that the resurrection of Christ is a necessary condition for each of the nine items given.⁶⁰

Whether or not this would be a more "charitable" reading, it is still a straw man argument, for reasons I've already given.

Moving on:

It was the death of Christ, not his resurrection, that was supposed to have atoned for humanity's sins.⁶¹

True, but irrelevant, for there is more to salvation than the atonement in and of itself, for reasons given by Hodge under points #2-3, among other reasons.

Moving on:

[The Gospel] could have been communicated simply by scripture. Or it could have been communicated by skywriting or a thousand other ways. There was no need whatever for the Resurrection to have occurred.⁶²

This piggybacks on a string of cumulative errors, noted above.

Moving on:

Christ could still have been and could still be the Son of God even if his earthly body had been destroyed. It is the spirit and/or soul that is supposed to live on. Jesus commended his spirit to his father (Lk 23:46) and it is his spirit and/or soul that could play the divine role of "Son," just as it was presumably his spirit and/or soul that lived and was the Son of God prior to his advent on earth.⁶³

Where do you begin?

⁶⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁶¹ Ibid., 57.

⁶² Ibid., 57-58.

⁶³ Ibid., 58.

i) For a professor emeritus of philosophy who presumes to critique Christian theology to evince such elementary ignorance of traditional Christology is truly embarrassing. If he had bothered to read Hodge on the person of Christ (ST, vol. 2:400-401), Drange would see that he is reproducing the old Apollinarian heresy. It is simply inept to charge Charles Hodge with inconsistency on the basis of a Christological heresy which Hodge expressly denies. That is not his standard of reference. Quite the contrary!

To make good on his claims, Drange would have to show that Hodge ought to be an Apollinarian, and that this commitment is in conflict with his argument for the Resurrection.

ii) On the one hand, God doesn't have a soul. He is a spirit. Only a man has a soul. On the other hand, the "spirit" which Christ commended to the Father is his human soul. The soul of Christ cannot substitute for the divine Logos, just as the divine Logos cannot substitute for the soul of Christ. Christ is more than God-in-a-body. Rather, Christ is a union of a concrete property-instance of human nature (body & soul) with the divine nature and person of the Logos or Son of God, resulting in a complex, embodied person.⁶⁴

iii) No, the Resurrection doesn't make Jesus the Son of God. That is not Hodge's argument. Hodge is not an adoptionist. The argument, rather, is that his Resurrection functions, among other ways, as a sign of his divine identity. The relation is emblematic rather than constitutive—in much the same way as the Virgin Birth is a sign of his divine identity. If Drange doesn't understand the nature and function of religious symbolism, then he is quite incompetent to evaluate the Resurrection.

Moving on:

“As for “Christ is the Savior of men,” it was the death of Christ that was supposed to have made that true. The subsequent resurrection had nothing to do with it. To think otherwise is to confuse two quite distinct principles of Christian theology, the Atonement and the Resurrection. They are quite independent of each other, both logically and conceptually.⁶⁵

It's pretty cheeky of Drange to suppose that he has a better handle on systematic theology than Charles Hodge. One of Drange's problems is that he doesn't under-

⁶⁴ This confusion also affects his objection to the necessity of the Resurrection on p.62.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 58.

stand what he reads. For example, in the very text which Drange has chosen to comment on, Hodge says, among other things, that “on his resurrection depended the mission of the Spirit, without which Christ’s work had been in vain.”

Wasn’t he paying any attention? And if Drange bestirred himself to read what Hodge has to say on the application of the atonement (ST, vol. 3, chaps. 15-16,18), he would see that the death of Christ or the atonement alone does not save anyone at all. Rather, the work of Christ lays the foundation for the work of the Spirit.

Now Drange would perhaps argue otherwise, but he must to just that—argue his point, and not merely assert it. There’s a reason that systematic theology is called “systematic” theology. You can’t just pluck one doctrine out of the air and attack it in isolation to other related articles of the faith.

But that would take some real effort on Drange’s part, instead of this drive-by shooting. He’d actually have to read Hodge from cover-to-cover, and not just the abridged, Reader’s Digest version, but the whole three-volume magnum opus. Or is it too much to ask of a philosophy prof. that he do some serious reading? Hodge is a cakewalk compared to Hegel or Husserl or Heidegger or Frege or Kripke or McTaggart or David Lewis. And since he’s retired, he has the spare time.

Moving on:

As for “Christ is the Messiah predicted by the prophets,” the question is whether the OT prophets ever predicted that their Messiah would be bodily resurrection from the dead. The only verse put forward as a candidate for such prophecy is Ps 16:10...The idea that the Messiah would die and then come back to life was totally foreign to Judaic theology. So there simply was no such prophecy.⁶⁶

The problem lies in Drange’s atomistic reading of the Bible. This is not a question of isolated proof-texting. Even when the NT quotes a verse of OT Scripture, like Ps 16:10, this is not intended to stand alone, but to trigger a larger set of associations. Ps 16:10, for one, is not just any old Psalm, but a Davidic Psalm, with all that represents.

The NT is in dialogue with an ongoing hermeneutical tradition. What one scholar has said with reference to one NT writer is applicable to all:

⁶⁶ Ibid., 58-59.

The author inherits an interpreted Bible and makes his own, often original, contribution to the interpretive tradition in which he stands.⁶⁷

—an interpretive tradition, I'd add, that's already well underway in the thematic progression of the OT, and which continues in Second Temple Judaism.

The Messianic hope is a theological construct, with a constellation of symbolico-theological themes feeding into it, such as the new Exodus and the new Eden, the new Moses and the new Adam, exile and restoration, Passover and priesthood, temple and tabernacle, individual and corporate resurrection, historical recapitulation and vicarious headship, the divine warrior, the Davidic king, Zion theology, the Servant, the seed of promise, and the Son of man.

There is no short-cut here. It calls for sustained thematic analysis and synthesis—such as can be found in the aforementioned books by Alexander, Motyer, Robertson, and VanGemeren. Or, to take just one particular motif, consider the intricate elaboration of the tabernacular theme in Scripture.⁶⁸

Here's another thumbnail sketch of just one line of argument, one Resurrection-trajectory:

A growing body of opinion, however, recognizes in the pattern of righteous suffering and vindication an ancient and well-documented tradition of Second Temple Judaism. Suggestive OT antecedents include Isaac in Gen 22, Job, Jonah, the righteous servant in Isa 53, the vindicated Son of Man in Dan 7, the murdered firstborn of the house of David in Zech 12:10-13:1, and Psalms like 22, 69, and 118...These biblical texts did engender a definite hermeneutical tradition, attested in literature from both the Second Temple and rabbinic periods (e.g. Wis 2; 2 Mac 6-7; 4 Mac 6,17; 4Q225; cf. B. Ber. 56b; b. Sukkah 52a; Pirque R. El. 31; cf. Yal. 575,581 on Zech)...And the much-queried claim that such vindication was to take place "on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3) may well find its basis in Jo 6:2, which the Targum explicitly applies to the general resurrection.⁶⁹

Moving on:

How about "Christ is the Prophet, Priest, and King of His people"? Could that be true if Christ had never been resurrected? I see no reason why not. All the

⁶⁷ P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans 1993), 39.

⁶⁸ G. Beale, *The Temple & the Church's Mission* (IVP 2004).

⁶⁹ M. Bockmuehl, "Resurrection," *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, M. Bockmuehl, ed. (Cambridge 2001), 115-116.

prophets, priests, and kings who ever lived on our planet were ordinary human beings who died and then remained dead.⁷⁰

Notice a pattern emerging? Drange treats all these at an entirely generic level, as if they had no historical emplacement.

Drange exhibits a vicious cycle which is only too typical of the unbeliever. He doesn't bother to study the Bible because the Bible is bunk. And his ignorance merely serves to reinforce his prejudice.

Way back in Deut 18:18-20 you already have the idea of Moses as an archetypal prophet. Not just a mere mortal, but archetypal of something else—a theme picked up and worked out in Heb 1:1-3; 3:1-4:13.

In the development of the Davidic motif, you have the idea of a Davidic king who is not the mortal, historical David, but an ideal, everlasting Davidic redivivus. From the royal psalms (2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 89; 110; 132), through the preexilic prophets (Isa 9; 11; Micah 5), exilic prophets (Jer 23; 31; 33; Ezk 34-37; 45-46), and postexilic prophets (Haggai; Zech 6) and historians (1 Chron), to Second Temple Judaism,⁷¹ Davidic Messianism is a pervasive and gathering theme before it reaches critical mass with the NT.

In the Book of Hebrews, you have the extended argument involving the iniquity and mortality of the priesthood and multiplicity of offerings, in time and space, as evidence, on the one hand, of the provisional character of that arrangement, and as further evidence, on the other hand, of the exemplary high priest prefigured in this arrangement (2:10-18; 4:14-10:18).

But Drange, in his empty-headed indifference, comes to the text as a blank slate, and then dismisses the summary argument of Hodge because it is so very thin. But it is so very thin because Drange is seizing on half a page of a 900 page systematic theology, as well as ignoring all of the standard exegetical literature published since the 19C. In his skimpy section of footnotes there is not a single reference to a single exegetical work.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁷¹ J. Collins, *The Scepter & the Star* (Doubleday 1995); J. Neusner et al., eds., *Judaisms & Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge 1987).

Imagine if Drange taught a course on Descartes or Hegel or Wittgenstein without any reference to the history of ideas—without any effort to interpret their views in light of the cultural preunderstanding of which they were a part.

Moving on:

Now consider the proposition “Christ’s sacrifice has been accepted as a satisfaction to divine justice.”...So, if Christ has never been resurrected, then mankind would have no way of knowing that its sins had been atoned for by means of Christ’s sacrificial death. But surely that is not so.⁷²

Drange is right in a wrong-headed way. The one doesn’t follow from the other. But the non-sequitur is his, not Hodge’s. Hodge never said that the Resurrection is the only way of knowing that our sins have been atoned. And his statement about divine acceptance does not imply any such thing. Drange is imputing a groundless implication to Hodge, and then faulting Hodge for a non-sequitur of Drange’s own contrivance.

Hodge’s point is if Jesus were a false Messiah, then God would have left him to rot in the grave. The fact that God raised him from the dead goes to show that Jesus was the true Messiah. At issue here is not the means of propagating that fact, but the fact to be propagated.

Moving on:

There is no mention of the Resurrection in any of Hodge’s descriptions of the work of the Holy Spirit in his book, so it is unclear why Hodge would make this statement.⁷³

It is only unclear because Drange hasn’t bothered to read what Hodge has to say about the covenants of redemption and grace (ST, vol. 2:361-363) where Hodge connects the work of Christ with the work of the Spirit.

Now, perhaps he would find fault with Hodge’s argument, but as it stands, he never even engages the argument.

Moving on:

⁷² Ibid., 59.

⁷³ Ibid., 60.

Christ's body could have been destroyed and he could still have had a bodily resurrection in the distant future (perhaps at the time of the Second Coming). All of that could have been made clear in scripture and in other ways as well (e.g., skywriting).⁷⁴

This is true, but irrelevant. Drange says this in reply to Hodge's statement that the resurrection of Christ illustrates our own. And the value of the illustration lies in the timing. It establishes a precedent for things to come.

I assume that Drange is an empiricist. As such, he ought to appreciate the value of precedent, where the pattern of the past serves to shape our future expectations.

No, this is not a matter of deductive logic. It doesn't exclude other logical possibilities. But so what? The admission that a truth of fact may not be governed by relations of strict implication does not render it any less useful or truthful. Drange needs to open a window and let a little fresh air into his musty old study.

The same irrelevant reasoning applies to what he says for the next couple of pages (62-63) about alternative possibilities. Many things are possible that are never actual. Indeed, the actual is only a tiny fraction of the possible. To continually bring up the specter of abstract possibilities is simply irrelevant to the rules of historical evidence.

And even from an abstract standpoint, not all possibilities are equally good. Whether or not there is a best possible world, in the superlative sense, there is certainly a comparative distinction to be drawn between better and worse, and to that extent we can apply the principle of sufficient reason to the case at hand. God attaches certain consequences to the Resurrection, not because these are logically necessary, but because they are teleologically necessary. Indeed, Paul Helm has suggested that Leibniz may be indebted to the supralapsarian teleology of William Twisse.⁷⁵

The question is not whether the means are absolutely necessary. Indeed, what makes them the means rather than the end is that their chief value lies in facilitating a given goal. Their value is instrumental. But by the same token, some means are better adapted to a given end than others. Drange is confounding logic with teleology and axiology.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁵ "All Things Considered," T. Bartel, ed., *Comparative Theology* (SPCK 2003), 104, 109, n.15.

This also infects his criticism of the glorified body as unnecessary since the soul can, according to orthodox theology, survive apart from the body.

True, but there is more at issue here than bare survival. There is also the quality of life. There are certain trade-offs between an embodied and a disembodied state of being. A discarnate being can suffer no pain, but by the same token, no pleasure—in the physical sense.

Likewise, although a dreamer can imagine other people, it takes two bodies to make another actual person. A dream child is not the same as a real child.

I'd add that one doesn't have to have a specific reason for every specific belief. It is sufficient to have a good reason for one's general source of information.

So even if a Christian couldn't answer every one of Drange's questions, that's no cause to disbelieve. Drange believes in all sorts of things for which he has no direct evidence.

Drange says that God "could create a new body...revival of the original body is unnecessary."⁷⁶

It is unclear if this has reference to the resurrection of Christ in particular, or the general resurrection. No, it is not absolutely necessary that the new body replicate the old body. But in the case of Christ, he was recognizable, and still bore the scars of his ordeal. This is not a question of what is necessarily true, but what is merely true. Many things are true without their being necessary truths.

The only alternative is to adopt some version of absolute idealism, a la McTaggart, according to which all relations are internal relations. Is that Drange's position?

Drange also asks how all the departed could be in "the same place" seeing as some are physical beings and others are nonphysical beings.⁷⁷

Since the Bible doesn't answer this question, a Christian doesn't have to answer this question either as long as he has a compelling reason to believe the Bible.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 63.

At the same time, his objection is a special case of the ancient and perennial nominalist/universalist debate, which is, in turn, a general case of the mind/body problem. How do thoughts and things interface?

And how we answer the question, or how we frame the question in the first place, goes to where we place the burden of proof. Do we begin with the phenomena as a given, and formulate a theory consistent with the phenomena?

Or do we begin with certain theoretical restrictions on the range of what's possible? Drange is clearly in the second camp, but this is prejudicial.

We cannot dictate to reality. Contingencies cannot be known in advance of observation, and, from a Christian standpoint, broad swaths of reality cannot be known in advance of revelation, for there is more to reality than meets the eye. Not all there is, including much of what is most important in life, is accessible to direct experience. The sensible world, while real enough as far as it goes, is also an outward sign and palpable exemplum of an insensible reality and impalpable exemplar.

As a philosophy prof., Drange is presumably familiar with this philosophical tradition. There are standing arguments for this position.

Moving on:

The references to overthrowing the kingdom of darkness, the falling of Satan, and the triumph of truth, good, and happiness, are all misplaced. It was the Atonement, not the Resurrection, which accomplished all those great deeds.⁷⁸

If Drange bothered to read Hodge's locus on eschatology (ST, volume 3, part 4), he would see how utterly false this is.

These events await the eschaton. Their accomplishment comes with the return of Christ. And the preparation for that event lies in the resurrection, ascension, and session of Christ, in which capacity he subdues his enemies and directs his church—like a general on a hilltop surveys the field of battle and commands his armies. This is all part and parcel of a consecutive argument in 1 Cor 15.

This is the “theological backing” for Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 15:17. One doesn't have to look around for “some other parts of scripture maintaining a connection be-

⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

tween the Resurrection and the success of the Atonement” to make that connection. You can find it all right here—one-stop shopping. But Drange is unable to read the text in context.

For the sake of argument, this is not the only place in Paul where such a connection is made (cf. Eph 1:19-22; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20), not to mention the argument in Heb 1-2 or the whole of Revelation.

Moving on:

It remains hard to comprehend how anyone could have a bodily resurrection after his/her body has been obliterated.⁷⁹

Seems pretty comprehensible to little old me. A particular body is just a particular organization of matter. Even if the original body is gone, the way to replicate the old body is to replicate its material organization. The same God who organized the matter in the first place has only to reorganize matter according to the same pattern.

Of course, the new body is not exactly the same as the old body, but the same questions of personal identity apply to the natural life-cycle as well. Is the body of a five-year-old the same as that of a fifteen-year-old, or fifty-year old, and so on?

Indeed, the glorified body is not supposed to be exactly the same. It’s supposed to mark a signal improvement over our old, mortal, disease-ridden frame.

Carrier, in chapter 5, documents a range of Jewish speculation on the degree of continuity or discontinuity between the mortal body and the glorified body. So there’s no reason to saddle the Biblical doctrine with an artificial standard of strict, numerical identity.

Moving on:

With the second claim, that the Resurrection showed something to mankind about Jesus of Nazareth; that one, too, is refuted by the fact that billions of people have had no awareness of the event...One would think that an omnipotent deity would have done a better job of advertising (or “marketing”) the Resurrection to mankind.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 66.

Drange seems to be ignorant of the elementary fact that Hodge was a Reformed theologian. The record of the Resurrection need not be accessible to mankind in general, but only to the elect, for whom Christ died. As a practical matter, there will be a spillover effect, but the elect are the target-audience.

Moving on:

At the very least, the resurrected Jesus would not have appeared only to his followers, but also to thousands of other people, thereby making what happened into a genuine historical occurrence.⁸¹

An event has to be witnessed by thousands of observers to count as a “genuine” historical occurrence? Is the birth of a baby or the death of a mother not a genuine historical occurrence unless it is witnessed by thousands of observers? The counterexamples are simply endless.

You see what happens when a man suffers from a doctrinaire denial of the supernatural. Drange is not a dumb man, but he resorts to any dumb argument to attack the Resurrection. His antipathy disarms his critical faculty.

Moving on:

Even if it were widely known that Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead, that in itself does not imply that his alleged message is true. The resurrection could have been accomplished through some sort of magic or superscience.⁸²

Yet another instance, back-to-back, of what dogmatic unbelief will stoop to. As a card-carrying secular humanist, Drange doesn't believe in magic or superscience.

If he were debating with an ufologist or creationist or astrologer, he would pour scorn on any such appeal. But see the double standard when the Resurrection is at issue. If he feels the need to be that unscrupulous, it just goes to show what a weak case he has. You only play with marked cards when you've dealt yourself a losing hand.

⁸¹ Ibid., 66.

⁸² Ibid., 66.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, Price argues, if “argue” isn’t too good a word for his procedure, that 1 Cor 15:3-11 is a spurious interpolation. Before we delve into the details, Edwin Yamauchi has some general comments on the historical integrity of the pericope in question:

No one questions the centrality of Christ’s Resurrection in Paul’s teaching (cf. D. M. Stanley, *Christ’s Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology*, 1961). Nor does anyone deny the genuineness of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, written but 25 years after the crucifixion of Christ. In First Corinthians 15: 1-8 Paul gives a list of the appearances of the risen Christ to various believers including himself. Moreover, Paul says he received this tradition in a manner that indicates its great antiquity. According to M. Carrez:

Framed by these two words, *gospel* and *kerygma*, we find a text and a tradition whose Aramaic tenor, archaic character, and primitive catechetical form have been recently pointed out by B. Klappert. ... The appearance to Peter, confirmed by the allusion to Lk 24,34, and the appearance to James ... show the Jerusalemite character of this tradition. What should we derive from it? That, in any case, this formulation already existed in an established way six years after the events of the redemptive drama at the latest. And that everything concurs in underlining the great antiquity of this formulation [“The Pauline Hermeneutics of the Resurrection,” in F. de Surgy, *op. cit.*, p. 40].⁸³

In the face of counter-arguments by the likes of Frederik Wisse and Murphy-O’Connor, Price says:

I see in such warnings essentially a theological apologetic on behalf of a new *Textus Receptus*, an apologetic not unlike that offered by fundamentalists on behalf of the Byzantine text underlying the King James Version.⁸⁴

But the problem with this analogy is that it breaks down at the fundamental point of comparison, for that is a debate over the relative merits of extant MS evidence, whereas 1 Cor 15:3-11 are attested in all of our surviving MSS and ancient versions. Hence, there is no scrap of hard evidence for Price’s conjectural emendation. His speculation goes against the entirety of the evidence.

Price tries to scale this sheer vertical cliff by backing into the refuge of all intellectual scoundrels—the conspiracy theory. In his version, the “theological winners”

⁸³ <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/yama.html>

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

(i.e. the Catholic or Orthodox party) “suppressed or destroyed all deviant texts and manuscripts.”⁸⁵

Price tries to bolster this quote by citing Bart Ehrman’s sensationally entitled *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*.⁸⁶

By this tactic he attempts to reverse the burden of proof, so that it “rests with any argument that the corpus or, indeed any particular letter within the corpus contains no interpolations.”⁸⁷

Yet such a subversive standard of (non-)evidence is beset by two basic problems:

i) Since Bob Price doesn’t even believe in the authority of Scripture, it wouldn’t make a particle of difference to him if all our extant MSS were identical with the autographa.

ii) Did the early church really have the organizational efficiency as well as enforcement mechanism to recall and destroy all “deviant” MSS and then reissue a standardized text?⁸⁸

The logical quandary for Walker, Price, and Ehrman is the need to postulate primitive diversity in order to postulate its subsequent suppression. But as soon as you posit this preexistent pluralism, it becomes highly unlikely that the theological refugees were unable to preserve any trace of their own textual tradition. How were they able to save “lost books of the Bible” but unable to save lost copies of the Bible?

iii) How do you know where to place or apportion the burden of proof if the surviving MSS are all said to be thoroughly corrupt? If the extant record were that corrupt, then, in the nature of the case, we would lack sufficient independent evidence to correct the record. In the absence of evidence, there is no way to affix the burden of proof since the record can point in no particular direction where there is no surviving evidence to the contrary.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 97-98, n.7.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁸ In place of the historical fantasy that Price et al. would palm off on the reader, cf. R. Beckwith, *Elders in Every City: The Origin & Role of the Ordained Ministry* (Gabriel Resources 2004).

iv) For that matter, if the surviving MSS were systematically corrupted, what would be the remaining evidence that they ever were systematically corrupted in the first place?

Walker says that “all of the extant MSS are remarkably similar in most of their significant features.”⁸⁹ Why is that taken to be evidence that the NT text was “standardized,” rather than evidence of scribal fidelity to the autographa?

To postulate that our textual tradition is generally unreliable does not justify the presumption of a specific interpolation. By definition, the absence of evidence cannot count as evidence for anything in particular. Indeed, Price admits that we are left to the mercy of internal evidence: “aporias, contradictions, stylistic irregularities, anachronisms, and redactional seams.”⁹⁰

v) Ehrman, however, makes his case on the basis of comparative textual criticism, based on different kinds of textual variants.⁹¹ But that would constitute external rather than internal evidence. So Price is citing Ehrman to support a position to which Ehrman does not subscribe

vi) In addition, Ehrman admits that “by far the vast majority [of textual variants] are purely ‘accidental,’ readily explained as resulting from scribal ineptitude, carelessness, or fatigue.”⁹²

vii) Even within the tiny residual of “deliberate” textual variants, Ehrman is pushing the envelope far in excess of the available evidence. As Gordon Fee, a leading textual critic, explains:

Ehrman rightly anticipates (p. 275) that colleagues will disagree with his conclusions in many specific instances (as I do, e.g., on John 1:18; 1 Cor 10:9; Luke 22:19b–20, to name but a few); but such disagreements belong to a different arena. Textually, the primary weakness of the study lies in its strength. In opening our eyes to many variations that might possibly have been motivated in the interest of a more orthodox Christology, Ehrman comes perilously close to overkill. In going back over the discussions in chapter 2 and keeping a “box score,” I found myself convinced as to the reasons for variation in only about one-third of the instances—even though I quite empathize with Ehrman’s basic concerns. One is reminded of G. D. Kilpatrick’s fascination with Atticism.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁹¹ Cf. B. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford 1993), 27–29, 276–278.

⁹² Ibid., 27.

While Ehrman will have broadened our horizons as to a possible cause of corruption for many variants, as with Kilpatrick his tendency to isolate one cause as primary against all others in the variants he discusses fails to persuade. Unfortunately, Ehrman too often turns mere possibility into probability, and probability into certainty, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist.

This study also illustrates our need for precision regarding the “causes of corruption.” For Ehrman there are two: accidental (= “mindless”)—the majority for Ehrman—and deliberate. But that seems far too sanguine. The majority of variants were much more likely “deliberate,” in the sense that they are not the result of mere inadvertence. But there are degrees of deliberation (the mind, after all, adds an article or a subject, but not always “thoughtfully”), so that not all “deliberate corruptions” are as purposeful as Ehrman would make them out to be.

This weakness surfaces at many points, but none more so than in an otherwise uncharacteristic historical faux pas—his treatment of P⁶⁶. In four different instances (on John 6:42 [p. 57]; 10:33 [p. 84]; 19:5 [p. 94]; 19:28 [p. 194]) he cites a unique reading of this MS as evidence for deliberate variation toward a more orthodox Christology. But in each case, the reading cited is that of P^{66*}. The deliberate “corruption,” therefore, does not exist at all, since the correction in each case, which aligns the text with the rest of the MS tradition, was made by the original scribe himself (among hundreds of such). This scribe’s “corrections” are what are clearly deliberate—and these show no interest in Christology (excepting John 11:33, not noted by Ehrman). Significantly, this scribe stands squarely in the middle (ca. 200 CE) of the two centuries of Ehrman’s interest. If Ehrman’s case for “Christological corruption” so clearly fails in our one certain piece of evidence for deliberate variation, then one might rightly question the degree of deliberation in a large number of other variations as well, which seem to have equally good, if not better, explanations of other kinds for their existence.

Thus many of the alleged “Christological” harmonizations, for example, may just as easily have been motivated by the same, apparently less theological, tendencies that prevail in the hundreds of other (non-Christological) harmonizations—unless the “theology” is a “high view” of the sacred text. And to single out such readings in Bezae is especially tenuous, since this MS has a thoroughgoing penchant to harmonize in every possible way—including toward the LXX (contra Ehrman, e.g., p.83). If Matthew and Luke both “correct” Mark—most likely for Christological purposes, but before the controversies—then why are the harmonizations of Mark to Matthew/Luke the result of the controversies? In a study like this do singular readings in codices like 13 [p. 57] or D [p. 61] or 0124 [p. 75] count for anything at all, since their unique readings are so often idiosyncratic? On what grounds can these be traced back to the second-third centuries? Moreover, the tendency to “help out the biblical author” prevails in all kinds of other ways, not just to beef up Christology—although Ehr-

man's study will not let us hereafter neglect that possibility as well. Such a list could go on, but must not.⁹³

Ehrman's recent book, *Misquoting Jesus*, has come in for similar criticism.⁹⁴

In addition, Price blithely ignores all the hard evidence for the stability and antiquity of the canonical text generally, and the Pauline corpus in particular. As David Trobisch has argued in detail:

It does not matter when or where the MS was written, whether it is a majuscule or a miniscule, whether the text was written on papyrus or on parchment; and it does not matter whether the text is taken from the Gospels, the letters of Paul, or the Revelation of John. Any MS of the NT will contain a number of contracted terms that have to be decoded by the reader: the so-called nomina sacra, sacred names.⁹⁵

Aside from the characteristic notation of nomina sacra there is another fascinating observation concerning the canonical edition: from the very beginning, NT MSS were codices and not scrolls.⁹⁶

The arrangement and the number of NT writings in the oldest extant MSS of the Christian Bible provide the most important evidence for describing the history of the canon. Methodologically, varied sequences of the writings in the MSS demonstrate that the writings circulated separately at first and were combined to form different collections later. This statement may also be reversed: if the same number of Gospels, letters of Paul, general letters, &c., are presented in the MSS in the same order, it follows that these MSS are based on an established collection.⁹⁷

⁹³ *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 8 (1995), 204-205.

⁹⁴ http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=4000
<http://www.curtisvillechristian.org/Misquoting.html>
http://www.beliefnet.com/story/188/story_18803_1.html
<http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2006/0200/0206.php>
<http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/biblequran.htm>
http://reformation21.org/Shelf_Life/Shelf_Life/181/?vobId=2930&pm=434
<http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2006/03/misanalyzing-text-criticism-bart.html>
http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2005/12/review-of-bart-ehrman-misquoting-jesus_31.html

⁹⁵ *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford 2000), 11.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

The four oldest extant MSS [Codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, & Ephraemi Rescriptus], which at the time of the production presented a complete edition of the NT, were produced during the 4-5C.⁹⁸

It seems that none of the four MSS served as a master copy for any of the others and that they were produced independently. Furthermore, each of these four MSS constitutes a complete edition of the Christian Bible. They all contain the writings of the OT followed by the NT.⁹⁹

By comparing the sequence of the writings in the four oldest extant editions of the NT, the four collection units of the MS tradition are easily identified: The four-Gospel Book, the Praxapostolos [i.e. Acts], the Letters of Paul, and the Revelation of John.¹⁰⁰

Because most of these MSS were produced after the 5C, at a time when the number of the 27 canonical writings had been firmly established, the division of the NT into collection units does not attest to different stages of the canon. The reason for such a division is probably a purely practical one. Smaller books were easier to bind, transport, and read. In case of loss or destruction, only the affected volume had to be replaced. Moreover, readers were not equally interested in each of the four units; some were clearly more popular than others.¹⁰¹

Examining the titles of the NT writings, one of the first observations is that they are transmitted with few variants. They are structured in the canonical edition in this way: Gospels, Praxapostolos [i.e. Acts], letters of Paul, and Revelation of John.¹⁰²

The titles serve to group the individual writings into collection units. The organizing function is clear for those letters that are numbered: the letters to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy, and the letters of Peter and John.¹⁰³

Three additional groups are easily discerned: the four Gospels, the seven general letters, and the letters of Paul. The titles of the remaining two writings, Acts and Revelation, contain a genre designation in their first part, just like the titles of the three groups do.¹⁰⁴

The archetype of the collection most probably was entitled *he kaine diatheke*, 'The New Testament.' Due to their fragmentary character, the oldest MSS do

⁹⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰² Ibid., 38.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 41.

not preserve the title page. The uniform evidence of the extant tradition, however, strongly suggests that this was the title of the archetype.¹⁰⁵

Trobisch attributes subsequent debate, not to an effort to arrive at a consensus regarding the canon, but to a retrospective argument over the preexisting canon, as codified by standard editions of the entire NT then in circulation.¹⁰⁶

Regarding the Pauline corpus in particular, Trobisch has also argued that Paul was responsible for producing an authorized recension of his own correspondence, inclusive of 1-2 Corinthians.¹⁰⁷

Harry Gamble has argued at length for the early and extensive circulation of the Pauline corpus:

There is therefore substantial evidence that I the early 2C (and probably earlier), there was a collection of ten Pauline letters arranged on the principle of decreasing length and counting together letters addressed to the same community, thus emphasizing that Paul had written to seven churches.¹⁰⁸

There is compelling evidence that some authentic letters of Paul did in fact circulate from an early time in communities other than those to which they were originally addressed. The textual traditions of Romans and 1 Corinthians preserve clear indications that these letters circulated at one time in generalized or catholicized forms from which their local addresses (Rom 1:7,15; 1 Cor 1:2), and perhaps other particulars (Rom 16) had been eliminated in favor of broad designations of their recipients (“Those who are beloved by God” (Rom 1:7), and “those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2b). These editorial revisions were made very early and must have had as their aim the adaptation of these letters for use in communities other than those addressed by Paul. The letters, then, must have circulated individually, before any collection of Paul’s letters, among various Christian communities.¹⁰⁹

Christian writers standing near the juncture of the first and second centuries were familiar with collections of Paul’s letters: Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch were both acquainted with numerous letters of the apostle. Though it is impossible to tell how many letters each knew, that Rome and Antioch were at the extreme poles of the Pauline mission field proves the breadth of their circulation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁷ *Paul’s Letter Collection* (QWP 2001).

¹⁰⁸ *Books & Readers in the Early Church*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

It is generally assumed that Paul had no part in the collecting of his own letters and that those who drew up the earliest edition of the collection did so by gathering copies or partial collections of copies from wherever they were preserved among Pauline churches. This is certainly possible, but it would correspond better with the circumstances and methods of the Pauline mission for the earliest edition of Paul's collected letters had been based on copies retained by Paul and preserved after his death by his associates. It seems unlikely that Paul would have written the kinds of letters he wrote without retaining copies. Ancient writers often kept copies of their private letters even when no particular literary merit or topical importance attached to them, and copies of instructional, administrative letters were all the more likely to be kept. In antiquity, collected editions of letters were nearly always produced by their author or at their author's behest, often from copies belonging to the author. A dossier of Paul's letters would surely have been useful to Paul and his coworkers: it can hardly be supposed that each letter immediately had its intended effect, required no further clarification, and generated no new issues. The letters themselves are proof to the contrary. The tangled correspondence of Paul with the Corinthians, if not typical, certainly indicates that Paul needed to and did keep track of what he had written.¹¹¹

The letters of Ignatius, then, give us a clear instance of the collection and dissemination of a group of Christian writings within a short period... Other things being equal, Paul's letters were far more likely to have been valued, collected, published, and distributed in a shorter time than those of Ignatius. What is not equal would strengthen that possibility: Paul was a church-founding apostle, had well-established and close ties with a number of churches in diverse but contiguous regions, and was survived by a cadre of associates who had been intimately involved in his literary activity. If the less substantial letters of a bishop and prospective martyr were quickly brought together and disseminated as a group, it is all the more probably that similar measures were taken with the apostle's letters several decades previously.¹¹²

Christian texts had the advantage of a circulation over non-Christian literature by virtue of the geographic dispersion of Christian communities and the relations that obtained between them. By the second half of the 1C Christian congregations had been planted across Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy and could be found in most of the major urban centers of the Mediterranean world—Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and Rome. Soon thereafter the Christian mission successfully penetrated the provincial regions of Egypt, Syria, Gaul, and North Africa. These numerous and far-flung Christian congregations, large and small, nevertheless retained a sharp awareness of their collective identity as the *ecclesia katholike* and affirmed their mu-

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 111.

tual relations through frequent communication. The result was a highly reticulated system of local communities that spanned the Mediterranean world but preserved a strong sense of translocal unity and cultivated contacts with each other. Though it was not contrived for that purpose, this network was ideally sited to disseminate texts: it made up a large constituency requiring books and furnished efficient channels to distribute them. Thus, both the motive and the means for the circulation of Christian writings far exceeded those affecting the currency of non-Christian literature and more nearly approach something like mass circulation in the Christian setting than did non-Christian texts in society at large.¹¹³

Hence, there is absolutely no foundation for the claim that our copies of the NT are guilty unless and until proven innocent.

Moving on:

In other words, any clever connect-the-dots solution is preferable to admitting that the text in question is an interpolation. If “saving the appearances” is the criterion for a good theory, then we will not be long in joining Harold Lindsell in ascribing six denials to Peter.¹¹⁴

i) This is just a dodge. The issue is whether it is responsible scholarship to postulate an interpolation in the teeth of unanimous textual tradition. Even if these verses were interpolated, we’d have no way of knowing that.

The question is whether exegetical theology should be guided by the available evidence, or else fly off into fanciful reconstructions which have absolutely no positive evidence in their favor and defy all the available evidence. For all his intellectual pretensions, Price’s alternative is fundamentally anti-intellectual and obscurantist.

ii) To bring Lindsell into the discussion at this point is a non-sequitur, for the question of whether and/or how we harmonize the Gospels is utterly irrelevant to the authenticity of 1 Cor 15:3-11.

Price merely manipulates the discussion as a pretext to weasel in the reference to Lindsell because he feels the need to demean inerrancy at every opportunity, and he will contrive an opportunity if one does not logically present itself.

¹¹³ Ibid., 142. Cf. R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians* (Eerdmans 1998).

¹¹⁴ ET., 72.

The value of Lindsell's book lay, not in its positive case for inerrancy, but in its exposé of "Evangelicals" and "Evangelical" institutions which had departed from inerrancy. From the opposite end of the theological spectrum, James Barr documented the same Evangelical slippage, yet you don't find Price making fun of Barr.

Lindsell's own model of inerrancy was a rough-hewn affair, suffering from a naïve commitment to positivism, which imposes a fact/value disjunction on historiography and judges the accuracy of the historical reportage by a contemporary standard of photographic realism. Ironically, the contributors to ET bring the very same preconception to Scripture. If Price were the least bit serious, he would select a more astute example of the opposing position, such as Carl Henry's six-volume magnum opus,¹¹⁵ or the stream of hefty ICBI publications. But he's clearly not up to the challenge.

Moving on:

One of the favorite harmonizations used by scholars is the convenient notion that when Paul sounds suddenly and suspiciously Gnostic, for example, it is still Paul, but he is using the terminology of his opponents against them.¹¹⁶

The retrojection of "Christian Gnosticism" into the NT era is a linchpin of the Jesus Seminar. Unfortunately for Price and his fellow poseurs, there is simply no hard evidence that Gnosticism was in play at the time of writing.¹¹⁷

Moving on:

Warfield, who set up a gauntlet he dared any proposed biblical error to run. Any alleged error in scripture must be shown to have occurred in the original autographs, which, luckily, are no longer available.¹¹⁸

i) Once again, this has absolutely no bearing on the authenticity of 1 Cor 15:3-11. Price only drags this in, in part, to take another swipe at inerrancy, and in large part to pad his argument and thereby distract the reader since he has no evidence whatsoever for his particular contention and must, indeed, oppose non-evidence to the

¹¹⁵ *God, Revelation & Authority* (Crossway 1999).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹⁷ Cf. T. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined* (Mellen Press 1988); M. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton 1996); R. Wilson, *Gnosis & the New Testament* (Philadelphia 1968); E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Baker 1983).

¹¹⁸ ET, 73.

solid wall of contrary evidence.

ii) Moreover, Wisse and Warfield are saying two very different things. Wisse is arguing for the presumptive integrity of the copies while Warfield is arguing for the presumptive integrity of the autographa in contrast to the copies. So, if anything, Warfield's appeal is a bit inconsistent with Wisse.

iii) Taken by itself, Warfield's appeal is open to the charge of special-pleading. Let us remember, though, that this appeal, if defective, is a defect, not in Scripture itself, but in a particular apologetic strategy.

Let us also remember that Warfield was about 30 years old when he collaborated with A. A. Hodge on this article. It doesn't necessarily represent his own most mature formulation. And, indeed, to quote from this one article is deliberately misleading, for it presents a very lop-sided view of Warfield's overall position. Just consider the following:

As a matter of fact, the great body of the Bible is, in its autographic text, in the worst copies of the original texts in circulation; Practically the whole of it is in its autographic texts in the best texts in circulation; and he who will may today read the autographic text in large stretches of Scripture without legitimate doubt, and, in the NT at least,¹¹⁹ may know precisely at what rarely occurring points, and to what not very great extent, doubts as to the genuineness of the text are still possible.

Another curiosity of controversy is found in the representation that the Church, in affirming the entire truthfulness and trustworthiness of the genuine text of Scripture, asserts that this text is wholly free from all those difficulties and apparent discrepancies which we find in "the Scriptures as we have them." Of course the Church has never made such an assertion. That some of the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in current texts disappear on the restoration of the true text of Scripture is undoubtedly true. That all the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in the current texts of Scripture are matters of textual corruption, and not, rather, often of historical or other ignorance on our part, no sane man ever asserted...The Church does indeed affirm that the genuine text of Scripture is free from real discrepancies and errors; but she does not assert that the genuine text of Scripture is free from those apparent discrepancies and other difficulties, on the ground of which, imperfectly investigated, the errancy of the Bible is usually affirmed.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Warfield wrote before the discovery of the DSS, which have done much to corroborate the MT as well.

¹²⁰ *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, J. Meeter, ed. (P&R 1980), 2:584-585.

iv) When critics say that Scripture is full of contradictions, their case usually consists, in large part, of nominal and numerical discrepancies, whether actual or apparent, in the text of Scripture. Since, however, names and numbers are precisely the sort of data which are most susceptible to mistranscription, it is not special-pleading to raise the possibility of mistranscription in such instances.

v) I'd add, even in this special case, that conservative scholars don't limit themselves to a text-critical defense of the Bible when dealing with such phenomena, but also draw our attention to such cultural conventions as the distinction between proper names, nicknames, family names, titular names, dual names, accession-dating, antedating, double-dating, dual-dating, coregencies, interregna, overlapping reigns, &c.

vi) Price is assuming that Warfield's remarks are directed solely at liberals. But lower criticism is still controversial in some conservative circles, as he himself makes note of. There was, for example, the old-fashioned view that the diacritical marks of the MT were divinely inspired.

vii) If we had no compelling reason to presuppose the inerrancy of Scripture, then it would amount to special-pleading to preempt the possibility of error as a live exegetical option. But, of course, there is a constructive case to be made for the inerrancy of Scripture, and it is within that evidentiary and philosophical framework that apparent errors find their point of reference.

The possibility of error presupposes certain truth-conditions, while the identification of error presupposes a standard of truth.

Although Butler's axiom that probability is the very guide of life is valid up to a point, yet probability is a comparative concept—relative to a standard of certitude. Everything in life cannot be uncertain. For we are only uncertain in relation to something of which we are more certain. Certainty is the yardstick of probability. And revelation supplies the yardstick.

The explanatory power of God's word is what makes explanation possible. Facts without values are literally meaningless. Only the Creator of the world is in a position to interpret the world. If there is an omniscient mind, and if that omniscient mind has revealed to us a finite, but interpreted body of knowledge about the way things are, then we know as much as we need to know.

Moving on:

It is worth noting that the arguments of Wisse and his congeners would seem to mirror precisely those of fundamentalists who dismiss source criticism as groundless and speculative. After all, we don't have any actual MSS of J, E, P, or Q, do we? Walker and Munro, it seems to me, are simply extending the analytical tools of the classical source critics into textual criticism. Would Wisse and the others argue, as the Old Princeton apologists once did, that we must uphold Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or the unitary authorship of Isaiah until these traditional views are "proven guilty"? I doubt it.¹²¹

This calls for a number of comments:

i) The fact is that most of what passes for source criticism is groundless speculation. All that Price does here is to prop up one groundless form of lower criticism by appeal to an equally groundless form of higher criticism. This sort of argument, if you can call it that, is only impressive for someone whose ears are attuned to a liberal echo chamber.

ii) Conservatives don't object to source criticism when a book of the Bible gives some indication of its sources. The problem is when liberals disregard the self-witness of Scripture and proceed to contrive tendentious criteria which they then invoke to postulate nonexistent and non-verifiable sources. What you end up with is a thin tissue of inferences that have little or no inherent plausibility, individually considered, and which, when multiplied, are raised to an exponential power of improbability. The more they kindle, the more they dwindle.

Any hypothetical reconstruction of the record can be no better than the raw materials. Indeed, it can only be worse. For the critic has no independent information to go on, whereas the original writer did have additional materials at his disposal.

If the Biblical record is deemed to be unreliable as it stands, then any hypothetical reconstruction will be even less reliable since it begins with what it takes to be an unreliable source in the first place. If the original record was in touch with reality, then a reconstruction will be at one or more degrees of separation from the historical event. And if the original record was already out of touch with reality, then a reconstruction will not bring it back into contact with reality, but will just be fictitious variant—like the literary evolution of the Faust myth.

¹²¹ Ibid., 99.

The reconstruction is always moving away from the historical event. If the original record was in step with reality, then a reconstruction is one or more steps removed from reality. If the original is out of step with reality, then a reconstruction is a second-order fiction. So the whole exercise is nonsense on steroids.

iii) As a matter of fact, even liberals gave up on JEDP years ago.¹²²

iv) No, we should not uphold the traditional authorship of Scripture until proven guilty. For that way of positioning the onus assumes that this is a merely provisional position, open to renegotiation.

To the contrary, this is an article of faith. It can only be surrendered if the Christian faith is surrendered.

The Christian faith presents itself to the world as a revealed religion. And a revealed religion is a package-deal. Either it was divinely revealed or it wasn't. There is either historical revelation, or there isn't. There is either historical redemption or there isn't.

This doesn't come in degrees and fractions and percentiles. If the Bible is only partly inspired, although it claims to be wholly inspired, then we can't go behind the record of revelation to tell which is which, for the record is all we have to go by.

If only some of the reported events actually happened, although the record says they all happened, then we can't go behind the historical record to tell which is which, for the record is all we have to go by.

If Scripture claims to be wholly true, but is only partly true, then the claim is wholly false.

If the God of the Bible isn't all he seems to be, then we are in no independent position to tell what he is really like.

When an apostate changes his view of Scripture, he also changes his view of God. If he still believes in a God, the God he believes in is a more opaque, inscrutable

¹²² Cf. "Pentateuchal Criticism, History of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, T. Alexander & D. Baker, eds. (IVP 2003), 622-631.

deity than before—a God who cannot or will not reveal himself in definitive fashion or act in decisive fashion.

v) Sure, we can postulate Q. Since, for example, Luke indicates that he made use of multiple-sources (Lk 1:1-4), we can slap a label on that, if we wish. But Q is a cipher, not a source. It's just a way of referring to his sources, without telling us what they were. The act of labeling doesn't move us from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge.

Sure, we can try to isolate and identify Q as non-Markan material shared in common by Matthew and Luke. But that still doesn't tell us where Matthew or Luke got his non-Markan material. Q has no explanatory power. To suppose otherwise is to confound an explanation with a disguised description.

Moving on:

The stubborn fact remains: in Galatians, Paul tells his readers that what he preached to them when he founded their church was not taught him by human predecessors. In 1 Cor 15 he is depicted as telling his readers that what he preached to them when he founded their church was taught him by human predecessors.¹²³

This is a specious contradiction, suspended on a simplistic equivocation of terms. A little time spent with some of the standard commentaries would clear this up in a jiffy:

Many agree that he was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, and these facts were passed on to him by the tradition. His early mission partners, Barnabas and Silva/Silvanus, came from the Jerusalem church, and Paul also spent time, however brief, with Peter (see Gal 1:18). In Gal 1:11-12, he does not have in view the historical details on which the gospel is based but the interpretation of what those facts mean...Paul asserts in Gal 1:11-12 that he came to understand the theological ramifications of Christ's death and resurrection through a revelation from Christ and did not receive it from another's interpretation, which his limited contact with the other apostles proves (Gal 1:15-2:21).¹²⁴

There may seem to be a formal contradiction...but there is no material contradiction...Paul's gospel—Jesus Christ is the Son of God; Jesus Christ is the risen Lord—was revealed to him on the Damascus road. No doubt he had heard such claims made for Jesus in the days of his persecuting zeal, but it was not the

¹²³ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁴ D. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker 2003), 683-684.

witness of the persecuted disciples that convinced him. He rejected their witness as blasphemous until he learned the truth by unmediated disclosure from heaven. On the other hand, facts about the life and teaching of Jesus, about his death, burial and resurrection appearances, were imparted to him after his conversion by those who had prior knowledge of them (see on vv18f.).¹²⁵

It is a mistake, however, to read such statements apart from their contexts, or to set them in rather wooden opposition to one another. Paul's gospel given him by revelation was not a message that differed in kerygmatic content from that of the early church. Rather, it was a message that included a new understanding of what might be called the "redemptive logistics" for these final days—i.e., (1) a direct outreach to Gentiles apart from Judaism's rituals, (2) authentic Christian living for Gentiles apart from a Jewish lifestyle, and (3) the equality of Jewish and Gentile believers in the Church. As for the basic content of the gospel, Paul was dependent on those who were his Christian predecessors, as his repeated use of early Christian confessional materials indicates.¹²⁶

The fact that Price doesn't acquaint the reader with an alternative viewpoint, one which happens to be a standard harmonization of the exegetical data, says a lot about his character, or lack thereof.

In addition, it's unlikely that Paul had no first-hand knowledge of Christ. Given that Paul studied in Jerusalem, had access to the high priest (Acts 9:1), had a sister who lived in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16), and happened to be in town when Stephen was martyred (Acts 8:1), we would expect this observant Jew to be in town for the Jewish holidays at the same time that Jesus came to town for Jewish holidays.

Indeed, it's striking that Price ignores 2 Cor 5:16, in which Paul clearly indicates some preconversion knowledge of the historical Christ. As Murphy-O'Connor observes:

It is important to try to determine what Paul knew about Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom he was about to encounter. Inevitably this controlled and channeled his perception. That he did know something is certain, for he later confessed, "we have known Christ in a fleshly way" (2 Cor 5:16).

What sort of knowledge of Jesus might a 1C Jew have had, and particularly a Pharisee?...Josephus, the 1C Palestine-based Jewish historian who claimed to be a Pharisee, mentions Jesus twice.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans 1988), 88.

¹²⁶ R. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Word 1990), 24.

¹²⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford 1996), 73.

After distinguishing the Christian interpolations from the authentic portion of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, he goes on to say:

It is inconceivable that [Paul] should have persecuted Christians without learning something about the founder of the movement. Paul the Pharisee certainly was in a position to discover as much as Josephus did.¹²⁸

As another scholar observes:

Paul is suggesting that he knew, or knew of, the historical Jesus, the Jesus “according to the flesh.” Historically speaking, this is quite probable. Jesus was prominent in Jerusalem during his years of public ministry, especially in his last year from the Feast of Tabernacles to the Feast of Dedication (October to December) and at the time of the Feast of Passover (April), when the observant young rabbi, Saul of Tarsus, converted within a year or two of the First Easter, would (probably) have been in Jerusalem. Grammatically, Paul’s “we know” suggests that he continued to remember Jesus as he had then noticed him.¹²⁹

Price is certainly acquainted with this verse, as well as the overlapping lives of Christ and Paul, in time and place. He chooses to pass over this information in silence because it would inconvenience his theory. And he can trust in the general ignorance of the reader.

Another methodological weakness with Price’s speculative treatment of 1 Cor 15:3-11 is that he isolates this pericope from parallel Pauline invocations of primitive tradition. These rise or fall together. As Paul Barnett points out:

Here I could develop a case from what Paul himself wrote; his letters are historically the earliest written part of the New Testament. Instead, however, I will concentrate not on Paul’s own words but to words earlier than his which he quotes within his letters, in particular to words within First Corinthians, words—which says—he “received” from those before him.¹³⁰

First Corinthians, written c. 55 is not the earliest letter to refer to such “received” information, to “traditions.” The two Thessalonian letters, written c. 50, use the critical “tradition” vocabulary, suggestive of pre-Pauline material that Paul, in turn, had verbally “handed over” to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:1). Among this pre-Pauline, un-

¹²⁸ Ibid., 75

¹²⁹ P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1997), 295.

¹³⁰ See A.M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors*, (London: SCM, 1961); B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (London: SCM, 1979).

Pauline¹³¹ material the teaching about the unheralded nature of the Parousia clearly originated in the teaching of the Master (1 Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:42; Luke 12:39;¹³² cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

The most probable moment Paul “received” such information was after his conversion at Damascus in the context of his baptismal instruction.

Before proceeding further, two important related chronological facts should be noted. One is that about seventeen years separated the first Easter A.D. 33¹³³ from Paul’s arrival in Corinth in A.D. 50.¹³⁴ Both these dates are now widely supported through research, the former in particular by two Cambridge astronomical scientists, Humphreys and Waddington. The other chronological fact is that fourteen years separates Paul’s conversion from the beginnings of formal mission work among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1,9). If to this period of fourteen years we add the two or three years it must have taken for Paul to reach Corinth we arrive at approximately the same span as between Jesus’ Easter and Paul in Corinth—about 17 years.¹³⁵ If we regard Paul in Corinth in A.D. 50 as a fixed point and work back from there we conclude that Paul’s conversion occurred very close in time to the first Easter, in all probability within less than a year of it.

Thus, contrary to widespread belief, Paul the Jew, Paul the Pharisee is actually a very early convert to Christ and he was converted on a road between Jerusalem and Damascus, only several days distant. Paul is not a Greek converted many years later at a place geographically and culturally remote from Israel.

¹³¹ So Hunter, op. cit. 129.

¹³² Revelation 3:3; 16:15; cf. Hunter, op. cit. 126-127.

¹³³ A.D. 33 is the date favoured here for the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus. See C.J. Humphreys & W.G. Waddington, *Nature* 306 (1983), 743-746; *Nature* 348 (1990), 684.

¹³⁴ See C.J. Hemer, “Observations on Pauline Chronology,” in *Pauline Studies* ed. D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), 6-9. For a survey of opinion on Pauline chronology see A.J.M. Wedderburn, “Some Recent Pauline Chronologies,” *Expos. Times* 92/4 (1981), 103-108.

¹³⁵ It is difficult to envisage a period much less than 17 years elapsing between Paul’s call/conversion and his arrival in Corinth:

a. Fourteen years separated his call/conversion and the missionary meeting in Jerusalem (assuming Paul is calculating this as from his conversion). At this meeting it was agreed that Barnabas and Saul should “go” to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1,7-9). Because part years were then counted as full years it is possible that the period may have been not much more than 13 years.

b. An estimated 2-3 years must be allocated for all that happened between that missionary meeting in Jerusalem and his arrival in Corinth: Acts Antioch -> Cyprus & central Anatolia -> Antioch 13-14 Antioch -> Jerusalem -> Antioch 15 Antioch -> central Anatolia -> Mysia -> Macedonia -> Achaia -> Corinth 16-17

This closeness in time between Paul’s conversion and the historic Jesus—which is not often given the weight it deserves—has two profound implications for the integrity of those traditions which Paul was to “receive.” First, traditions about Jesus formulated within the Jerusalem church in so brief a period are unlikely to have been distorted precisely because the period was so brief.¹³⁶ Second, it would be incredible if such traditions did not reflect the mind of the Master who had been so recently with the disciples.

Turning now to traditions embedded within 1 Corinthians, which—explicitly or implicitly¹³⁷ Paul had “received”—we note four teachings:

- i. The husbands and wives among God’s holy people should not separate, but if they do, they must remain unmarried or else be reconciled (7:12-13; Mark 10:2-10).
- ii. Those who proclaim the gospel should get their living through the gospel (9:14; Luke 10: 7; Matthew 10:10).
- iii. On the night of his betrayal Jesus spoke words and took actions with a loaf and a wine cup which pointed to his death for his disciples, words and actions, he said, they were to “do in remembrance of [him]” (11:23-26; Mark 14:22-25).
- iv. A four-part formula was the basis both of the apostles’ proclamation and the church’s credo (15:11), namely:
that Christ had died for the sins of his people according to the scriptures,
that he had been buried,¹³⁸

¹³⁶ An observation made long ago by the distinguished historian of religions A.D. Nock rebutting the reconstructions of Bultmann. See A.D. Nock, “A Note on the Resurrection,” in *Essays on the Trinity and Incarnation* ed. A.E.J. Rawlinson (London: Longmans, 1933), 47-50.

¹³⁷ The absence of the “received” vocabulary in regard to 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 and 9:14—or 1 Thessalonians 4:15—is no reason to believe these sayings were “received” at a time later than the traditions in 11:23-26 and 15:3-5 where the “received” vocabulary is used. Most probably the disciples remembered well the Master’s distinctive teaching about marriage, the support of the missionary and the sudden nature of the *parousia* so that such teachings were secure within the earliest tradition of the Jerusalem church when Paul the Christian first came to Jerusalem. On the sayings of Jesus in the writings of Paul see generally, D.L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); D.C. Allison, “The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: The Pattern of the Parallels,” *NTS* 28 (1982) 1-31.

¹³⁸ It is sometimes claimed that Paul knows nothing of the “empty tomb” tradition so prominent in Mark 16 and John 20. It should be noted, however, that the verb translated “buried” really means “en-tombed” (ejtavfh). Although each evangelist prefers the word *mnhmei’on* as the location of Jesus’ burial (Matthew 27:60; 28:8; Mark 16:2,3,5,8; Lk 24:2,9,12,22,24; John 24:1,2,3,4,6,8,11), the word *tavfo Itaphos* is also used by Matthew as a synonym (Matthew 27:61,64,66; 28:1). If Christ died and was “entombed,” the implication surely is that when he was raised on the third day, the “tomb” was indeed empty. Thus the “received” tradition appears to

that he had been raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he had appeared to persons listed on a number of occasions (15:3-5).

The closeness in time of these traditions to Jesus makes it probable that they reflect Jesus' own teachings and self-disclosure in the following areas:

1. Jesus saw himself to be the Messiah of Israel whose mission was in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.
2. Jesus regarded his death as the instrument by which he dedicated the Twelve forgiven, to God as the seed of the new covenant people of God. Since the "three day" tradition is deeply rooted in the sayings of Jesus it is likely that he foresaw his resurrection after "three days."¹³⁹
3. Jesus envisaged his continuing covenant people "remembering" him in a cultic meal.
4. Jesus foresaw a continuing covenant people whose families would observe a stringent marital code.
5. Jesus anticipated ongoing work of mission and therefore of missionaries and their need to be financially supported through their work.

But these teachings about Jesus from the earliest faith community, the Jerusalem church—which we regard as historically secure because of the brevity factor and which almost certainly reflect or are consistent with Jesus' own view of himself and his mission—are very different from the reconstructions of the scholars within the "new quest" school who diminish Jesus, regarding him as nothing more than a charismatic rabbi or prophet, lacking uniqueness of any kind.¹⁴⁰ Doubtless there were numerous other such teachings "received" by Paul from the Jerusalem church and "handed over" to the Corinthians. It was only because of aberrations regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper and of belief in regard to the resurrection of the dead that caused Paul to rehearse those matters in 1 Corinthians. It is reasonable to argue that there were many other "traditions" about Jesus and from the Jerusalem church which are unmentioned because there was no pastoral need to do so.

exclude the notion that the "appearances" of the risen Lord were in some merely visionary or subjective manner. The "entombment" confirms both the reality of the Messiah's death and, when taken the "appearances," confirms the physical reality of his bodily resurrection.

¹³⁹ John. 2:19; Lk. 13:31-35; Matthew 12:40-41; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34. By contrast the "first day" rests in the narrative rather than the sayings' tradition (Mark 16:2; John 20:1; cf. John 20:19,26; 1 Cor 16:2; Acts 20:7).

¹⁴⁰ So E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, (London: SCM, 1984), 240, 318, 320.

In passing, it is worth noting that in the general period of Jesus there were a number of “charismatic” leaders with substantial followings—e.g. Judas the Galilean, Barabbas the revolutionary, Theudas the prophet—in each case their movements ceased with deaths of the leader. By contrast the followers of Jesus continued as a movement after his death. There is no break in continuity between Jesus and the disciples from the ministry period and the birth of the first church in Jerusalem. Our argument here is that the early tradition referred to by Paul corroborates the general picture of Jesus presented in the gospels as opposed to the humanist reconstructions in the minimizing stream of the “new quest.”

More could be said. One could point, for example, to the Aramaic words—*abba, mara*¹⁴¹—embedded in Paul’s letters. These words—because they are in the vernacular Aramaic—reflect the influence of the earliest Jewish faith community on the apostle Paul in critical aspects of Christ’s identity (“Son of God” and “Lord”) which are supposedly of Hellenistic cultural influence. But these words reflect the Aramaic—not the Hellenistic origin—of Jesus (1) as the “Son” of his *Abba*, Father and (2) as the “Lord” who was invoked *marana tha* “Lord, come [back].”¹⁴² While the dating of Paul’s exposure to these aramaisms about Jesus is less secure than the traditions embedded in 1 Corinthians, along with those traditions they point consistently to a Jewish not a Hellenistic well-spring. That well-spring—almost certainly—was the Jerusalem church, which in turn—because of the brevity factor—must have been sourced by Jesus himself. These words strongly imply that Jesus was invoked as *Mara* and the God of Israel as *Abba*, his Father. Prayer to the Father was through the Son, in whose name the *Amen*—another Aramaism—was uttered.¹⁴³ Reconstructions of Jesus merely as a charismatic rabbi/prophet of first century Judaism cannot explain these pre-Pauline Aramaisms which individually and together imply an early, “high” Christology, which are specifically un-Hellenistic, but Jewish, in character.

This line of argument serves to point up the importance of Paul. It should not pass unnoticed that not only are the “received” traditions from and about Jesus very early, going right back to the immediate aftermath of Jesus and beyond that to the ministry of the Master himself, Paul’s letters are themselves early. Indeed, their earliness is not in dispute. Whatever the uncertainties of dating the Gospels-Acts, the letters of Paul are almost universally agreed to have been written c. A.D. 48-65. The importance of Paul is that his letters and the non-Pauline, pre-Pauline traditions from and about Jesus which Paul had “received” stand as a roadblock against whatever heterodox views of Jesus may be raised against him.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 16:22.

¹⁴² Revelation 22:20.

¹⁴³ 2 Corinthians 1:20.

¹⁴⁴ http://old.anglicanmedia.com.au/old/pwb/importance_of_paul.htm

Continuing with Price:

If the claim of 500 witnesses were early tradition, can anyone explain its total absence from the gospel tradition?¹⁴⁵

i) If the Gospels were to explicitly reference this event, then Price and his cohorts would simply dismiss that claim as a polemical embellishment, in much the same way as they dismiss the account of the guards stationed at the tomb (Mt 27-28). If it were attested in all four gospels, they'd say that Matthew, Luke, and John were dependent on Mark, then say that the Markan account was, a best, a record of mass hysteria.

ii) The event in question could well be the Easter appearance recorded in Mt 28:16-20. The reason no mention is made of the larger body of witnesses is that Matthew prefers, for theological reasons, to focus on the commissioning of the Apostles.¹⁴⁶

iii) It is only natural for the four Gospels to focus on the Apostolic witness to the Resurrection—the witness of the Twelve, minus Judas—of those who had been with Jesus throughout his ministry (Acts 1:21-22).

Since Paul is, by contrast, an outsider, it is only natural that he should cast a wider net.

Again, Price is presumably familiar with the exegetical literature on this subject. The fact that he keeps that information from the reader is yet another example of the way in which he skews the evidence.

In the next section he resorts to apocryphal materials from the so-called Gospel of Thomas,¹⁴⁷ Gospel according to the Hebrews,¹⁴⁸ and what he himself identifies as “legendary tales passed along by Hegesippus”—as well as a “late Syriac hagiography [entitled] The History of John the Son of Zebedee.”¹⁴⁹ The fact that he has to pad his case with such unhistorical rubbish just goes to show that his own case is intellectual rubbish.

¹⁴⁵ ET, 80.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 2000), 1206.

¹⁴⁷ A 4C Gnostic Gospel, with antecedents in a 2C apocryphal gospel.

¹⁴⁸ Which we only know of, second-hand, from Jerome.

¹⁴⁹ ET, 101, n.60.

In the next section he tries to trump up a rivalry between Peter and James by appealing to the following:

Material in the NT that is polemically aimed at James and the heirs (Jn 7:5; Mk 3:21,31-35) as well as pro-Peter polemic (Mt 16:18-19) and anti-Peter polemic (Mark's story of his denials of Christ, hardly neutral material), followed by the denial narratives of all the gospels; contrast the milder Johannine shadowing of Peter in favor of the Beloved Disciple. A James versus Peter conflict is as plausible a Sitz-im-Leben for such materials as any.¹⁵⁰

The point of this exercise is to reduce 1 Cor 15:7 to a “catholizing harmonization.”¹⁵¹ But his argument is rather bizarre on several different levels:

i) Price takes a broadly Bauerian view of NT history.¹⁵² But on that hypothesis, it would be radically inconsistent for Paul or a deutero-Pauline forger to harmonize Pauline theology with the Petrine-Jacobean wing of the church. If anything, we'd expect a deutero-Pauline forger to take Pauline theology in a more radically Marcionite direction

ii) Why assume that these Gospel accounts represent any sort of polemical or anti-polemical agenda? Why not take them at face-value as candid descriptions of morally flawed Apostles?

iii) The fact, moreover, that you have differences of emphasis among different Apostles does not entail a fundamental disagreement over the nature of the Gospel. As one scholar has put it:

Peter's primary focus was his ministry toward the Jews. The point is that for believing Jews who wished to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity, the continued practice of Judaism did not create problems of theological principle; therefore, the Jerusalem apostles did not find it necessary to “preach” its discontinuance. But in the context of the Judaizing heresy among Gentiles, that was precisely what Paul had to preach.

At the very least, we may be fairly certain that, as part of their agreement with Paul, the Jerusalem apostles would not be expected to preach against the specific custom of circumcision among believing Jews, whereas Paul would be expected to condemn that practice among his Gentile converts.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵² http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/rev_ludetwo.htm

¹⁵³ M. Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Baker 1996), 156-157.

And as David Wenham puts it:

This thesis of a radical divide between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity may appear to be contradicted, partially at least, by the evidence of the book of Acts: the author of Acts describes a sharp conflict in the early church, but he portrays the apostles, Paul and James—i.e., the leading figures in the church—as working together and reaching agreement over the controversial issues (chs. 15,21)...But this view of things has been seen, in effect as a Lukan cover-up.

As for Luke's portrayal of Paul as conciliatory, there is nothing in Acts that obviously contradicts the Paul of the epistles. A comparison of Acts 15 with Galatians 1-2 raises some interesting questions about chronology, but the picture is identical with regard to the positions of the leading participants in the debate about Gentiles and the Law. Galatians suggests a spectrum of positions; Paul on the leftwing standing for Gentile freedom; Barnabas with Paul, though wavering (note "even Barnabas" in Gal 2:13), Peter being challenged by Paul in terms that suggest that his real convictions are with Paul, even if he fell into serious inconsistency; James, who is associated with the conservative rightwing (2:12) but who joins Peter and John in endorsing Paul's ministry (2:9), and on the far right the troublemakers who insist that Paul's Gentile converts be circumcised.¹⁵⁴

Paul and James address quite different situations. Paul's concern when he attacks "justification by works" is to defend Gentile Christians from the demands of those Jews or Jewish Christians who want them to be circumcised and brought under the Jewish Law. James' attack on "Justification by faith without works" has nothing to do with Jews and Gentiles. His concern is, rather, with Christians whose lack of love and charity make a mockery of their profession of belief.¹⁵⁵

Price even tries to bolster his sagging case by appealing to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas—a darling of the Jesus Seminar.¹⁵⁶

Moving on:

If the author of this passage [1 Cor 15:3-11] were himself an eyewitness of the resurrection, why would he seek to buttress his claims by appeal to a thirdhand

¹⁵⁴ G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, D. Hagner, ed. (Eerdmans 1996), 689-690.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 692.

¹⁵⁶ For a critical analysis of this late Gnostic apocryphon, cf. C. Blomberg, "Tradition & Redaction in the Parables of the Gospel of Thomas," *Gospel Perspectives* 5:177-205.

list of appearances formulated by others and delivered to him? Had he forgotten the appearance he himself had seen?¹⁵⁷

Again, we see how unbelief betrays a smart man into making a dumb comment. Paul's appeal is a commonplace of apologetics: "Don't just take my word for it. What about all these other folks?" Nothing could be more obvious.

Moving on:

We are faced with a similar problem in the case of the old claim for the apostolic authorship of the (so-called) Gospel of Matthew. All scholars now admit that the author of this gospel simply cannot have been an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus, since he employs secondary sources (Mark and Q), themselves patchworks of well-worn fragments. It is just inconceivable that an eyewitness apostle would not have depended upon his own recollections.¹⁵⁸

You have to hand it to Price—he has a real knack for cramming the maximum amount of error into the minimum amount of space:

i) "All scholars"? This is just a flat-out falsehood. A number of scholars either affirm the traditional authorship of Matthew or remain open to the possibility, viz., D. Black, Blomberg, Carson, France, Gundry, Guthrie, Hagner, Keener, Morris, Ridderbos, J.A.T. Robinson, J. Wenham, and Zahn.

ii) Markan priority is just a hypothetical solution to the synoptic problem. Even Markan prioritists will readily admit that a detailed reconstruction of the literary interdependence is beyond our reach. Moreover, Markan priority is not the only reasonable solution to the synoptic problem.¹⁵⁹

iii) Even assuming Markan priority, it is demonstrably false to say that an eyewitness would necessarily rely on nothing but his own recollections. To document the evident falsity of this claim, we need go no further afield than Price's own example. His personal deconversion story is stuffed with footnoted references to the sec-

¹⁵⁷ ET, 88.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵⁹ E.g., D. Black, *Why Four Gospels?* (Kregel 2001); D. Neville, *Arguments from Order in Synoptic Source Criticism* (Mercer U Press 1994); *Mark's Gospel: Prior or Posterior?* (Sheffield 2002); B. Orchard & H. Riley, *The Order of the Synoptics* (Mercer U Press 1987); J. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (SCM 1976); E. Sanders & M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (SCM 1989); J. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke* (IVP 1992).

ondary source materials.¹⁶⁰ So is it “just inconceivable” that Price wrote the memoir bearing his name? Should we indulge in a lot of fancy source criticism to see if we can discover the true author of this pseudonymous work?

iv) How does he know that Q is a patchwork of well-worn fragments? After all, our only source for the Q source would be Matthew and Luke. So any further attempt to get behind the source of the source is inherently circular.

v) Actually, Matthew’s fidelity to Mark demonstrates his tenacious respect for primitive tradition.

As Nolland observes:

Two minor features of Matthew’s handling of his sources may be worth singling out for particular mention. One is his unwillingness to lose source material. There is very little Markan material that has not found a home in Matthew, in some form or other.¹⁶¹

Moving on:

[1 Cor 15:8] is even more embarrassing to the notion of Pauline authorship, and for the same reason. For all we have in it is the bare assertion that there was an appearance to Paul. Would not a genuine eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ have had more to say about it once the subject had come up? Luke certainly thought so, as he does not tire of having Paul describe in impressive detail what the Risen Christ said to him.¹⁶²

By way of reply:

i) For a couple of reasons, we would not expect an elaborate description. To begin with, that would throw the series out of balance. Paul is reciting the Easter appearances in chronological sequence, terminating with himself. If Price were attempting to exegete the text instead of disprove it, he would be sensitive to this fact.

ii) In addition, there is an obvious difference in literary genre between an epistle, where we do not expect a lot of detail, and historical narrative, where we do. Again, if Price were a serious Bible scholar, he would appreciate this difference. But he is too busy imposing on the text to listen to the text.

¹⁶⁰ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/robert_price/beyond_born_again/index.shtml

¹⁶¹ J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans 2005), 10.

¹⁶² ET, 88.

iii) Price's appeal to Luke is utterly disingenuous. For Price doesn't regard the Lucan account as factual. So, for Price, both the presence and the absence of a detailed account is evidence that nothing really happened. Given such flexible rules of evidence, it is no wonder that Price is an unbeliever, for his position is equally consistent with everything and nothing. It's the fideism of unbelief.

iv) Finally, there's the practical aspect of Paul's apologetic:

In discussions of the objective reality of the resurrection of Jesus, much is made of the fact that Paul does not mention the empty tomb. He appeals only to those who encountered the risen Jesus. Hence, the skeptics conclude, this is all there was. The disciples imagined everything. Nothing really happened.

Paul, of course, was much less naive than his modern critics. His concern was to reinforce the faith of his converts at Corinth about the middle of the year AD 54. Jesus, however, had died on April 7, AD 30. Even if there had been a body in the tomb on the following Sunday morning, it would have disintegrated into dust in the intervening twenty-four years! Elementary common sense indicated that an appeal to the empty tomb would have been pointless. Paul could only refer his readers to witnesses who were still alive.¹⁶³

Moving on:

According to [Vielhauer's] interpretation...Paul is fighting against claims for Petrine primacy circulating in Corinth by the Cephas party. He aims everywhere to assert his own equality (and that of Apollos) with Cephas. If this were the case, however...why would he risk losing all he has thus far built by introducing a formula which draws special attention to the primacy of Cephas as the first witness of the resurrection? Surely it would have been much more natural for Paul to pass over this inconvenient fact in silence.¹⁶⁴

What is left to say?

i) This conclusion, even if otherwise valid, is only as good as the premise. Vielhauer is offering up another boilerplate of Bauerian leftovers: the Pauline party over against the Petrine-Judaizers.

ii) There is no trace of any Judaizers in 1 Corinthians.

¹⁶³ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians* (Doubleday 1998), 158.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

iii) Even if, for the sake of argument, Vielhauer were right, the reason Paul chose to pass along this fact rather than pass over this fact is that, however inconvenient to his ecclesiastical status, Paul's theology was driven by the facts. One can readily understand, however, why respect for historical evidence would be an alien concept to a member of the Jesus Seminar.

Moving on:

The case for an interpolation is strengthened if we can show its dependence on an allied body of literature otherwise known to be later in time than the text we believe to have suffered interpolation.¹⁶⁵

Have you ever read such backwards reasoning? How do you establish the literary dependence of a text on a putative extant source later than the text itself? I'm afraid that Robert Price missed his true calling in life. Clearly he belongs with Bozo and the bearded lady.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

Chapter 5

Richard Carrier concludes his essay by stating that:

I leave it to my critics to point out any and all significant objections that my theory must still overcome, or evidence yet to be addressed. Progress requires dialogue.¹⁶⁶

Given the length of his essay, that's a tall order. But I, for one, am happy to take him up on the challenge.

Mind you, it's with no little trepidation that I presume to take on the great Richard Carrier—a man who, by his own consent, is no less a philosopher than Aristotle or Hume.¹⁶⁷ But I'll try my little best, hoping that readers will make allowance for an underdog like me.

Before we get to the particulars of Carrier's thesis, something needs to be said about his use of reference works. In documenting "Jewish diversity," he makes repeated use of three reference works: the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, and the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

The first title is a standard work, but rather dated, the second title is a standard work, but a one-volume, ready-reference tool, while the third title is fairly specialized and not the most obvious choice for information on some of the Jewish groups discussed.

Such major reference works and scholarly monographs as the following are never consulted:

Bromiley, G. W., ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans 1988).

Davies, W. & L. Finkelstein, eds. *The Cambridge History of Judaism. II. The Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1989).

Douglas, J., ed. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (IVP 1998).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.answeringinfidels.com/content/view/99/48/>

- Evans, C.A. & S. Porter, eds. *Dictionary of NT Background* (IVP 2000).
- Ferguson, E. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans 2003).
- Freedman, D., ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday 1993).
- Green, J. et al., eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (IVP 1992).
- Green, W. & J. Neusner, eds. *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Macmillan 1994).
- Hawthorne, G. et al., eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP 1993).
- Hengel, M. *The "Hellenization" of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (SCM 1989).
- _____, *Jews, Greeks, & Barbarians* (SMC 1980).
- _____, *Judaism & Hellenism* (Fortress 1974).
- Martin, R. & P. Davids, eds. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (IVP 1998).
- Neusner, J., ed. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Continuum 1999-2003).
- _____, *Encyclopedia of Midrash* (Brill 2004).
- _____, *The Pharisees & Other Sects* (Garland 1991).
- Temporini, H. & W. Haase. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin 1972).
- Tenney, M., ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Zondervan 1976).

I'm not necessarily saying that these omissions undercut his claims on this particular point. But they illustrate one of the problems when a Classicist jumps straight into NT studies without any background in the standard literature. And some of this literature is pertinent, not only to 1C Jewish diversity, but to other assumptions which figure in Carrier's interaction with the NT.

A much more serious oversight is his near-exclusive reliance on Liddell-Scott for NT usage, as well as Septuagintal and Patristic usage, to the utter neglect of many more specialized reference works which target period usage, such as the following:

Balz, H. & G. Schneider, ed. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1990-93).

Bauer, W. (Danker/Arndt/Gingrich). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press 2000).

Brown, C., ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan 1975-1978).

Hill, D. *Greek Words & Hebrew Meanings* (Cambridge 1967).

Lampe, G. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford 1961).

Louw, J. & E. Nida. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (UPS 1988).

Lust, J. et al., eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart 1992-96)

Muraoka, T. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peeters 2002).

Spicq, C. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendricksen 1994).

Turner, N. *Christian Words* (Nelson 1981).

Since specialized Greek word-studies are an essential ingredient in Carrier's argument, his unfamiliarity with the nuances of Biblical usage is going to undermine his case overall.

Another lacuna is in his familiarity, or lack thereof, with the basic exegetical literature. He says (205, n.79), that he consulted 5 major commentaries on 1 Corinthians (Collins, Conzelmann, Fee, Hering, Hurd). Two problems stand out:

i) His list omits the commentary by Thiselton, which is the standard commentary on the Greek text. Although it came out in 2000, it was obviously available to Carrier at the time of writing since he references N. T. Wright's book on The Resurrec-

tion, which came out in 2003, and which, itself, makes reference to the commentary by Thiselton.

ii) In addition, it's unclear if his reading took him much beyond the titles or subtitles. For example, he cites 1 Cor 6:13 to disprove the bodily resurrection (135; 210, n.151). Yet all 5 commentaries classify that verse as a Corinthian slogan which Paul is quoting in order to rebut!

iii) Likewise, he cites Robert Gundry's classic monograph with reference to Gundry's analysis of the "body" (146, 215, n.211), but he betrays absolutely no awareness of what-all the "flesh" (sarx) happens to mean in Pauline usage, even though Gundry devotes a fair amount of time to that word as well, and its meaning is a lynchpin of Carrier's overall thesis.

By way of one further preliminary, there is a hidden agenda in arguing for a spiritual resurrection. By spiritualizing the event, it becomes a psychological event rather than a historical event. This, in turn, makes it subject to sociological theories of wish fulfillment, crowd psychology, and mass hallucination. Freud and Durkheim can then deliver the coup de grace.

Moving on:

Thirty-two sects are known by name, and at least four more by description. There may be overlap...How many more might there have been whose names were not preserved?¹⁶⁸

Assuming that Carrier's sources are accurate, this is an interesting survey. It has the incidental value of undermining the Catholic claim that God intended a magistrum to preserve the unity and orthodoxy of his covenant community. For if that were necessary for the NT covenant community, why would it be unnecessary for the OT covenant community?

At the same time, it would be misleading for Carrier to insinuate that just because you had a multitude of Jewish sects, there was no standard of reference within 1C Judaism.

A few Jewish sects, by virtue of their popularity, institutional prestige, or both, would supply the standard of comparison, even for purposes of contrast.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 109.

In the NT itself, only a small handful of Jewish sects are singled out for this distinction: scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans. Hengel's balanced assessment needs to be kept in mind:

The spiritual face of Jerusalem before its destruction was a markedly "pluralistic" one...Here, however, we should not forget that despite this plurality, by the end of the 2C BCE the Pharisees were already the leading spiritual group and had the largest following.¹⁶⁹

This is parallel to our own religious situation. Although there are a multitude of religious options in the air, only a tiny faction of these frame the terms of debate.

Likewise, two religious groups can be fundamentally opposed and yet share quite a lot in common. Calvinism and Lutheranism were framed in direct opposition to Romanism, yet they carry over a good deal of Latin theology. Arminianism is a Reformed heresy, yet by that same token it inherits a good deal of traditional Reformed theology.

Moving on:

Indeed, the Pharisees were the one sect against which the Christian sect was most opposed, and least like. Yet Robinson and his ilk derive their absolutist notion of Jewish resurrection dogma from the Pharisaic literature. It is wildly inappropriate to attribute to the original Christians ideas only found advocated by their enemies.¹⁷⁰

One is struck by the extreme ease with which Carrier can criticize "Robinson and his ilk" for overgeneralizing while he himself indulges in overgeneralizing. Carrier has done nothing to lay a foundation for the sweeping claim that "the Pharisees were the one sect against which the Christian sect was most opposed, and least like," or that Robinson et al. are attributing to the NT ideas "only" found advocated by their enemies.

Are we to seriously suppose that NT eschatology has more in common with Sadducean eschatology than it does with Pharisaic eschatology? Indeed, we are expressly told, on this very point, that Pauline theology had far more in common with the Pharisees than with the Sadducees (Acts 23:6ff.).

¹⁶⁹ *The Pre-Christian Paul* (SCM 1991), 44. Cf. S. Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees* (Brill 2001).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

As Barrett summarizes the relation,

Maddox distinguishes between Luke's rejection of the Pharisee's position with regard to the Law and his acceptance of their doctrine of the resurrection.¹⁷¹

While, as Bruce points out:

That Paul's argument was not frivolous is indicated by the presence of Pharisees in the Jerusalem church (15:5; cf. 21:20). The gospel of the risen Christ was not discordant with the Pharisaic creed; but it was totally unacceptable to the Sadducees (cf. 4:2). A Pharisee could become a believer and remain a Pharisee; a Sadducee could not become a believer without ceasing to be a Sadducee. Paul's reappraisal of the law was indeed incompatible with Pharisaic tradition; but that does not come into the picture here.¹⁷²

This, alone, is extremely damaging to Carrier's case, for it affirms the continuity between Pauline and Pharisaic theology at precisely the point where Carrier most needs to prove discontinuity. It is striking that Carrier never attempts to reinterpret Acts 23:6ff. consistent with his case.

The very fact that there were so many religious options in play in 1C Judaism makes it all the more significant that a Diaspora Jew like Paul chose to study in Jerusalem rather than, say, in Alexandria, and chose to align himself with the Pharisees. As Hengel again makes note of:

This is not the place to enumerate all the ingredients in Pauline theology which may—presumably—come from the Pharisaic school in particular and from Jewish Palestinian thought in general. My view is that they related to by far the greater part of Pauline theology—even if they are presented in excellent Greek. Despite all the parallels, the difference from the typically Hellenistic-Jewish literature composed outside Palestine, mostly with a marked philosophical stamp—from Aristobulus and the Letter of Aristeas through II-IV Maccabees to the Sibylline Oracles, Philo and even Josephus—is evident.¹⁷³

Shifting focus from the general question of Jewish diversity to the specific question of diverse views concerning the afterlife, Bauckham has argued that, with a few minor exceptions, there was a dominant view in Second Temple Judaism on the afterlife—a view which carries over into the NT.

¹⁷¹ *The Acts of the Apostles* (T&T Clark 1998), 2:1064.

¹⁷² *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans 1990), 465-466.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 47.

Bauckham contends that the apparent degree of diversity is misleading because scholars fail to distinguish between diverse imagery and diverse concepts. Mixed metaphors are mutually inconsistent if taken literally, but a wide variety of metaphors can and do figurate the very same concept.¹⁷⁴

In discussing the “two-body” doctrine which he attributes to a number of Jewish groups, Carrier draws some rather firm inferences from the literature which are not as clearly present in the sources themselves. This procedure raises several methodological questions:

i) Are these spare, scattered references intended to present a comprehensive eschatology, which either draws an explicit contrast between the intermediate state and the final state, or explicitly denies such a contrast?

ii) Are these loosely worded references intended to draw fine distinctions of relative continuity and discontinuity, and/or absolute distinctions of strict identity and alterity?

The danger here is to pose more sweeping and specialized questions than the text was intended to answer, and to harden the alternatives into more mutually exclusive terms than the original speakers or writers had in mind.

Is Carrier in fact exegeting a two-body doctrine from the sources, or is he interpreting the sources in light of a two-body doctrine? It looks to me as though he is using a rather abstract version of a two-body doctrine as an interpretive grid to extend and harmonize the data.

I don't see that these references, individually considered, chart a roadmap to a two-body doctrine. Instead, he is using a roadmap to piece them together, filling in the gaps and rounding out the contours until they assume the shape of a two-body doctrine.

Now Philo may well have had a more clear-cut position, since he is more philosophically self-conscious and thoroughgoing. The same does not necessarily follow for the rest.

These equivocations carry over into his section on “Paul and the Pharisees.” And

¹⁷⁴ *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Brill 1998).

there are some howlers along the way, such as the following:

Some Rabbis then ask how we can conclude this, when those resurrected by Ezekiel did not become immortal or free of pain, and so forth...The response is to dismiss Ezekiel's miracle as a myth, however meaningful.¹⁷⁵

A myth? Is that really how the Rabbis classified Ezk 37? What we have there is a symbolic vision. To classify a symbolic vision as a myth is a category mistake which appears to represent Carrier's viewpoint rather than the Rabbis.

In this general connection, Carrier says:

Philo interprets the Exodus light from Egypt as an allegory for the soul's escape from the body...It is thus telling that Christ dies and rises over a Passover weekend, a holiday centered on this very Exodus narrative.¹⁷⁶

This is a pretty amazing leap of logic. I'd add that, for all his love of allegory, Philo does not deny this historicity of the Pentateuch. So even if we stipulated to this fanciful parallel, that would still assume the factuality of the Resurrection.

Moving on:

If [Paul] meant that our bodies would be reformed from the dirt into which they had dissolved, he would surely have cited passages supporting such a view (like Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19, and Ezk 37:5-10).¹⁷⁷

Two problems:

i) If, like the Rabbis, he regarded Ezk 37 as a "myth," then why would he have cited this passage as a proof-text? How does that follow from Carrier's own interpretation of rabbinical debate?

ii) Paul would only have cited OT proof-texts if the question of the resurrection were a question of authority. But that is not what is at issue. That, indeed, would beg the question.

This brings us to the next point:

¹⁷⁵ ET, 115-116.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 202, n.35.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 117.

Were the Corinthians, then, objecting to whether resurrection was possible? That does not seem likely, either. Paul assumes throughout his letter that the Corinthians accept that all things are possible...That it is possible is never doubted. That leaves only one argument: the Corinthians he is arguing against must have doubted the resurrection because of some question about how the resurrection would happen.¹⁷⁸

Several problems:

i) Carrier is assuming that Paul is addressing the same audience throughout the letter. But the doubters in 1 Cor 15 could well be a subgroup.¹⁷⁹

ii) Notice the false antithesis. If you don't believe that something will happen or has happened because you don't see how it could happen, that is just another way of saying that you disbelieve it because you don't see how it is possible. And there are at least a couple of reasons why the Corinthian faction may have regarded a bodily resurrection as impossible:

iii) They may have taken a rationalist view, not atypical among the Greeks, such as the Athenians (Acts 17:32), Celsus, and Porphyry, that a physical resurrection and/or ascension was absurd. Indeed, it isn't coincidental that Paul devoted the first three chapters of his letter to the folly of worldly wisdom. And some Hellenistic Jews also adopted this Grecian view:

When dealing with 15:1-2 we saw that all Greeks and most cultivated Jews did not believe in the resurrection of the body. For them the body was a drag on the soul, and at death the soul escaped into immortality. Not surprisingly, therefore, some Corinthians took the position, "There is no such thing as resurrection."¹⁸⁰

iv) Carrier himself says, on p.125, that "the dispute at Corinth...had to be about the physical absurdity of a resurrection of the flesh."

v) Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, the doubters may well have been infected by an overrealized or overspiritualized eschatology which devalued or denied the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 117.

¹⁷⁹ In fact, Carrier elsewhere admits this. Cf. 207, n.113. But he fails to see how this undermines his analysis.

¹⁸⁰ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *ibid.*, 162.

place of the body in the world to come.¹⁸¹ Indeed, (iv) could be a special case of (iii).

vi) Carrier had already said that it's a short step from a non-body doctrine (of the immortal soul) to a two-body doctrine, in which the soul is clothed with an ethereal body.¹⁸² But the reasoning is reversible. If Paul denied the bodily resurrection, in the conventional sense, then it is unclear why he even bothers with chapter 15. The point at issue between the doubters and himself was not necessarily survival after death, but the mode of postmortem survival. And by Carrier's own admission, there's not much practical difference between a no-body and a two-body doctrine. If an immortal soul and an ethereal body have the same cash value, then why would Paul expend so much firepower on the functional equivalent of his own position?

On p.118, Carrier's threefold contrast between Paul's position and the Rabbinical positions suffers from the same equivocations noted before by pressing differences of degree into differences of kind, as though we were comparing one systematic eschatology with another systematic eschatology. But the materials furnished by Carrier don't offer anything that elaborate. He would first need, if possible, to reconstruct a systematic eschatology before he could compare it to another. It's hard to see how he can infer so much from so little unless he has a preconception of how it all fits together.

On a related note, he tends to deduce the logical implications of figurative imagery. But, of course, a metaphor is merely used to illustrate an argument. It is not, itself, an argument. And there's quite a difference between the incidental implications of a metaphor and the logical implications of an argument. A metaphor is only meant to illustrate an argument at the relevant point of commonality.

Moving on:

Paul sees this flesh-spirit dichotomy as a fundamental distinction between Christians and Pharisees.¹⁸³

Here and elsewhere, Carrier treats "flesh" as a synonym for "body," and then extends that into an eschatological matter/spirit dualism.

¹⁸¹ Cf. G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1987), 12, 715-716; *God's Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson 1994), 83, 198-199, 201, 205; A Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 95-106, 345-348, 357-365.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 118.

This is the sort of blunder that only a Classicist could make. No NT scholar would treat *sarx* and *soma* as interchangeable. If Carrier had bothered to consult the afore-said lexicons, or monographs on Pauline usage,¹⁸⁴ or monographs on Pauline theology,¹⁸⁵ or standard commentaries on the Greek text of the pertinent Pauline epistles,¹⁸⁶ he would quickly realize that “*sarx*” is a polysemantic word in Pauline usage, and in eschatological settings it does not denote a contrast between matter and spirit.

Moving on:

It is therefore peculiar that Paul only provides two kinds of evidence in support of Christ’s resurrection: scripture and various epiphanies like his own roadside vision. On the hypothesis that Jesus rose in the same body that died (and prove this by submitting that body to handling by disciples and eating fish, and by the very words of Jesus himself), such an approach makes little sense.¹⁸⁷

Such an approach makes little sense because of Carrier’s misleading description. “Vision” is a slippery term. In popular parlance, a “vision” connotes a private, subjective experience, but Paul’s “roadside vision” is depicted as a public, audiovisual event. And this is unsurprising since the event is described in terms of a classic theophany,¹⁸⁸ and in Scripture a theophany could be, and often was, an objective, sensible event,¹⁸⁹ such as the pillar of cloud and fire or the Transfiguration. Likewise, the luminous appearance of Moses when he came down from Mt. Sinai doesn’t mean that he was immaterial!

A possible objection to this argument is the apparent contradiction between Acts 9:7 and 22:9. Did Paul’s traveling companions hear the voice, or did they not? As Ben Witherington explains their relation:

¹⁸⁴ R. Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms* (Brill 1971).

¹⁸⁵ J. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Eerdmans 1998); H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Eerdmans 1975); T. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (IVP 2001).

¹⁸⁶ E.g., Cranfield & Fitzmyer on Romans; Fee, Thiselton on 1 Corinthians; Barnett, Harris, Thrall on 2 Corinthians; Bruce, Burton, Longenecker on Galatians; Hoehner on Ephesians; Bockmuehl, Fee, O’Brien, Silva on Philipians; Dunn, O’Brien on Colossians.

¹⁸⁷ ET, 120.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. C. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (T&T Clark 1994), 1:448-449.

¹⁸⁹ J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant & Theophany in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (SOTBT 1995).

Perhaps Polhill is the most cogent at this point in noting that the distinction is made between a voice “which was speaking” (22:9), as opposed to 9:7, which can mean hearing a sound or noise.

In other words, the distinction is made by means of the added qualifying participial phrase, not on the basis of the mere case of the object of the verb “to hear.”

Thus, we can explain the differences in the two accounts as follows: (1) only Saul had a personal encounter with Jesus involving seeing someone and hearing distinct words; (2) his companions saw and heard the phenomena that accompanied this encounter but had no such encounter themselves. Notice that Acts 22:9 does not say they did not hear the sound of the voice at all, but only that they did not hear the voice of the one speaking “to me.”¹⁹⁰

I’d add that there is precedent, in theophanic discourse, for distinguishing degrees of perception (cf. Jn 12:28-29). Since a theophany is a revelatory event, God controls the effect it has on the percipient, pursuant to his purpose, which may be polarizing or person-variable.

Of course, Carrier doesn’t believe that such things can actually happen. But the immediate point is to show the inner consistency of Scripture.

Moving on:

Why does he [Paul] never resort to any of the Pharisaic descriptions of continuity between the dead and the raised body, which answered the very same worry for them?¹⁹¹

For two reasons:

i) Paul prefers his own metaphors.

ii) Apropos (i), the Christian doctrine is not identical with the Pharisaic doctrine, for in the Pharisaic doctrine you have only a monadic relation between the mortal body and the immortal body, whereas in the Christian doctrine you have a dyadic relation between the mortal body and the immortal body as well as the relation between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the just.

There is, on the one hand, a continuous relation between the glorified body of

¹⁹⁰ *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans 1998), 313.

¹⁹¹ ET, 121.

Christ and the glorified body of the Christian. The resurrection of the just is embedded in the resurrection of Christ.

On the other hand, there is a degree of discontinuity as well as continuity between the mortal body and the immortal body. Carrier chooses to emphasize the verses which accentuate the points of discontinuity—and he mangles their true meaning—while he disregards those verses which accentuate the other side of the coin. Thiselton draws attention to:

The importance of the fourfold use of *touto*, “this” (twice in v53, twice in v54), as indicating clear continuity of identity (“this body”) even in the midst of radical transformation.¹⁹²

So the Pharisaic doctrine is too simplistic to model the Christian doctrine.

Moving on:

Paul does not appeal to any eyewitness evidence because there is none, at least none pertaining to the nature of Christ’s new body.¹⁹³

By way of reply:

i) This is simply false. Paul does appeal to eyewitness evidence in 1 Cor 15:5-8. This he uses to establish the fact of the Resurrection. And what is actual is possible. So as long as you know that it happened, you needn’t know how it happened.

ii) The obvious reason Paul doesn’t go into the details is threefold:

a) If the concern of the Corinthians is with the question of how this is possible or to account, in some ontological fashion, for personal identity between the mortal body and the immortal body, then reciting the details of Christ’s glorified body would do nothing to answer the metaphysical question. That would substitute a description for an explanation.

b) Paul was not an eyewitness to the details of the Easter appearances. He didn’t see Jesus eating, or handle his palms. So there is no reason why he would take it upon himself to report on those particular details. That’s best left to the disciples. That’s why we have the canonical gospels.

¹⁹² *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1297.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 121.

c) Paul is not concerned with the incidental features distinctive to the resurrection of Christ, but with the general points of commonality between the past resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of the Christian.

For example, the specific fact that Christ bore the scars of his ordeal does not necessarily mean that this is an essential point of continuity between the mortal and immortal body. In context, this is only important to establish the identity of Christ—that the man they crucified was the same individual who rose from the grave.

In addition, there may be more minute and superficial continuity between a mortal body and an immortal body when the process of glorification operates directly on a corpse which had undergone little or no decomposition, rather than recreating (and upgrading) the old body *e nuovo* because the original remains had long since crumbled into dust.

Likewise, eating implies corporeity, but corporeity doesn't imply eating. Rocks are corporeal, but their diet is decidedly limited. Whether we need to eat in the glorified state is an interesting question which the narrative is not designed to answer.

It follows from all this that Carrier's idiosyncratic solution to Paul's "strange argument" (122) is a solution to a pseudoproblem. Moving on:

How is it that Paul never resorts to obvious analogies like claymolding or ship-building? It simply makes no sense. Unless Paul believed something fundamentally different from what these later Christians did. So, too, Athenagoras and Tertullian know they must prove that God can keep track of all the "parts" of a decomposing body so as to reassemble it. Yet Paul never comes anywhere near such an argument.¹⁹⁴

Here, Carrier chooses to confound a particular model of glorification with the general principle. Belief in a bodily resurrection does not commit one, either exegetically or logically, to belief in the strict numerical identity of the former body with the new body, or with the conundra attendant upon such a stringent theory of personal identity, such as the identity of indiscernibles. Carrier has chosen to saddle the witness of Scripture with extra-scriptural baggage. This is nothing more than a straw man argument.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

Moving on:

And how can it be that, more than a century later, Christians would readily appeal to things Jesus said to prove their point about the nature of the resurrection, but Paul, only a decade or two away, can't summon a single word from Jesus in his own defense?...Even more bizarre, how can it be that, more than a century later, Christians would have all kinds of eyewitness testimony to cite in proof of their position, and had no problem citing both OT and NT resurrections as examples, yet Paul, only a decade or two away, fails to summon a single example. No witnesses are cited—not even his own eyewitness encounter with Jesus!...No physical evidence is mentioned. So it begs all credulity to maintain that Paul believed in the resurrection of the flesh.¹⁹⁵

This is littered with fallacies:

i) What would count as “physical” evidence 10-20 years after the fact? In fact, Carrier's fellow contributors tell us that a corpse would be unrecognizable after a few weeks—although I'll have more to say on that particular count.

ii) Needless to say, the Christian faith had achieved a much higher public profile a century later, putting Christians on the defensive as they had to fend off philosophical and legal attacks against the faith. So naturally the apologetic for the Resurrection would shift to a higher gear than you find in a letter to a 1C church.

What could be more obvious? But because Carrier comes to the Bible convinced that it couldn't possibly be true, then absolutely any alternative explanation, however outlandish, is more probable than the sheer impossibility that the Bible might be right.

iii) The resurrection of Christ is without precedent. There are no other “resurrections” in Scripture

iv) Paul very rarely quotes Jesus, whether on the subject of the Resurrection or anything else. The same holds true other NT letter writers. So this is an argument which either proves too much or too little. There are allusions to the Gospels in the NT epistles, but few quotes.

v) I also can't tell if Carrier is talking about the canonical gospels or apocryphal agrapha.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 124.

vi) Paul does cite eyewitness testimony. That's what 1 Cor 15:5-8 consists of!

vii) Paul prefers his own illustrations. This calls for no special explanation.

viii) Paul doesn't resort to isolated prooftexting because the OT foundation is woven into a whole thematic tapestry. For example, N. T. Wright offers the following analysis:

The argument is, in fact, an exposition of the future resurrection of all those who belong to the Messiah, set out as an argument about new creation. Gen 1-3 forms a subtext for the whole chapter, and even when Paul appears to be merely offering illustrations of his point these, too, are drawn from the creation stories.¹⁹⁶

The great Psalm which speaks of humankind's vocation to rule the creation as the creator's vicegerent (Ps 8), is explicitly quoted in v27, where it is closely aligned with the messianic Ps 110 and with the multiple echoes of Daniel. This is not a mere "appeal to scripture," as though Paul were mounting an argument about something else and needed to drag in a few proof-texts; he is thinking his way through a theology of creation and of humankind, and the biblical allusions indicate the narrative of which the resurrection of Jesus now forms the climax, helping the story to its intended goal.¹⁹⁷

A glance through Gen 1-2 reveals how many of its major themes are alluded to in Paul's present argument. The creator God made the heavens and the earth, and filled both with his creatures; Paul mentions these two categories in v40, and uses a discussion of them to distinguish the first Adam from the final one. The powerful divine wind, or spirit, moved over the waters, and the divine breath or spirit also animated Adam and Eve; the life-giving activity of both the creator and Jesus is seen by Paul in terms of the pneuma, the spirit, wind or breath (vv44-6). The creator made the lights in heaven, which Paul mentions in v41). He created plants bearing fruit containing seed, so that more plants could be produced; Paul makes this a major theme in vv36-8, and then draws on the language of "sowing" in vv42-4. The creator made every kind of bird, animal and fish; Paul brings them, too, into his argument (vv39-40). At the climax of Gen 1, the creator made human beings in his own image, to have dominion over the rest of creation, and in Gen 2 he entrusted Adam in particular with responsibility for naming the animals; for Paul, too, the climax of the story is the recreation of humankind through the life-giving activity of the final Adam, whose image will be borne by all who belong to him.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress 2003), 313.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 341.

Another element of Paul’s agricultural imagery is supplied by the harvest festival of Pentecost, with its offering of the firstfruits as a pledge of things to come.¹⁹⁹

Moving on:

It goes even further. Justin, Athenagoras, and Tertullian take great pains to attack those who denigrate the flesh...Thus it is extraordinarily remarkable that Paul says nothing of the kind.²⁰⁰

Paul already goes to great lengths to defend the physical integrity of human existence in 1 Cor 6:12-7:16,25-40; 12:1-27 (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-5).²⁰¹ This is one of Carrier’s problems. He has no feel for the flow of argument, for text in relation to context and intertextuality.

Moving on:

The Corinthian faction who denied the resurrection did not believe in the survival of the soul. Had that been the issue, Paul would have addressed it.²⁰²

This is a very puzzling statement. Why would it have been an issue had they affirmed the survival of the soul? Why would Paul feel the need to address that “issue”? Is Carrier saying that both Paul and the Corinthian faction denied the survival of the soul?

Such a denial doesn’t square with Biblical theology in general²⁰³ or Pauline theology in particular (2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 1:23; 1 Thes 5:10).

Moreover, what evidence is there that the Corinthian faction denied the immortality of the soul—especially if the topic never even came up?

Moving on:

¹⁹⁹ Cf. M. De Boer, *Defeat of Death* (JSOT 1998); N. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (SJTOP 1957); J. Holleman, *Resurrection and Parousia* (Leiden: Brill 1996).

²⁰⁰ ET, 124.

²⁰¹ In chap. 12, the “body” is a metaphor for the church, but his argument still presupposes the value of a literal body.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁰³ E.g. P. Johnson, *Shades of Sheol* (IVP 2002); C. Morgan & R. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire* (Zondervan 2004).

First, that the Corinthian faction in question believed death was final and irreversible is proved by the fact that Paul says if there is no resurrection, then the dead are lost.²⁰⁴

In NT usage, to be “lost” doesn’t mean that you cease to exist. Indeed, it is applied to the living. Rather, it means that you will not escape the final judgment. Eternal torment is your lot.

This is the problem when someone like Carrier, who has no background in the standard exegetical literature, starts to pick away at stray verses of Scripture.

Moving on:

Second, the disagreement Paul had with the Corinthian faction did not hang on any proto-Gnostic denigration of the flesh. Had that been the problem, Paul would have addressed it...This is, after all, the same man who says in Rom 7:18 that the flesh contains nothing good²⁰⁵

By way of reply:

i) Once again, if Carrier bothered to emerge from his Classical cocoon long enough to consult such standard commentaries on 1 Corinthians as Fee and Thiselton, he would see the evidence of an overrealized/spiritualized eschatology as one of the misconceptions which Paul had to clear up.²⁰⁶ This may not be “Gnostic,” but it has the same cash-value.

Overrealized/spiritualized eschatology is not the only source of the problem at Corinth. Any reconstruction of the problem is bound to be a bit tentative. But it is arguably one source of the problem.

ii) Even if the problem is not overrealized eschatology, but a hangover from Greek philosophy, that would not, of itself, entail a denial of the afterlife. Platonism affirmed the immortality of the soul, and so did Stoicism—by Carrier’s own admission.²⁰⁷

True, there were schools of Greek philosophy which denied the afterlife altogether.

²⁰⁴ ET, 125.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁶ This is also discussed in Schreiner’s *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*.

²⁰⁷ ET, 133, 137.

If, indeed, you are a secular materialist, then that commits you to denial of the afterlife. The only way to salvage an afterlife consistent with materialism is to baptize materialism with a doctrine of the resurrection, à la Donald McKay.

iii) And see, once again, Carrier's complete and crippling ignorance of what the "flesh" means in Paul's theology. Absolutely no awareness of the ethical and metaphorical connotations of the word.

Moving on:

Third, Paul's doctrine could not have been of a reassembly and restoration of the flesh.²⁰⁸

So what? Notice the non-sequitur—as if a belief in bodily resurrection committed you to belief in a "reassembly" of bones and body parts and vital organs. That would be, at best, only one particular model of glorification.

The ancients weren't stupid. They were perfectly aware of the fact that, in many cases, the body had undergone complete dissolution. The imagery we find in Ezk 37 or Rev 20:13 is just that: imagery—picturesque metaphors. The ancients knew all about bodies that had been wholly consumed by worms and scavengers. Literal reassembly was never a prerequisite for glorification. Indeed, the ancients lived with the physicality of death in a way that few of us moderns do. We leave that to coroners and crematoria.

On pp.126-39, Carrier tries to make the case that what Paul really has in mind is astral immortality. But this identification suffers from general and specific objections alike. In terms of the systemic frame of reference, N. T. Wright points out that:

Paul does not, then, think of "heavenly bodies" as "spiritual beings clothed with light." He is not buying into the cosmology of the Timaeus; indeed, the way the entire chapter is built around Gen 1 & 2 indicates that he is consciously choosing to construct a cosmology, and within that a future hope, from the most central Jewish sources.

There is thus no suggestion in this passage that he is intending to explain the resurrection body within the framework of "astral immortality." As we saw when discussing Dan 12 and Wisdom 3, this concept will in any case not work for those Jewish texts that, like Paul here, see the future beyond death in two

²⁰⁸ ET, 126.

steps or stages...Nor is the problem he faces the same as the one Plato and Cicero dealt with in the exposition of “astral immortality.” They were eager to escape the prison-house of the body; but for Paul the problem was not the body itself, but sin and death which had taken up residence in it, producing corruption, dishonour and weakness.²⁰⁹

Brian Rosner makes the same point:

The way Paul introduces his comments points to his reliance on the biblical tradition of creation. The bodies mentioned in 15:39-41 correspond to three of the days of creation in reverse order, the sixth and fifth in v39 and the fourth in vv40-41.²¹⁰

More generally,

It is clear from no less than nine intertextual connections in 1 Cor 15, some of which are indispensable to his argument, that Paul is dependent on the Jewish Scriptures in his treatment of the theme of resurrection. These include: (1) the Adam/Christ typology in 15:21-22; (2) the allusion to Pss 110:1 & 8:6 in 1 Cor 15:25,27; (3) the language of continual opposition to God’s people in 15:30 which echoes Pss 44:22 & 119:109; (4) the quotation of Isa 22:13 in 15:32; (5) the scornful rebuke, *aphron*, in 15:36 which echoes Ps 14:1 (LXX, *aphron*—a Psalm Paul quotes from in Rom 3:11-13); (6) the allusions to Adam in 15:45-49 (“the first man,” “the man of dust,” both twice); (7) the trumpet as a sign of the day of the Lord in 15:52 which recalls Isa 27:13, Joel 2:1 & Zeph 1:14-16 (cf. 2 Esdr 6:23); (8) the quotation from Isa 25:8 in 15:54; and (9) the quotation of Hos 13:14 in 15:55.²¹¹

Beyond the broader objections are many detailed difficulties:

i) What supplies the best background material for the interpretation of 1 Cor 15? Wright has argued that the creation account in Genesis, combined with later OT reflections upon the creation account, supply the pertinent background material. Now, although Carrier takes issue with one linguistic argument of Wright, he simply ignores the larger argument altogether. This is especially illogical on Carrier’s part since he himself admits the parallel with Genesis 1.²¹²

ii) Instead, Carrier cobbles together putative background material from such diverse

²⁰⁹ *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 346.

²¹⁰ “With What Kind of Body Do They Come?”, P. Williams et al., eds., *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting* (Eerdmans 2004), 190-205.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

²¹² ET, 207, n.118.

and post-Pauline sources as Marcus Aurelius (2C), Clement of Alexandria (3C), Photius (9C), a pagan satirist (Lucian, 2C), the Gnostic Gospel of Philip (4C), “a later Gnostic text (4C),” and the Ethiopic Ascension of Isaiah (2C?).

In order to believe that this supplies the key to the interpretation of 1 Cor 15, you have to believe that sources ranging from the 2C-9C, sources which reflect such varied outlooks of Christian Platonism (Clement), pagan Stoicism (M. Aurelius), Gnosticism, and Palestinian apocalypticism, sources whose literary genres cover philosophy, satire, gospel narrative, and pseudepigrapha, all belong to the same universe of discourse and can all be mapped back onto the writings of a 1C Jew tutored to Pharisaical theology. Needless to say, this post-Pauline, miscellaneous patchwork is wholly devoid of scholarly merit.

iii) Carrier’s theory of astral immortality is heavily dependent on the work of Dale Martin.²¹³ But there are superior treatments of Pauline usage.²¹⁴

Moving on:

We have already seen from his letter to the Philippians that the difference he draws is between the “lowly state” of our “earthly” body and the “glory” of the body of the risen Jesus, which has its true home in the heavens.²¹⁵

One problem with this appeal is that if astral immortality were what Paul had in mind, a resurrection would be incongruous. Although stars fall from the sky to the earth (i.e., a meteor shower), stars do not rise from the earth to the sky (the Resurrection; Ascension).

The Resurrection took place on terra firma. It does not, therefore, occupy a whole different dimension of reality. To erect a categorical wall abstracts the Easter event from its concrete circumstances.

In fact, one of the attributes (doxa) of the glorified body (15:43) is applied to earthlings (v40). So the distinction involves a difference of degree, not of kind.

Moving on:

²¹³ *The Corinthian Body* (Yale 1990).

²¹⁴ E.g. G. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson 1994); B. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians* (Scholars Press 1973).

²¹⁵ ET, 126.

In the Pauline corpus, pneumatikos is routinely contrasted with physical things, like labor, money, food, drink, rocks, human bodies (sarkinos), and “flesh and blood” haima kai sarka).²¹⁶

This just doesn’t hold up under sustained scrutiny. As Wright points out:

In 1 Cor 2:14-15, the psychikos person does not receive the things of the spirit, because they are spiritually discerned, while the pneumatikos person discerns everything. There is, of course, no question there of “physical” and “spiritual” as appropriate translations. Nor would those words, with the connotations they normally have today, be appropriate at 3:1, where Paul declares that he could not consider the Corinthians as pneumatikoi, but merely sarkinoi or perhaps sarkikoi. The words clearly refer to matters other than whether the people concerned are “physical”; clearly they are...So, too, when Paul discusses pneumatika in chapter 12, these “spiritual gifts” are certainly not “spiritual” in the sense of “non-physical”...the same is true of many other uses of the word, in this letter and elsewhere in the NT.²¹⁷

[For example], 1 Cor 10:3f. (“spiritual” food and drink in the wilderness; Paul did not suppose this was “non-physical”); 14:37 (those who consider themselves “spiritual” are presumably not imagining themselves “non-physical”); Gal 6:1; Eph 5:19/Col 3:16.²¹⁸

“Spiritual” is simply a Pauline way of denoting the varied work of the Holy Spirit—inspiring, sanctifying, animating, &c.

Thiselton adds that:

The LXX regularly uses “flesh and blood” to denote humankind in its weakness and vulnerability, and it is in this sense Paul declares elsewhere that his revelation of the gospel truth comes not from “flesh and blood” but from God.²¹⁹

Robert Gundry agrees, but offers a different supporting argument:

But “flesh and blood” connotes the frailty of the present mortal body, as Paul’s next, synonymously parallel clause indicates: “neither does corruption inherit incorruption.”²²⁰

²¹⁶ Ibid., 128.

²¹⁷ *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 349-350.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 350, n.115.

²¹⁹ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1291.

²²⁰ “The Essential Physicality of Jesus’ Resurrection,” *Jesus of Nazareth*, 217.

Carrier tries to blunt the edge of Wright’s distinction between adjectives of relation and adjectives of material, and goes on to say that:

The context decides—and our context clearly indicates substances are the issue: sarx versus pneuma, different kinds of flesh, astral bodies versus terrestrial ones, and celestial versus terrestrial origins and habitation.²²¹

By way of reply:

i) Even if Wright’s grammatical analysis were inconclusive, this is only a supporting argument. Carrier’s objection does nothing to overthrow the pattern of Pauline usage.

ii) Even on his own level, Carrier can only show some exceptions to the adjectival distinction. So the weight of evidence is still with Wright.

iii) As Thiselton has noted, the simplistic identification favored by Hering and Martin:

Overlooks our earlier distinction between “flesh” as denoting different substances (v39) and “body” as denoting different natures, characters, or forms within different spheres or in relation to different given purposes or functions.²²²

As we commented in relation to Hering, the issue moves from substance in v39 to form in vv40-41.²²³

The key to understanding the nature of the glorified body lies in understanding the properties assigned to the glorified body by Paul. There are four: incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual. And none of them are constitutive properties. They describe the effect of glorification, not the composition of the body. “They do not denote ‘substances’ but ‘modes of existence’ or ‘of life.’”²²⁴

Thiselton devotes several pages to a meticulous analysis of the terms, commencing with v42.²²⁵ By contrast, Carrier’s piecemeal discussion is amateurish and uninformed.

²²¹ ET, 129.

²²² *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1268.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 1269.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1267.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1271ff.

Moving on:

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul assumes that the “whole” man is comprised of three things: “spirit, life, and body,” *pneuma*, *psyche*, and *soma*. Hence Paul’s view corresponds conceptually with that of Marcus Aurelius.²²⁶

Another specimen of Carrier’s wooden exegesis. As Wanamaker observes, a prayer would be an odd place for an anthropological definition of human nature.²²⁷ Beale points out that “5:23 clearly restates and develops 3:13, where God is said to strengthen their hearts.”²²⁸ In other words, the terms are used rather loosely for their cumulative effect. More generally:

It is precarious to try to construct a tripartite doctrine of human nature on the juxtaposition of the three nouns, *pneuma*, *psyche* and *soma*. The three together give further emphasis to the completeness of sanctification for which the writers pray, but the three together add but little to the sense of *homon tas kardias* (“your hearts”) in 3:13. The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between “spirit” and “soul” is forced. Few would care to distinguish sharply among the four elements “heart,” “soul,” “mind” and “strength of Mk 12:30 (amplifying the threefold “heart,...soul, and...might” of Deut 6:5). The distinction made by Paul between *psyche* and *pneuma* in 1 Cor 15:45 has no bearing on the present passage; there the distinction lies between the “living person” which the first Adam became at his creation (Gen 2:7) and the “life-giving spirit” which the second Adam has become in resurrection. It is the contrast between the two nouns in that sense that constitutes the contrast between the adjectives *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos* in 1 Cor 15:44,46 (*psuchikos* means *choikos* as *pneumatikos* means *epouranios*). The contrast between *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos* in 1 Cor 2:14-15 depends on the contrast between the soul of man and the Spirit of God; the understanding of the *psuchikos anthropos* is confined to the capacity of “the spirit of man within him (1 Cor 2:11), and without the indwelling Spirit of God he cannot appreciate the *pneumatika*, the “things of God” (1 Cor 2:11). In that context *pneuma* is practically synonymous with *nous* (cf. 1 Cor 2:16).²²⁹

Carrier appeals to Jude 19 to support his thesis, but the Judean contrast only serves to undermine his thesis, for the distinction is between Spirit-filled Christians and unbelievers. Yet the Christians are hardly composed of stardust!

²²⁶ ET, 129.

²²⁷ *The Epistle to the Thessalonians* (Eerdmans 1990), 206.

²²⁸ *1-2 Thessalonians* (IVP 2003), 177.

²²⁹ F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Word 1982), 130.

Most of Carrier's running commentary on 1 Cor 15:44-54 (pp132-39) builds on faulty assumptions I've already rebutted, so there's not much new to rebut. One howler is the following:

Paul does not believe in anything like a soul—only the spirit, which only those in Christ have (or else, only those in Christ have a spirit that is part of God and hence immortal).²³⁰

To cite just one counterexample, this totally ignores the dialectical interplay between the human spirit and the divine Spirit in 1 Cor 2:10-11.

There is also the peculiar claim that Christ couldn't have said what the Evangelist attributes to him in Lk 24:39 since that would contradict Paul and put Paul at odds with his Lord and Savior.

What makes this so peculiar is that it makes two assumptions, neither of which you'd expect Carrier to make: (i) The Gospel of Luke was written before 1 Corinthians; (ii) Paul had read the Gospel of Luke.

I'm quite sympathetic to both assumptions, but it's been a central plank of Carrier's argument that the empty-tomb tradition and the Lucan (as well as Johannine) doctrine of the Resurrection are part of a post-Pauline invention.

Moving on:

To Philo, of course, spirit and body were opposites. So Paul's idea of a "spiritual body" seems a paradox. But...even Philo believed that spirits are made of an ethereal matter, the same material of which the stars are made...Paul and Philo are not that far apart. They are simply using different language for what amounts to nearly the same thing.²³¹

Carrier is like a cult member who indulges in defensive proof texting instead of reading in context. If there is a conscious allusion to Philonic Platonism in 15:45-49, it takes the form of an anti-Philonic polemic. Both Paul and Philo operate with a two-Adam anthropology. For Philo, the heavenly Adam is an abstract universal or exemplar of which the earthly Adam is a concrete particular or exemplum. Moreover, the heavenly Adam is prior to the earthly Adam, both in time and exemplary

²³⁰ ET, 133.

²³¹ Ibid., 139.

causality.

For Paul, by contrast, the earthly Adam is prior in time, as a type of the heavenly Adam, and the prototype of humanity. In addition, the earthly Adam isn't Adam in his pristine state, but fallen Adam (cf. 15:21-22).

For Philo, this is a way personifying the relation between time and eternity. The orientation is hermeneutical and metaphysical. For Paul, by contrast, the orientation is historical, soteriological, and eschatological.²³² There is, then, a systematic difference at the level of competing conceptual schemes—whether consciously or not.

Moving on:

Remarkably unusual in 2 Cor 5:1,4 is the use of the word “skenos” instead of “soma” for “body.” For this is a term unique to Orphic conceptions of the body as a residence, jailhouse, or tomb...There can be no other explanation for Paul's appropriation of such unusual and unique vocabulary, especially when placed in such a blatant context of buildings and burdens.²³³

In reply:

i) Carrier is addicted to hyperbole. It is no coincidence that he is at his most emphatic when his argument is at its weakest. Hyperbole is the caulking to plug up gaps in the argument.

ii) The Orphic conception of the afterlife operates with an utterly alien worldview. Indeed, Orphic theology had no conception of the afterlife, but of afterlives, for it hinged on the cyclical and merit-mongering principle of reincarnation and karma.²³⁴

It is antecedently improbable in the extreme that a Messianic Jew tutored in Pharisaic theology would look to such a source of inspiration.

iii) Not only is another explanation readily available, but far from being remarkable or unusual or unique, it is quite obvious to any reader with a slight sensitivity to Paul's OT allusions, for Paul is evoking the tabernacle as an emblem of our moral

²³² Cf. A. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet* (Cambridge 1981); G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Eerdmans 1952).

²³³ ET, 142.

²³⁴ Cf. E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 163-164.

frame, and the temple as an emblem of our immortal frame:

In 1 Chron 9:23 the term skene, used for the tabernacle, is combined with oikos: en oiko tes skenes...another development of the building imagery occurs in Jewish apocalyptic; when the glory of the future age is described in terms of the new Jerusalem and its buildings; the dwelling-places of the holy and righteous ones, and the like.²³⁵

To a Cilician skenopoios (“leather worker” or “tentmaker” [Acts 18:3]), it would readily evoke notions of travel and transitoriness, nomadic existence and pilgrimage. For a Jew, skenos would be naturally associated with the desert wanderings of the Israelites after the exodus and the “festival of booths” celebrated for seven days during the seventh month of each year. And to a Christian, the term would allude to the tabernacle (miskan, skene, or skenoma) as the locus of God’s presence among his people during the wilderness wandering (e.g. Exod 40:34-38) and then to the indwelling Spirit of Christ as the mode of God’s presence in believers during their pilgrimage of faith to the Promised Land of Christ’s immediate presence.²³⁶

Yet the LXX never renders sukka by skenos, but regularly by skene (a word Paul never uses). Lowrie (56-57) proposes that Paul used skenos rather than skene because he wished to allude to the ad interim tent of meeting (Exod 33:7-11) which was intended for provisional use until the tabernacle (LXX skene) was constructed.²³⁷

That Paul has a temple image in view is apparent from the phrase “not made with hands”; which virtually everywhere else is a technical way of speaking about the new eschatological temple. See above discussion [on 2 Cor 6:16-18, 256-256] and like expressions (222-227); accordingly, the relevant citations are Exod 15:17; Is 66:1-2; Dan 2:34-35 (LXX); Mk 14:58; Acts 7:48-49; 17:24; Heb 9:11,24; Sibylline Oracles 4.11.²³⁸

In addition, the references to “building,” “house” (v1), and “dwelling” (v2) occur in Paul elsewhere with respect to Israel’s temple or the church as the temple. “Building” (oikodome) refers to Israel’s temple (Mt 24:1; Mk 13:1-2) or to the church as the temple (1 Cor 3:9; Eph 2:21-22).²³⁹

Once again, Carrier’s haughty and studied indifference to the world of Biblical scholarship betrays him into the most egregious and embarrassing of blunders.

²³⁵ M. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (T&T Clark 1994), 1:358.

²³⁶ M. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 2005), 370-371.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 370, n.11.

²³⁸ G. Beale, *The Temple & the Church’s Mission*, 257.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

In this same connection, he says:

There can be no doubt that the earliest Christians believed the present world would be annihilated and replaced with a new one, just as it is graphically described in 2 Pet 3:3-13, and clearly assumed in 1 Jn 2:15-17 & Heb 12:26-29; 13:14.²⁴⁰

In reply:

i) Whenever Carrier says “undoubtedly,” this is a telltale sign that a dubious claim is sure to follow. There are two problems with his appeal to 2 Peter:

- a) St. Peter compares future judgment by fire with past judgment by water. But the flood of Noah did not “annihilate” the world.
- b) In eschatological discourse, fiery imagery is often figurative for a process of spiritual refinement.²⁴¹

(a)-(b) don’t rule out the possibility that St. Peter may have something more cataclysmic in view (e.g. a cosmic conflagration, a la Sodom & Gomorrah, on a global scale), but they do expose Carrier’s penchant for greatly overstating his case.

ii) As to 1 Jn 2, Carrier is blind to the ethical nuances of John’s “cosmic” language. As F. F. Bruce puts it:

The “world” (Gr. kosmos) has a wide range of meaning in the Johannine writings, and the context must determine, from one place to another, which phase of its meaning is to be understood...What John warns his readers against in the present passage is the world oriented against God, “the godless world,” as the NEB paraphrases it. The spirit that dominates the world so orientated, “the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,” as it is put in Eph 2:2, is inimical to the love of God and to the uninhibited outflowing of his love in the lives of his people. Conformity to that spirit is worldliness.²⁴²

iii) As to Hebrews 12-13, Carrier’s appeal suffers, as usual, from his childish literalism:

²⁴⁰ ET, 211, 160.

²⁴¹ R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Word 1983), 319-320; T. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* (Broadman 2003), 378, 385, 391; A. Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *WTJ* 49 (1987), 405-413.

²⁴² *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans 1979), 60.

It is commonly assumed that the referent in the expression *ton ouranon*, “the heaven,” in v26b is to the visible, created, cosmological heaven...It seems preferable, however, to interpret the nuance of “the heaven” in v26b from the immediate context...the explicit association of “the earth” with Sinai and the old covenant (vv25b,26a) implies that “the heaven” is to be associated with the new covenant (v25ac). “earth” and “heaven” are symbols of the revelation at Sinai and the new covenant revelation to the writer’s generation, respectively.

The writer found in the text of Hag 2:6LXX the powerful metaphor of “shaking.” The shaking promised in v26b must be interpreted in relationship to the shaking of the earth at Sinai in v26a. The Sinai revelation is defined in v26a as one of judgment, and the future shaking will entail an intensification of the event of judgment. The “shaking” of heaven and earth is not intended to describe a coming historical event, namely the future transformation of the world or its ultimate destruction. It is descriptive of God’s eschatological judgment, which is the corollary of the reception of the fullness of salvation through the new covenant.²⁴³

As a metaphor for transcendent reality, the polis, “city,” can be described by the participle *menousa*, “permanent.”...The heavenly city is thus essentially equivalent to other terms for transcendent reality in Hebrews, including “the heavenly world to come” (2:5), the heavenly “rest” of God (3:11; 4:1,8-11), “the age to come” (6:5), and “the kingdom which cannot be shaken” (12:28).²⁴⁴

Moving on:

Paul also treats the body as a container for the spirit in 2 Cor 4:7...In just this way Paul fuses Jewish with Orphic theology.²⁴⁵

Once again, Carrier has a bad habit of disregarding the natural background. As any student of Scripture would know, the earthenware imagery was a commonplace of OT similes. As Garland documents:

It most likely is that the image derives from Paul’s intimacy with the OT, which begins by avowing that God formed man from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7; see 1 Cor 15:42-48) and typically views God as a potter (Job 10:9; 33:6; Isa 29:16; 41:25; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1-10; Rom 9:21-23). The image of God as potter is even more prominent in the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ W. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Word 1991), 480.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 547.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁴⁶ *2 Corinthians* (Broadman 1999), 220, n.550.

Garland goes on to quote from Fitzgerald's discussion²⁴⁷ of Job 4:18; Isa 30:14; Jer 19:1,10-11 and Lam 4:2.²⁴⁸

In this same connection, Carrier tries to bolster his contention by comparing 1 Cor 2:1-12 with the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon.²⁴⁹ But this is a standard OT motif, cycling through the Pentateuch, Prophetic Books, Historical Books, and Wisdom Literature proper.²⁵⁰ Carrier chooses to ignore the canonical antecedents because he needs something more Hellenistic in time and place to prove that Paul was a syncretist.

It is clear that Carrier's thesis is not driven by the evidence. Rather, he begins with a preconceived thesis, and then goes trolling for whatever evidence he can scrape up to substantiate his thesis.

Moving on:

In 2 Peter [1:15-17] we find a hint of the same sentiment...this body is a mere residence that we inhabit temporarily...Calling this an "exodus" also calls up Philo's conception of the departure of the soul for heaven as something metaphorically prefigured in the legendary Exodus from Egypt. This is probably no coincidence, as both Peter and Philo no doubt drew on earlier sources for their ideas.²⁵¹

Several problems:

i) The idea of a discarnate afterlife is a commonplace of the ANE.²⁵² This follows from two related ideas: (a) the belief that consciousness survives death, and (b) the obvious fact that the "departed" leave their body behind.

ii) This conception of death and the afterlife already exists in the OT. Therefore, Carrier's felt need to assign the views of Peter and Paul to some specific and contemporaneous source is quite unnecessary and grossly underdetermined by the evi-

²⁴⁷ *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel* (Scholars Press 1988), 167-168.

²⁴⁸ *2 Corinthians*, 221, n.551.

²⁴⁹ ET, 143.

²⁵⁰ Cf. M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation & Mystery in Ancient Judaism & Pauline Christianity* (Tübingen 1990); E. Ellis, *Prophecy & Hermeneutic* (Eerdmans 1978), 23-44, 213-220.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁵² Cf. E. Yamauchi, "Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East," *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, R. Longenecker, ed. (Eerdmans 1998), 21-50.

dence.

iii) Yes, Peter undoubtedly drew on an earlier source for his Exodus imagery. In particular, he drew on the Exodus for his Exodus imagery.

The reason Carrier can't see this is that he isn't looking at the evidence. Rather, he is looking at his thesis, and the only evidence he can see is evidence which is reflected and refracted in the distorted lens of his thesis.

iv) He is also overloading the import of the word:

The use of the term exodus for death probably derives from the meaning "end" (i.e., the end of life; exodus tou biou) rather than from the meaning "departure"...thus it need not here imply the soul's departure from the body.²⁵³

The Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, J. Lust et al., eds., gives the following definitions for "exodus": "going out," "way out, outlet," "deliverance out of Egypt, exodus out of Egypt," "end," &c.²⁵⁴

Moving on:

It is clear that Origen's conception is much closer to Paul's than anything we find in the rest of the Church Fathers.²⁵⁵

This brings us all the way back to where Paul began, with his seed analogy. Such a concept might imply continuity to us, but not to those who grew up in an agricultural society.²⁵⁶

Question: were the Church Fathers unacquainted with an agrarian economy? Did Origen know more about farming than the rest of the Church Fathers?

Moving on:

Paul found it exceptionally difficult to find the words to express it...Paul had to resort to ambiguous, indirect metaphors.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 202.

²⁵⁴ 1:161b.

²⁵⁵ ET, 144.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 146.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 146.

Aside from the fact that metaphors are inherently indirect and open-textured, Paul was not straining to find figures of speech. To the contrary, he found everything he needed in the stock imagery of the OT. His imagery in 1 Cor 15 comes from the creation account and intertextual reflections thereon. His imagery in 2 Cor 4 comes from the OT potter/ clay analogy, which, in turn, goes back to the creation account. His imagery in 2 Cor 5 comes from the OT temple/tabernacular motif—while the ingestive image common to both 1 Cor 15:54 and 2 Cor 5:4 goes back to Isa 25:8, which—in turn—has its backdrop in the covenantal feast of Exod 24:11. But Carrier is way too busy lecturing the Bible to listen to the text.

Moving on:

Nowhere does Paul state that a fleshly resurrection of Jesus was a necessary belief, or even a belief anyone held.²⁵⁸

That's a simple-minded way of framing the issue. The resurrection of Christ (along with Ascension), as well as the resurrection of those in Christ, is not ordinarily isolated from the rest of his theology precisely because it is so thoroughly integrated into his theology, as a recurrent motif in the Pauline epistles.²⁵⁹ This is easily lost sight of due to the fact that most of the literature on the Resurrection is apologetic in genre, and therefore accentuates the event of the Resurrection rather than the theology of the Resurrection. 1 Cor 15 stands out because the Resurrection had come under direct challenge.

After quoting Col 1:22,24, Carrier says:

The moment Christ rose from the dead, the church became his body—his earthly body.²⁶⁰

This fails to draw the most elementary of distinctions between the literal body of Christ and the figurative body of Christ as a metaphor for the church. Such hopeless opacity of understanding defies easy correction.²⁶¹ V24 belongs to a different

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 147.

²⁵⁹ E.g. R. Gaffin, *Resurrection & Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (P&R 1978).

²⁶⁰ ET, 147.

²⁶¹ For a discussion of the possible source and significance of this metaphor, cf. E. Best, *One Body in Christ* (SPCK 1955); M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Westminster 1993); G. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus* (University Press of America 1991).

pericope than v22. V.23 marks the Janus-verse. One must keep this literary transition in mind as we shift from the literal to the figurative sense of the “body.”

In this same connection, Carrier also appeals to Col 3:3-4,15.²⁶² But the point of this verse is that our source of life is Christ, and since Christ is in heaven, our source of life lies in heaven—which is hidden to the earthly and present point of view. The Christian is a citizen of two worlds (Eph 2:6). As N. T. Wright puts it:

There is a perfect balance here between the “already” and the “not yet” that are so characteristic of Paul’s teaching on the Christian life. The new age has dawned, and Christians already belong to it. The old age, however, is not yet wound up, and until they die (or until the Lord “appears” again in his second coming) their new life will be a secret truth, “hidden” from view.²⁶³

Moving on:

So also everything Paul says about having “the spirit of Christ” in us and only “the spirit of Christ” being life. How can Christ be in two places at once, flesh in heaven, spirit down here inside us?²⁶⁴

Sometimes you must wonder if Carrier is really that dense, or if he is just playing dumb to advance his agenda. The “Spirit of Christ” is a title for the Holy Spirit—a divine and discarnate being. Although Christ is physically absent from the Church, he is present in the person of the Holy Spirit as his ambassador.²⁶⁵ Keep in mind, too, that the Holy Spirit isn’t literally “inside” us, like a homunculus inhabiting the pineal gland.

Just as we find it convenient or even necessary to use spatial metaphors to conceptualize temporal relations, we employ spatial metaphors to conceptualize the Lord’s economic relations.

Moving on:

The only passages that present a difficulty for my theory are two verses in Rom 8 [11,23]...So insistent is Paul on this point that we are compelled to accept a contradiction in his thought.²⁶⁶

²⁶² ET, 214, n.204.

²⁶³ *Colossians & Philemon* (IVP 1991), 132.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁶⁵ Cf. G. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 478-484.

²⁶⁶ ET, 149.

This is a face-saving way of stating that his theory doesn't fit the facts. And the reason why is that he doesn't know what either "flesh" or "spirit" mean in Pauline usage.

In his next section (51-55), Carrier reiterates and amplifies his maladroit handling of visions and apparitions. Throughout this section, Carrier takes his own philosophical viewpoint for granted, which begs the question. For example, he says that:

Everything for us, then rests on what Paul means by these appearances of Jesus, since only that is acceptable today as evidence for an actual historical event.²⁶⁷

No supporting argument is offered as to why Carrier's self-serving rules of evidence should be deferred to as the only acceptable rules of evidence.

In the same vein:

An apocalypse...is believed to be real—even though clearly to us an internal and psychologically subjective event, like an "out of body experience" involving imagined transport to heaven...We now know that such experiences can have a purely psychological biological cause, and thus can easily be doubted as to experiences of any genuine external reality. But that is not how they were understood by religious men in those days.²⁶⁸

Notice the number of question-begging descriptions bundled into this one statement:

- a) The apparitions of Christ were all "apocalyptic visions."
- b) All visions are internal, subjective events.
- c) Visions are analogous to OBEs.
- d) OBEs and other suchlike are imaginary.

On one level this merits no response because it offers no evidence. We are treated to a chain of assertions, each of which requires a separate argument, for which no argument is forthcoming. And hovering in the background is his presumptive materialism, for which no supporting argument is offered.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 151.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 153.

What this distills down to is a circular apologetic: Carrier doesn't believe it because he doesn't believe it, and the reader shouldn't believe it for the same non-reason.

Pay close attention to Carrier's subversive standard of evidence. No one denies that visionary experiences "can" be purely subjective. Indeed, no one denies that spiritual claims may sometimes be fraudulent. However, the bare, general possibility creates no negative presumption in any particular case.

After all, we also know that a witness to a crime can be mistaken, if not an outright liar. But that bare possibility, which is sometimes a sad reality, doesn't make it antecedently probable that any given witness is actually mistaken or perjurious in any given case.

In Scripture, visionary revelation has reference to the subject of revelation, not the object—to a particular mode of revelation. The interiority of the process does not prejudge the interiority or exteriority of the percept.

At the risk of stating the obvious, which seems necessary since Carrier has chosen to ignore the obvious, all of perception has a subjective, psychological component. The object of thought is not the sensible as it subsists outside the percipient, but the mental representation of the sensible.

The only immediate object of thought is thought itself—even if the source goes back to an external stimulus. Frankly, our belief in the external world is an act of faith, even a leap of faith—as is our confidence in the correspondence between appearance and reality; for perception is a one-way street. The percipient can never actually retrace the perceptual process. All he can do is to offer a hypothetical reconstruction from the receiving-end. He can postulate photons which excite the optic nerve, and so on, but this ostensibly "objective" explanation is deceptive inasmuch it offers an analysis of appearances on the basis of appearances—on the basis of how things appear to us, so it can never get below the level of appearances.

Left to our own devices, Berkeley had the better of the argument. Indeed, at that level, his argument is unassailable.²⁶⁹

Ironically, the only escape from radical subjectivity is the very thing that Carrier denies: propositional revelation. The closest thing we can ever get to a direct description of the way things are is a description supplied by the Creator of the world.

²⁶⁹ G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas & Philo*, R. Adams, ed. (Hackett 1988).

The ontology of visionary revelation is dualistic rather than materialistic. It presupposes a double substance ontology of mind and body, spirit and matter. Ordinarily, the perception of an embodied agent is channeled through the senses, but in an altered state of consciousness the soul, cut off from sensory input, enjoys direct awareness of the spiritual realm.

This is a special case of a wide variety of widely attested parapsychological phenomena—mysticism, necromancy, oneiromancy, astral travel, NDEs, OBEs, Old-Hag Syndrome.²⁷⁰ Carrier chooses to dismiss this out of hand because it doesn't fit into his narrow worldview. From a Scriptural standpoint, such phenomena can be, by turns, divine, demonic, or delusive.

In addition, visionary revelation ranges along a public-private continuum, with some Scriptural cases at the private end of the spectrum, and others at the public end. This is unsurprising, for we would expect revelation to be targeted by God to a particular audience—whether one or many. It is controlled and calibrated according to the purpose served.

An OBE is a picturesque, phenomenological description—reported from the inside out rather than the outside in. St. Paul's famous account is notably noncommittal on the precise logistics of the experience (2 Cor 12). That is because the mode of revelation is merely the incidental means of revelation, and not the direct content of revelation itself. The modality is not given in the revelatory process; rather, the revelation is given by means of this particular process. It is not an object of direct inspection. The fact that Biblical seers don't indulge in the sort of "scientific" de-

²⁷⁰ There are extensive and well-documented case-studies on various aspects of the paranormal which no amount of secular hand-waiving and snide dismissals can wish away. Cf. D. Bartholomew, *Uncertain Belief* (Clarendon 1996); F. Goodman, *How About Demons* (Indiana University Press 1988); G. Habermas & J. Moreland, *Beyond Death* (Crossway Books 1998); K. Koch, *Christian Counseling & Occultism* (Kregel 1972); H. Montefiore, *The Paranormal: A Bishop Investigates* (Upfront 2002); J. Montgomery, *Demon Possession* (Bethany 1976); *Principalities & Powers* (Dimension Books 1975); J. Richards, *But Deliver Us From Evil* (Seabury 1974); M. Saborn, *Light & Death* (Zondervan 1998); R. Sheldrake, *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* (Riverhead Books 1995); M. Unger, *The Haunting of Bishop Pike* (Tyndale 1971).

<http://www.equip.org/free/DD282-1.htm>

<http://www.equip.org/free/DD282-2.htm>

<http://www.sheldrake.org/>

scriptions you find in the apocryphal literature, such as the astronomical adventures of Enoch, is a tribute to their veracity.²⁷¹

Moreover, Carrier's appeal to 2 Cor 13 cuts against the grain of the text, for whether we render "arretos" as ineffable or forbidden, the point remains that his ecstatic experience "did not change him in any way, and did not provide him with any information he could use."²⁷² For this reason alone, and this is not the only reason, Carrier's identification of 2 Cor 13 with Gal 1-2 or Acts 9 cannot be sustained.

Furthermore, Carrier evinces a basic ignorance of NT chronology. If 2 Corinthians was written around AD 55-56, then the vision took place about AD 42-43. This would place it earlier than the events described in Gal 1-2 (c. AD 46 or AD 49), and much later than the Damascus Road encounter (c. AD 33).²⁷³

What's more, the experience described in 2 Cor 12:1-4 is not a vision, but an audition. Paul doesn't talk about what he "saw," but what he "heard."

In addition, the fact that Paul is noncommittal on whether his rapture was in the body or out the body goes to show that, for him, an embodied heavenly existence is a live option.

Finally, even prior to his conversion, Paul would have had occasion to learn the basic biographical facts about the public ministry of Christ from the Christians he arrested and interrogated.

Carrier alleges that the conversion accounts of Paul are contradictory.²⁷⁴ A few comments are in order:

i) To begin with, if we have three real speeches, on the same subject, but delivered at differing times and places to a different audience each time, then we wouldn't expect them to be identical.

²⁷¹ For a historical overview of the ascent motif, cf. M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford 1993). On the apologetic function of the Enochian pseudepigrapha in postdating Essene chronology, cf. R. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian* (Brill 1996), 217-254.

²⁷² Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford 1996), 320.

²⁷³ Cf. P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1997), 561, n.26; M. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 835-837.

²⁷⁴ ET, 154, 217, n.250.

To have three verbatim speeches, with no audience adaptation, would be a mark of artificiality. It would be a clear indication that Luke merely fabricated a Pauline speech, and then inserted the identical speech at three different junctures within his narrative.

Some stylistic variety is a mark of authenticity, not inauthenticity.

ii) We also need to distinguish between direct and indirect discourse, and make allowance for the difference between Lucan and Pauline usage depending on which voice is in play.

iii) There are also certain semantic nuances to consider. As one recent Greek grammarian explains:

An interesting item of dispute is the object of the verb ακουω with the genitive or accusative case. This is important for discussion of Acts 9:7 & 22:9...The traditional understanding is that with the genitive ακουω means to hear but not understand; or that the genitive is concerned with the form of speech but the accusative with the content.²⁷⁵

Carrier also claims that:

Paul would not call a conscious state “sleep.” That would be a contradiction in terms...2 Cor 5:8-9 refers to our future existence in new bodies, and Phil 1:23 refers to being free of toil and suffering (by sleeping in Christ until the resurrection).²⁷⁶

In reply:

i) The business about a contradiction in terms is simply maladroit. Since, on any accounting, sleep is employed as a metaphor for death, then even if sleep and consciousness were literally contradictory, that’s entirely beside the point. Figures of speech were never meant to be taken that literally. The question to ask is how that metaphor functions in its cultural context.

a) At one level, the metaphor is apt because the dead outwardly resemble a sleeper.

²⁷⁵ S. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield 1995), 97; Cf. N. Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (T&T Clark 1977), 86-90.

²⁷⁶ ET, 217, n.251.

b) Because Carrier is a materialist, he associates sleep with a state of unconsciousness. When the body slumbers, the brain slumbers, and the mind is the brain. That, however, is to impose a modern paradigm on an ancient text.

In Scripture, although the body slumbers, the soul is awake. Indeed, the dormative state of the body liberates the soul to enjoy an altered state of consciousness. Shut off from the sensible world, it is free to perceive the spiritual realm. Indeed, this is frequently depicted in terms of astral travel. That's why, in Scripture, sleepers are the natural recipients of inspired dreams. And even daydreams, of a visionary kind, occur in a trance (e.g. Acts 10:10-11; 22:17). In order to be conscious of the spiritual realm, the subject must be unconscious of the sensible realm.

c) There is also a natural linkage between sleep and rest. "Rest," due to its associations with the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17) and the Promised Land (Deut 12:9-10; 1 Kg 8:56; Ps 95:8-11), becomes a major motif in Scripture, unfolding into the notion of an eschatological rest for the people of God (cf. Isa 57:1-2; Dan 12:12-13; Heb 3:7-4:12; Rev 14:13).²⁷⁷

ii) By contrast, there is nothing overtly figurative about 2 Cor 5:8 or Phil 1:23, and if you deny the survival of consciousness, then it would be contradiction in terms for Paul to "be" with the Lord. If, in consequence of death, there is no soul or body, then there is no "being" to "be" with the Lord.

iii) At this juncture, Carrier also seems to be oblivious to cultural assumptions:

a) The OT prohibition against necromancy assumes the conscious survival of the departed.

b) As do depictions of the afterlife (e.g., Isa 14:9ff.; Lk 16:19ff; Rev 6:9ff; 20:4).

c) As does the popular belief in ghosts (e.g., 1 Sam 28:7-19; Mt 14:26; 17:3; Lk 24:37-39; Acts 12:15).

Indeed, Carrier regards this belief as part of the "sociocultural context" of the NT.²⁷⁸ If so, then why does he insist that Paul could not have had the intermediate state in mind in 2 Cor 5:8 and Phil 1:23?

²⁷⁷ Cf. "Rest," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Alexander et al., eds. (IVP 2000), 727-732.

²⁷⁸ ET, 171.

d) Carrier also believes that Paul's doctrine is quite close to Philo's immortality of the soul.

As usual, Carrier's "evidence" is tugging in contrary directions. He needs the belief in ghosts to show how credulous and superstitious the Jews supposedly were, in order to disprove the empty tomb. But he needs to deny the belief in ghosts to prove that Paul put all his chips on the "spiritual body." Carrier needs Philo to bridge the gap, but he needs to kick the Philonic ladder aside once he arrives.

This is the problem when you begin with a preconceived theory, and then go looking for the evidence.

In this same general connection, Carrier says:

The term anabiosis is a word for the general resurrection in 2 Mac 7:9, as in Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers 1.9 (quoting Theopompus, a historian from the 4C BCE, as saying: "According to the [Persian] Magi, men will be resurrected and become immortal, and what exists will endure through their incantations," a fact which is also reported by his contemporary Eudemus of Rhodes, proving that the Jewish doctrine of resurrection actually derives from earlier Persian religion).²⁷⁹

Once again, it is tremendously impressive how many question-begging claims Carrier is able to squeeze into one overstuffed sentence:

i) Anabiosis doesn't mean "the general resurrection." It doesn't even mean "resurrection." All it means is a "return to life." Carrier is committing the classic sense/reference fallacy.

ii) Moreover, it doesn't even refer to the "general resurrection," in 2 Mac 7:9,²⁸⁰ but only to the resurrection of the just.

iii) Carrier is totally reliant on post-Christian, non-Zoroastrian sources for his claim. All he actually gives us is a quote attributed to one Greek historian (Theopompus) by another Greek writer, Diogenes Laertius (AD 3C). He also has a vague reference to another Greek writer (Eudemus), the source for which is presumably

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 218, n.252.

²⁸⁰ Incidentally, 2 Macabees is a 1-2C BC Alexandrian apocryphon.

Simplicius (AD 6C). Of course, the reader would never get this information from Carrier.

iv) Note the double-standard. Carrier dismisses secondary sources when a Christian is quoting a pagan: “through the distorting filter of ‘orthodox’ writers (e.g., the antiheretical literature.”²⁸¹

But the filter of a tertiary source when a Greek is quoting a fellow Greek summarizing Persian piety is just fine and dandy with Carrier.

v) For the rest, it will suffice to quote a couple of real scholars:

Theopompus (4C BC) attributes a belief in any anastasis (“resurrection”) to the Persians. Herodotus’s (3.62) statement attributed to Prexaspes—“If then the dead can rise, you may look to see Astyages the Mede rise up against you, but if nature’s order be not changed, assuredly no harm to you will arise from Smerdis”—seems to indicate a lack of belief in a resurrection among the Persians in the 5C BC.²⁸²

To sustain such claims one must assume: the chronological priority of the Iranian beliefs;²⁸³ late dates for the OT texts,²⁸⁴ a close parallelism between the beliefs; and reasons for dependence.²⁸⁵

The answer depends first on the antiquity of the Zoroastrian belief in the resurrection. Boyce believes that Zoroaster’s Gathas (Y. 30.7) allude to this belief. But as we have seen [456f.], most scholars disagree. The monographic study by Franz König on this subject concludes that the earliest attestation of a Zoroastrian belief in a resurrection cannot be dated before the 4C BC.²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Ibid., 227, n.333.

²⁸² E. Yamauchi, *Persia & the Bible* (Baker 1990), 456, n.363.

²⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, 395-436.

²⁸⁴ Carrier is dismissing out of hand all of the scholarly arguments against the late dating of Daniel and Isaiah. On Daniel, this includes the work of Archer, Baldwin, Harrison, Hasel, Kitchen, Millard, Waltke, Whitcomb, Wiseman, Yamauchi, and Young. On Isaiah, this includes the work of Allis, Archer, Harrison, Kitchen, Margalioth, Motyer, Oswalt, Robertson, and Young. Carrier’s posture is a classic example of liberal fideism: don’t bother me with any inconvenient facts!

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 459.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 461.

Furthermore, there are fundamental differences in how the Jews and the Persians conceived of the resurrection. This has been noted by many scholars, such as Robert H. Charles.²⁸⁷

The Avestan texts wandered gradually from (most likely) eastern Iran to the southwest, where they were finally fixed in writing by the Sassanian kings, a process perhaps already begun in the first centuries of the Christian era under the Arsacids. However, our oldest Avestan manuscript dates from only AD 1288, and all extant manuscripts go back to a single Stammhandschrift of the 9-10C.²⁸⁸

The fact that Theopompus also mentions that at the end of time mankind “will not cast a shadow” seems to suggest that a spiritual rather than the, more normally attested, material resurrection.²⁸⁹

Rather strikingly, no other mention of resurrection in Iranian thought can be found before the Sassanian period, when the belief in an afterlife and resurrection was evidently much discussed... We know that in the 3-4C AD Christianity made great inroads in Iran. It may well be that the Zoroastrian leader Kirdir decided to beat the Christians on their own terrain and “upvalued” the resurrection as mentioned in the Young Avesta.²⁹⁰

But if you think this is bad, it only gets worse:

In the generation after Paul someone wrote what was probably the first-ever account of the “Gospel” of Jesus Christ. Tradition has assigned the book to an unknown author named Mark, according to legend, Peter’s scribe... Most scholars believe it was [written] sometime around 70 CE, give or take a decade. But it is clear that Paul knew nothing of the work, so we can be fairly certain it was not circulating when he was alive. Yet this Gospel contains the first known appearance of an empty tomb story. All other accounts rely upon it and basically just embellish it or modify it to suit each author’s own narrative and ideological agenda. As nearly all scholars agree, Matthew and Luke clearly used Mark as their source... there is no indication any of them [Matthew, Luke, John] has any other source of information for the changes and additions they made.²⁹¹

Luke does claim to have many sources, but does not say who or for what material... Likewise, John claims to derive from an unnamed eyewitness, but only in

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 461.

²⁸⁸ J. Bremmer, *The Rise & Fall of the Afterlife* (Routledge 2002), 47.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 49.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 49.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 155.

a section of his Gospel that looks like it was added by a different author, who does not include mention of the empty tomb.²⁹²

I suppose we should be impressed by just how many tendentious denials Carrier is able to compress into a couple of paragraphs. At one level, there is nothing to respond to as we read him make one baseless claim after another, without any evidence and often in the teeth of contrary evidence. There is so much he passes over in silence or ignorance or both. Giants of 19C scholarship like Lightfoot,²⁹³ Westcott,²⁹⁴ and Zahn²⁹⁵ go unmentioned, much less rebutted. 20C scholars²⁹⁶ such as Barnett,²⁹⁷ Blomberg,²⁹⁸ Ellis,²⁹⁹ Guthrie,³⁰⁰ Köstenberger,³⁰¹ J. A. Robinson,³⁰² J. A. T. Robinson,³⁰³ Stonehouse,³⁰⁴ and Schlatter³⁰⁵ join the blacklist. Likewise, moderate to conservative commentators on Matthew,³⁰⁶ Mark,³⁰⁷ Luke³⁰⁸, and John³⁰⁹ sink without a trace.

The point is not to oppose my experts to his experts, as though it were an argument from authority. Rather, the scholars I've cited, who span the theological spectrum, make an evidentiary case for their position.

It is commonplace to commend a scholar for the breadth and depth of his erudition. But where Carrier is concerned, one can only remark on the breath and depth of his

²⁹² Ibid., 156.

²⁹³ *Biblical Essays* (Baker 1979).

²⁹⁴ *The Gospel According to St. John* (Eerdmans 1975).

²⁹⁵ *Introduction to the New Testament* (Klock & Klock 1977).

²⁹⁶ Carrier is not, of course, responsible for titles published after the publication of the ET. I cite these for the benefit of the reader.

²⁹⁷ *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years* (Eerdmans 2005).

²⁹⁸ *Jesus & the Gospels* (Broadman 1997).

²⁹⁹ *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill 2002).

³⁰⁰ *New Testament Introduction* (IVP 1990).

³⁰¹ *Encountering John* (Baker 2003).

³⁰² *The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel* (London 1908).

³⁰³ *Redating the New Testament* (Westminster 1976); *The Priority of John* (Meyer-Stone Books 1987).

³⁰⁴ *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Baker 1979); *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* (Baker 1979).

³⁰⁵ *New Testament Theology* (Baker 1999).

³⁰⁶ E.g., Blomberg, Carson, France, Gundry, Hagner, Keener, Morris, Nolland, and Zahn.

³⁰⁷ E.g., Cranfield, France, Edwards, Evans, Gundry, Lane, and Witherington.

³⁰⁸ E.g., Arndt, Bock, C. A. Evans, Marshall, and Zahn.

³⁰⁹ E.g., Blomberg, Bruce, Carson, Keener, Morris, Witherington, and Zahn.

Biblical illiteracy. Rarely has a man written so much on a subject of which he knows so little.

But even though I can't very well condense hundreds of pages of closely reasoned argument from the above-named writers, I will venture to make a few comments on Carrier's groundless assertions.

i) The Gospels are not anonymous. All our MSS name the authors of the Gospels. And there is no evidence that this is an editorial addition. Indeed, given the antiquity and uniformity of these ascriptions, the evidence is against their unoriginality.³¹⁰

You notice that Carrier has no hesitation in citing other Jewish and pagan writers by name—even though the quantity and quality of MSS evidence for those works is negligible compared with the NT.

Assuming that the traditional attributions are true—and the superscriptions are exceedingly well-attested—then Matthew and Luke would certainly have other sources of information at their fingertips.

ii) Mark is not an unknown individual. He is known to us from both the Lucan and Pauline corpus.

iii) "Tradition" and "legend" are hardly synonymous.

iv) Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Gospel of Mark was written around AD 70, "give or take a decade," the lower figure would put it within the lifetime of Paul—even by Carrier's reckoning. For Paul's death is generally dated to around AD 65.³¹¹ So either Carrier can't do the math or he doesn't know the rudiments of NT chronology.

v) As a matter of fact, David Wenham has marshaled internal, comparative evidence to show that Paul, writing way back in the 40s, was already acquainted with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke—and maybe even the Fourth Gospel for good

³¹⁰ Cf. M. Hengel, *The Four Gospels & the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Trinity 2000), 48-56.

³¹¹ Cf. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1984).

measure.³¹² Assuming Marcan priority, this completely upends Mr. Carrier's entire thesis. Even without Marcan priority, the damage is done.

Of course, this runs counter to what "most" scholars believe, but the decades-long gap between oral tradition and the canonical gospels posited by "most" scholars has always been completely irrational. This was not a preliterate culture. If men could pen letters, they could just as well pen gospels.

vi) Carrier is trying to play both sides of the fence. On the one hand he says:

Matthew and Luke clearly used Mark as their source, repeating the same elements in the same order and often using identical vocabulary and word order, not only for this story but for the whole Gospel.³¹³

If so, then this is an example of how extremely conservative Matthew and Luke are in handling their sources. How pedantically faithful they are in respecting and preserving the Marcan source.

On the other hand, he also says:

All other accounts rely upon it and basically just embellish it or modify it to suit each author's own narrative and ideological agenda.³¹⁴

If so, then that is an example of how extremely cavalier Matthew and Luke are in handling their sources. How faithless they are in reproducing the Marcan source.

You see how these two assertions are tugging in opposite directions? Carrier is in a bind. He needs one sort of argument to prove Marcan priority, and a contrary argument to prove legendary embellishment. So his thesis is drawn-and-quartered by the conflicting demands of his own agenda.

Incidentally, the assumption of Johannine dependence on the Synoptics is highly contentious.³¹⁵

³¹² *Paul & Jesus* (Eerdmans 2002); *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Eerdmans 1985).

³¹³ ET, 155.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

³¹⁵ Cf. D. Smith, *John Among the Gospels* (Fortress 1992).

vii) Carrier evidently believes that Jn 21:24 is the only reference to the eyewitness author. This is another example of his shallow knowledge of the Bible, along with his inattention to the secondary literature. Actually, the witness-motif is one of the subthemes of the Fourth Gospel, surfacing at three key points in the narrative: the prologue (1:14), death of Christ (19:35), and epilogue (21:24). 21:24 forms an inclusio to 1:14.³¹⁶

viii) We don't "know" Luke's sources in the sense that Luke doesn't name his sources, but as a student of ancient history, Carrier certainly believes it to be possible to infer an author's sources. Indeed, Carrier's own quite fanciful historical reconstruction does this to a fare-thee-well.

It is a simple matter to infer from the Book of Acts, as well as the personal greetings which introduce and conclude the letters of Paul, the overlapping circle of Luke's own informants and contacts.

ix) More generally, if Mark invented the story of the empty tomb to oppose Paul's ethereal version of the glorified body—as Carrier would have it—then Mark missed a number of sterling opportunities to pad his case. Why did he stop with the empty tomb? Taken by itself, an empty tomb is quite consistent with more than one model of the Resurrection. Even assuming, for the sake of argument, Carrier's interpretation of Paul, how does the Marcan account negate the Pauline conception? Why didn't he do what Luke and John do—what with the fish and bread and nail-prints?

x) Moreover, Carrier's thesis assumes that pre-Marcian Christians had no narrative account of their Lord's life and death and afterlife, which is implausible in the extreme:

How likely is it that any Christian group was ever long content with sparse theological assertions unattached to stories and so unillustrated? 1 Cor 15:3-8 must be a summary of traditional narratives that were told in fuller forms elsewhere.

Surely no one would ever have been satisfied with the shorn assertions, "Jesus' appearance to Cephas" and "Jesus appeared to five hundred people at once."

³¹⁶ For a detailed defense of the originality and apostolicity of Jn 21:24, cf. H. Jackson, "Ancient Self-referential Conventions & their Implications for the Authorship & Integrity of John," *JTS* 50 (1999), 1-34; A. Köstenberger, "'I Suppose' (oimai): The Conclusion of John's Gospel in Its Literary & Historical Context," *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting*, P. Williams et al., eds. (Eerdmans 2005), 72-88.

This is no more plausible than urging that Christians at first said things such as “Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38) and only much later enjoyed telling miracle stories about him; or that while Paul and others preached Christ crucified, no supposed particulars about Jesus’ martyrdom emerged until decades after the fact, when interest unaccountably set in.³¹⁷

The argument for Pauline priority to the detriment of the Gospel narratives of the women at the tomb asserts that the stories developed out of the kerygma...[But] it is unclear why this argument applies to the resurrection narratives and not to the stories of Jesus’ ministry. Few, if any, believe that first there were only summary statements about Jesus’ ministry such as we find in the Acts sermons...and that the stories about Jesus’ healings and exorcisms we find in the Gospels developed, in that sense, out of the kerygma.³¹⁸

Moving on:

This does not mean these authors must be considered liars. The logic of their sectarian dogma would lead to an honest and sincere belief in an empty tomb.³¹⁹

It would? By way of reply:

i) Most religious movements do not survive the death of their founder—especially when the founder dies an ignominious and untimely death. Gamaliel’s speech is a classic case in point (Acts 5:36-37).

ii) Of those that do survive, they do so by redefining the terms of fulfillment so that the “prophet who failed” was a true prophet after all as long as you spiritualize the fulfillment, which takes it out of the realm of empirical disproof.

But Carrier’s argument is moving in the opposite direction: not from physical to spiritual, but from spiritual to physical. On his theory, the original version of the Resurrection consisted in belief in an ethereal body, which was only embellished, at a later date, into belief in any empty tomb and physical body.

But this is not how cults typically save face. Rather, the direction is: first make a tangible prediction; when this falls through, redefine the terms of fulfillment in more intangible terms.

³¹⁷ D. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus* (T&T Clark 2005), 235-236.

³¹⁸ R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women* (Eerdmans 2002), 261.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

In addition, it is clearly a lie to make up a story whole cloth.

But Carrier tries to prop up his claim with the following:

The rest they can have total confidence in through the two popular “excuses” of their day, which were respectable then, but now are often agreed to be dubious: (1) historical truth can be revealed directly by God through the Holy Spirit, and (2) whatever isn’t historically true is nevertheless didactically true. Just as Paul can find “hidden meaning” in the OT Prophets, and Philo and the Therapeutae can find deep symbolic truths in ostensibly historical narratives like that of Exodus, so could the Gospel authors create narratives with deeper, hidden meanings under a veil of history.³²⁰

By way of reply:

i) These two “excuses” can’t both apply to the very same document, for if creative didactic truth will do, then you don’t need revealed historical—and if revealed historical truth will do, then you don’t need creative didactic truth.

There is no attempt on Carrier’s part to be the least bit fair to the Bible. Any alternative theory, however inconsistent, is preferable to crediting the record of Scripture.

ii) Whether direct revelation is dubious or not depends entirely on your philosophical precommitments.

iii) In any event, none of the four evangelists lays claim to direct revelation. And we have an example of what this would look like in the Apocalypse.

Matthew and Mark don’t say where they got their information, but as an Apostle (Matthew) or a resident of Jerusalem (Mark, cf. Acts 12:12), they didn’t need either direct revelation or “didactic” truth.

iv) If didactic truth were such an accepted convention, then why didn’t Paul fabricate his own Gospel? Why didn’t Philo fabricate his own “history” of the Exodus?

v) Carrier does nothing to show that Paul is finding an esoteric meaning in the OT prophets. That’s nothing more than sheer assertion on his part.

³²⁰ Ibid., 156.

In this same connection, Carrier appeals to 1 Cor 2:4-8 to prove the existence of a *doctrina arcana*.³²¹ It would take us too far off the beaten track to reproduce or summarize all the arguments against this construction. The reader will find a thoroughgoing refutation in the standard literature.³²²

Carrier then cobbles together a number of verses from the Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews to support his thesis of a “new, superhuman body,”³²³

That Jesus is the new and greater temple is, indeed, a major theme of NT theology, and caps a leading OT motif.³²⁴ This is, however, moving on the plane of typology and symbolism, where the glorified body of Christ is emblematic of his finished redemptive work. It has nothing to do with the composition of the body, in terms of the raw stuff or constitutive elements of which it’s made. Once again, Carrier is unable to emancipate his mind from its gauche, backwoods literalism.

Moving on:

Mark’s use of a “young man” who loses his linen garment (representing the body of flesh, like the linen cloth that “clothes” the dead Jesus in Mk 15:26), becoming naked (Mk 14:51-52), then after “the resurrection” is clothed in a white robe (Mk 16:5), representing the celestial body (e.g., Dan 12:2-3,10).³²⁵

No doubt Carrier can prove anything once he repairs to this unbridled amalgam of free association and allegorical exegesis. It’s as if we’d suddenly strayed into Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia*. Very odd that a hardboiled atheist like Carrier has the same hermeneutical instincts as a raving cult-leader.

Moving on:

Mark also reiterates the Pauline view (consistent with but not entailing a two-body resurrection doctrine) that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”³²⁶

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 219, 261.

³²² D. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 91-93; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 93-98; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 224-242

³²³ *ET*, 157; 219, n.264.

³²⁴ Cf. G. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

This is hopeless, simply hopeless. The antithesis is ethical, not metaphysical—the point being that we often mean to do right, but lack the moral resolve to make good on our good intentions, using the disciples’ drowsiness as a handy illustration.

Moving on:

Mark records a saying of Jesus that the raised will be “just like angels in the heavens,” and angels were typically ethereal.³²⁷

The problem here is that Carrier isn’t drawing the parallel at the same point where Jesus draws the parallel. The analogy lies, not with incorporeity, but immortality (Lk 20:36). Because the saints are like the angels—with respect to immortality—they have no need of conjugal relations or the marital bond to replace the departed or supply a stable two-parent home for the rearing and role-modeling of the young. Remember that the original question had to do with Levirate marriage, the sole purpose of which was procreative (v28).³²⁸

So the answer is quite narrowly targeted. It is entirely consistent with a physical resurrection. Indeed, it is quite consistent with the possibility of sex. After all, Jesus died as a man, and rose as a man. And he was still able to consume food.³²⁹

It is only at odds with the temporary purpose of marriage—whose function is obsolete in the world to come (cf. Isa 56:3-5).

For that matter, the verse does not even preclude the possibility of angelic sexuality. This is another popular over-reading of the text. There is, for example, the traditional interpretation of Gen 6:1-4.³³⁰

The gospel accounts (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:36) take the heavenly angels as their point of reference. Fallen angels are another matter. If capable of sexual rela-

³²⁷ Ibid., 157.

³²⁸ Cf. R. Gundry, *Mark* (Eerdmans 1993), 706, 708; C. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans 1999), 528.

³²⁹ My point is not necessarily to make a case for sex in the world to come. But too many Christians have overinterpreted this verse as though it rules out the possibility of sex in the afterlife, which, as a careful reading will show (see above), it does not. So if it is consistent with sex in the world to come, it is certainly consistent with a physical resurrection. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. For sex would be a special case of full physicality.

³³⁰ Cf. V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Eerdmans 1991), 1:261-272.

tions, this would be a case of illicit relations. But what is impermissible is not impossible.³³¹

Moving on:

Where did Mark get the idea of an empty tomb, and what did he intend his empty tomb narrative to mean?...the most likely origins are the Psalms.³³²

Before we get to the specifics, not only does he attribute the empty tomb to “Psalmic origins,” but a few pages later he attributes it to “Orphic origins.” This sort of explanatory overkill, common in Carrier, betrays, once again, a lack of confidence in his own source criticism. If he could trace the empty tomb to the Psalter, he wouldn’t need Orphism, and if he could trace the empty tomb to Orphism, he wouldn’t need the Psalter. Not only are these different putative sources, but divergent sources in time, place, and culture.

Actually, Carrier goes on to document what he considers to be a resurrection-motif in parts of the OT other than the Psalter. Some of his parallels are more convincing than others. There are points at which he veers into free association. But I’ll stick to the main point for now:

i) Perhaps the first thing to observe is the point-blank contradiction between Carrier and Drange. While Drange can find next to nothing in the OT to parallel or anticipate the Resurrection, Carrier has no problem digging up all sorts of background material.

Likewise, Drange regards the absence of such material as disconfirmatory whereas Carrier regards the presence of such material as disconfirmatory.

So here are two contributors to the same book, both arguing against the Resurrection, using conflicting criteria and conflicting arguments. If Carrier’s objection is valid, then Drange’s objection is invalid, or vice versa. So do they falsify the Resurrection, or do they falsify each other?

ii) Perhaps the next thing to observe is the unspoken assumption, on Carrier’s part, that if the Resurrection account has OT antecedents, then this somehow disproves

³³¹ Again, my point is not necessarily to make a case for angelic sexuality. But when exegetical options are prematurely taken off the table, the effect is to prejudge other options and unduly curtail our theological resources.

³³² ET, 158.

the historicity of the account. Carrier offers no supporting argument for this assumption, and his assumption is quite counterintuitive. For, according to the classic argument from prophecy (inclusive of typology), what we have here is a pattern of promise and fulfillment which, in turn, implies the inspiration of Scripture and the providence of God. For only divine power and foresight could predict the future and orchestrate events to line up behind his predictions.

So the fact that the Resurrection has OT antecedents is scarcely a disproof of the event. If anything, it's a classic example of prophetic proof.

However, Carrier attempts, I guess, to get around this by conjecturing that Mark began with an OT prooftext, and then made up a corresponding story. But there are a number of difficulties with his position:

i) Carrier has to credit Mark with a very subtle typological scheme and theological methodology. Indeed, it's so subtle that his co-contributor, Theodore Drange, can't see it at all!

Yet Marcan priority is also a cornerstone of Carrier's thesis. But one of the arguments for Marcan priority is that he is theologically primitive compared to the more advanced doctrine and methodology of Matthew, Luke, and John. So evidence of Marcan sophistication would count as evidence against Marcan priority.

ii) Liberals typically accuse the gospel writers of doing violence to original intent, of quoting the OT out of context and twisting Scripture to make a Messianic prooftext terminate with the life of Christ. But if, as Carrier would have us believe, Mark began with a given prooftext, and then invented a story about the life of Christ to illustrate the prooftext, surely he didn't need to be so oblique and round-about in making his point.

Only if Mark is beginning, not with an OT text, but a historical event, does his procedure make sense. The facts are driving the story.

iii) There are a couple of intertextual "parallels" which I wish to comment on because it lays the foundation for some of Carrier's more ambitious and imaginative building projects:

For example, both Mark and Ecclesiastes speak of walking under the sun and seeing the youth who “stands in place” of the king (Eccl 4:15).³³³

On the face of it it’s pretty peculiar the way Carrier plucks this verse out of thin air—one stray verse from one OT book, which he somehow turns into a thematic parallel. In context, the point of contrast is between the teaming masses on the march (all those who “walk” under the sun) and the youth who “stands” alone. This connected imagery does not carry over into Mk 16.

Once again, Carrier is so busy trying to ransack the Bible (and the Classics) for specious parallels that he doesn’t pay attention to what the text actually depicts.

iv) The second “parallel” takes the following form:

Even more prominently, when the women say, “Who will roll away the stone...?” Mark copies a phrase from the Genesis narrative of Jacob’s fathering of the twelve tribes of Israel through two women (and two slaves)...So here, for Mark, it evokes Jacob’s watering of the sheep, and the founding of Israel.³³⁴

In reply:

a) As a quick check of Septuagintal usage will disclose, “kulio” is the idiomatic verb which is paired off with “lithos” (Josh 10:18; 2 Sam 14:33; Prov 26:27). The prepositional compound form (“apokulio”) is employed to indicate the direction in which the stone is rolled (apo-”away from”). So there is no special significance attaching to the verbal parallel between Gen 29:3,8 and Mk 16:3.

b) Mark is alluding, not to Gen 29, but the previous chapter of his own gospel:

The women’s question, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” harks back to 15:46-47 and sets the stage for the “looking up” and seeing “that the stone is rolled away.”³³⁵

c) And even if Mark were alluding to Gen 29, Carrier infers from this innocent allusion to one episode in the life of Jacob that this faint allusion exerts a magnetic force attracting every other episode in Jacob’s life.

³³³ ET, 161.

³³⁴ Ibid., 161.

³³⁵ R. Gundry, *Mark*, 990.

But surely that inference is both unprovable and implausible. Surely the purpose of a literary allusion is to trigger a particular association, setting up a particular parallel between the past and the present, and not to trigger every possible association—the effect of which would be to drown out the intended comparison in the white noise of every other association.

In a footnote (p221, n.287), the static interference gets even worse as Carrier allegorizes the names of the women in Mark “so [that] the two Marys represent Egypt and Israel,” &c.

To begin with, in the small world of 1C Palestine, Jews were indeed named after famous people and places in OT history. They were literally living in the world of the OT.

But for that same reason, the names in Mk 15-16 have no more narrative symbolism than the names in Mk 1-14.

By the time that Carrier is finished, what you have is this house-that-Jack-built contraption, teased out of a quaternary association of a tertiary association of a secondary association of a primary association.

It’s a bit mind-blowing that, on the one hand, a trained classicist would have so little methodological discipline while, on the other hand, a secularist would find so many layers of meaning in an “uninspired” book.

In this same connection, Carrier also manages to uncover a “tomb” motif in 2 Cor 5:1-4.³³⁶ This introduces a systematic error into his reading, since the operative motif in 2 Cor 5 is not a “tomb” but temple and tabernacle imagery.

In the same paragraph, his appeal to late 2-3C apocrypha (Acts of Thomas; Epistle to Diognetus) to interpret mid-1C Pauline documents is merely the umpteenth illustration of his shoddy scholarship and special-pleading.

Moving on:

This is exactly what Paul calls a “mystery,” and like all mysteries, it would not be written down in the cult’s sacred story but explained through an oral exegesis and only to initiates.³³⁷

³³⁶ ET, 222, n.292.

³³⁷ Ibid., 162.

Two monumental blunders here:

i) Carrier has not the foggiest idea of what “mystery” means in Pauline usage. For Paul, a divine mystery is not something concealed, but revealed by God, in contrast to a man-made discovery.³³⁸

ii) Even if you don’t believe the NT, it’s obvious from secular sources like Pliny, Tacitus, Josephus, Celsus, Lucian, Suetonius, and others that the early church was hardly a secret society.

In the next section the reader is treated to yet another specimen of Carrier’s incorrigible free association, in which he compares the “Gold Leaf of Hipponion” with the Easter account:

When an initiate enters the land of the dead, they will find “a white cypress” on “the right-hand side” (leuka and dexia). In Mk 16:5, when the women enter the tomb (the land of the dead), they find a “boy in white” on “the right-hand side” (leuken and dexiois). The initiate is told to go beyond the white-cypress, where guardians of the sacred waters will ask them “What are you looking for in the land of the dead?” In Mark, too, the women are searching for something in the land of the dead: Jesus, the water of life. Yet they, too are supposed to go further (physically, to Galilee; but psychologically, to a recognition of the truth)...for the women (and the readers); through Mark’s invocation of Jacob’s well, the tomb represents the well of eternal life, from whose waters the sheep must drink to be saved. Just as the initiate must drink of the waters of “memory” (mnemosune) to be saved, so do the women enter the tomb, a “memorial” (mnemeion), where they are told to remember something Jesus said (Mk 16:7).³³⁹

It’s hard to read all this with a straight face, but I’ll try my best. One of the odd things about Carrier is that he’s very scholarly, but a poor scholar. He has all sorts of curious, antiquarian information at his fingertips, but he lacks the hermeneutical discipline of a decent historian or exegete.

Just for starters, Carrier says:

³³⁸ Cf. M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation & Mystery in Ancient Judaism & Pauline Christianity*; R. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery” in the New Testament* (Fortress 1968); H. Hoehner, “Excursus 6: Mystery,” *Ephesians* (Baker 2003), 428-434.

³³⁹ ET, 162-163.

Several metal plates preserving these secret instructions have been recovered from the graves of initiates. The best example...is the Gold Leaf of Hipponion.³⁴⁰

And what makes this the best example? According to a recent scholar,

The location of these springs, however, varies from tablet to tablet. In B1 [Pete-lia], the first spring is on the left, επ αριστερα, while the second, ετεραν, is presumably on the right. In B2 [Hipponion], however, the first spring is ενδεξια, on the right, and the second is farther along the road, προσσω.³⁴¹

The cypress tree marks the location of the spring; if the spring is to one side, so is the tree.

What makes B2 the “best example” is that this particular example happens to parallel the orientation in Mark, whereas, were Carrier to choose B1, the comparison would break down. So what we have here is selective evidence as Carrier just so happens to cherry-pick an example that conveniently illustrates his thesis while ignoring inconvenient evidence to the contrary.

One cardinal rule when interpreting an author’s usage is to construe his terms on his own terms. Begin with a comparative study of his own usage, as well as the linguistic community to which he belongs.

For example, Mark uses the mnema/mnemeion word-group to design a tomb because that’s standard usage. You can see this in his account of the demoniac (Mk 5:2-3,5), as well as the internment of John the Baptist (6:29). Since it carries no “Orphic” significance in these other accounts, there’s no reason to impute an Orphic significance to this usage in the Easter account.

Memory has a very role to play in “Orphic” literature. As Edmonds goes on to explain:

This function of memory in preserving the identity of the individual is especially important in the context of a belief in reincarnation. Memory enables the individual to recall the events of previous lives, to avoid the errors committed in those lives, and to understand the hardships of the present life as penalties for those previous misdeeds. The Pythagoreans, who believed in metempsychosis,

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 162.

³⁴¹ R. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets* (Cambridge 2004), 49-50.

stressed the importance of memory even in the mortal life...Three of the four long versions of the B tablets were found in the regions where Pythagoras and Empedokles had the most influence.³⁴²

Carrier is conflating two completely different worldviews. This is quack scholarship, on the same plane as a ufological interpretation of Ezk 1, a la Eric von Daniken.

Likewise, right-handedness is not only an actual spatial marker, but an orientation reverberant with theological connotations in OT usage. And you can see this repeatedly on display in Marcan usage outside the Easter account (Mk 10:37,40; 12:36; 14:62; 15:27). And this applies to the NT generally.

In the same vein, colors often have ritual significance, and the color white is, in Scriptural usage, the stereotypical hue of heavenly beings (e.g., Dan 7:9; Mk 9:3; Acts 1:10; Rev 1:14; 4:4).

If Carrier would only let the text speak for itself, instead of squeezing it through his preconceived grid, he could see this for himself.

Other flaws in his comparison include the now discredited Jacobean typology, random association (white cypress>white boy), as well as adding extra dots not present in the text, and then connecting these extra-textual dots to fill out the parallel. The women were not told to “remember” something. The physical/psychological gloss is imported into the text. A tomb is not synonymous with the “land of the dead.”

Once again, Carrier’s parallel is a prefabricated parallel of his own making—a creative construct which pieces together an artificial parallel by strategic substitutions and scholarly sleight-of-hand.

The Orphic outlook moves in a completely different conceptual and sociological universe than the gospels:

It is in this context, too, that the so-called Orphic gold Leaves could find a place. From their content, it is clear that they can be both guides to the underworld and passwords into a happy hereafter, although in some Leaves only the “password” function appears.³⁴³

³⁴² Ibid., 54.

³⁴³ Bremmer, 16.

The Gold Leaves of the Timpone Piccolo of Thurii all use the feminine form of “pure” and the Leaves of Hipponion and Pelinna were both found on a woman.³⁴⁴

Orphism, then, was an upper-class movement which paid special attention to the human individual...this concentration on the individual also appears from its vegetarianism, which separated the true Orphic from the community maintaining practice of sacrifice.³⁴⁵

Until now we have used the term “Orphic mysteries,” but the continuing discovery of new Gold Leaves has made it finally clear that we are really speaking of Bacchic mysteries.³⁴⁶

Just take stock of all this: a vegetarian-cum-Bacchic cult for upper-class women, with golden leaves, secret passwords, and feminine nouns. Yeah, who could possibly miss the glaring parallels with NT Christianity!

In this same section and the next, Carrier continues to indulge his incurable penchant for parallelomania. Before we get to the specifics, some general observations are in order. Everett Ferguson has some sensible remarks which should serve as warning and corrective:

Perhaps the first thing to observe is that there are only a limited number of options in any given historical setting. Only a certain number of ideas are possible and only a certain number of ways of doing things are available. We need not wonder at similarities, which need not be necessarily a sign of borrowing, in one direction or the other. Many things in a given historical and cultural setting will be arrived at independently by more than one group simply because there is not an unlimited number of options available about how to do something.

Even where there is a direct dependence, one must determine its kind and significance. Early Christianity obviously had a great dependence on the OT and its Jewish background. It did not deny this...

The kind and significance of parallels may be further clarified by commenting on the cultural parallels. That Christians observed the same customs and used words in the same way as their contemporaries is hardly noteworthy in itself. Those things belonged to the place and time when Christianity began. The situation could not have been otherwise for Christianity to have been a real historical phenomenon, open now to historical study. To expect the situation to have been otherwise would require Christianity to be something other than it is,

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

a historical religion. Indeed, if Christianity did not have these linguistic and cultural contacts with the 1C Mediterranean world the presumption would be that it was a fiction originating in another time and place.³⁴⁷

Moving on:

Parallels with the then-contemporary Osiris-cult are curiously strong, too...Osiris was sealed in a casket (equivalent to a tomb) by 72 conspirators, while the Sanhedrin who condemned Christ consisted of 71 men, and Judas makes 72; Osiris was then resurrected on the third day, and died during the full moon, just like Christ (for Passover comes at the full moon)...it does seem an improbable coincidence.³⁴⁸

By way of reply:

i) This is the sort of “parallel” which the average reader may find quite unsettling. After all, the average reader—at least until recently (with the advent of online collections), doesn’t have easy access to the Loeb Classical Library. So he’s wholly at the mercy of Carrier’s abstract.

ii) Keep in mind that, once upon a time, a knowledge of the Greco-Roman Classics, in the original Greek and Latin, was a fixture of a liberal arts education. Every college student was acquainted with this material. And the Church Fathers obviously knew their way around the Classics as well.

So, on the issue of comparative mythology, it is not as though Carrier and his fellow contributors are breaking the sensational story of some newly discovered materials, long suppressed by the church, thereby blowing the cover of the Christian faith. There’s nothing newsworthy about this stuff. The Christian faith has survived, not due to ignorance of this material, but in full knowledge of this material, and because Christians, especially Christians tutored in the Classics, were not dependent on someone’s slanted summary, but were conversant with the full text, where they could see with their own eyes that these alleged “parallels” were utterly bogus.

iii) More on that in a moment, but even if we confine ourselves to Carrier’s abstract, notice that what he has actually done is not to document a parallel, but to contrive a parallel with a few judicious interpolations.

³⁴⁷ *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2.

³⁴⁸ ET, 159.

He says that a casket is “equivalent” to a tomb. Perhaps, but this is free association, not an intentional parallel or evidence of literary dependence. Plutarch mentions 72 coconspirators, but Mark makes no mention of how many men constituted the Sanhedrin. Yes, it may have been 71, but such extraneous facts are quite irrelevant to the narrative viewpoint.

Notice, too, that he doesn’t even have a numerical parallel, so he has to cook the books by adding Judas. Again, there’s no textual reason to assume that Mark was tacitly padding the account to create a parallel.

Then we have Carrier using the loaded word “resurrection.” This is, of course, a NT word, with a very specific connotation.

As for the rest, let’s compare Carrier’s abstract with some direct quotes from the primary source document, and let the reader see for himself how the Marcan account compares with Plutarch. I won’t quote the whole thing—just the most pertinent parts:

13 Typhon contrived a treacherous plot against him and formed a group of conspirators seventy-two in number...Typhon, having secretly measured Osiris’s body and having made ready a beautiful chest of corresponding size ... then Osiris got into it and lay down, and those who were in the plot ran to it and slammed down the lid, which they fastened by nails from the outside and also by using molten lead. Then they carried the chest to the river and sent it on its way to the sea through the Tanitic Mouth. They say also that the date on which this deed was done was the seventeenth day of Athyr, when the sun passes through Scorpion, and in the twenty-eighth year of the reign of Osiris; but some say that these are the years of his life and not of his reign.

15 Thereafter Isis, as they relate, learned that the chest had been cast up by the sea near the land of Byblus and that the waves had gently set it down in the midst of a clump of heather.

16 She removed it with the greatest ease and cut away the wood of the heather which surrounded the chest...Then the goddess threw herself down upon the coffin with such a dreadful wailing that the younger of the king’s sons expired on the spot.

18 As they relate, Isis proceeded to her son Horus...and bestowed the chest in a place well out of the way; but Typhon, who was hunting by night in the light of the moon, happened upon it. Recognizing the body he divided it into fourteen

parts and scattered them, each in a different place. Isis learned of this and sought for them again, sailing through the swamps in a boat of papyrus.

The traditional result of Osiris's dismemberment is that there are many so-called tombs of Osiris in Egypt, for Isis held a funeral for each part when she had found it.

Of the parts of Osiris's body the only one which Isis did not find was the male member, for the reason that this had been at once tossed into the river, and the lepidotus, the sea-bream, and the pike had fed upon it...But Isis made a replica of the member to take its place, and consecrated the phallus, in honour of which the Egyptians even at the present day celebrate a festival.³⁴⁹

27 She herself and Osiris, translated for their virtues from good demigods into gods, as were Heracles and Dionysus later, not incongruously enjoy double honours, both those of gods and those of demigods, and their powers extend everywhere, but are greatest in the regions above the earth and beneath the earth. In fact, men assert that Pluto is none other than Serapis and that Persephonê is Isis.

30 Now Osiris and Isis changed from good minor deities into gods.

39 Then among the gloomy rites which the priests perform, they shroud the gilded image of a cow with a black linen vestment, and display her as a sign of mourning for the goddess...and this is kept up for four days consecutively, beginning with the seventeenth of the month.³⁵⁰

42 The Egyptians have a legend that the end of Osiris's life came on the seventeenth of the month, on which day it is quite evident to the eye that the period of the full moon is over. Because of this the Pythagoreans call this day "the Barrier," and utterly abominate this number. For the number seventeen, coming in between the square sixteen and the oblong rectangle eighteen, which, as it happens, are the only plane figures that have their perimeters equal their areas, bars them off from each other and disjoins them, and breaks up the ratio of eight to eight and an eighth by its division into unequal intervals.

Some say that the years of Osiris's life, others that the years of his reign, were twenty-eight; for that is the number of the moon's illuminations, and in that number of days does she complete her cycle. The wood which they cut on the occasions called the "burials of Osiris" they fashion into a crescent-shaped coffin because of the fact that the moon, when it comes near the sun, becomes

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http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/A.html

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http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/B.html

crescent-shaped and disappears from our sight. The dismemberment of Osiris into fourteen parts they refer allegorically to the days of the waning of that satellite from the time of the full moon to the new moon.³⁵¹

So this is what, in all seriousness, I suppose, Carrier would have the unsuspecting reader believe, without benefit of the actual text before him, is a traditional underpinning of the Marcan account.

Notice that Osiris undergoes no resurrection. Rather, we have a conventional pagan apotheosis in which he becomes the god of the netherworld. Carrier is conflating different literary genres.

In addition, there is no three-day motif. That figure could only be arrived at, if at all, by some very esoteric computations. Remember that, in Scripture, the three-day motif is not a mathematical operation deriving by summing up the number of hours, but, at best a round number—more emblematic than exact.

Again, a Sabbath implies a full moon, but this is Carrier's inference, based on a purely incidental implication of the Marcan narrative.

In the meantime, look at all the stuff that Carrier has chosen to leave out of his abstract: tossing the chest into the river, floating to the land of Byblus, the quest for the chest, the death of the prince, the dismemberment of the corpse, the rival shrines, the missing penis (eaten by fish), the phallic" replica" and phallic festival, the esoteric numerology, and so on and so forth.

What Carrier has done is to fabricate a parallel by suppressing all of the disanalogous material, while inventing artificial parallels through various interpolations and extrapolations absent from the source material itself.

My point is not that Carrier is trying to deceive the reader. Rather, I think it more likely that he is self-deceived. Because he doesn't believe in a supernatural source of Christian dogma, he is left to believe in a naturalistic source. Because he doesn't believe that Christianity is a revealed religion, it follows that the NT writers must have borrowed their ideas from the culture in which they lived. For him, there is no difference between pagan mythology and Christian miraculosity. And since, finally, he is out to positively disprove the Christian faith, he is forced to find paral-

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http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/C.html

lels in pagan sources to demonstrate that the NT writers stole their material from the heathen.

In the next section, Carrier talks about the reversal motif in Mark. At one level, what he says is not so much mistaken as it is one-sided, for the reversal of fortunes is one of the major themes of Scripture from start to finish. So there is no want of parallel material, at this broadly thematic level. But, for Carrier, that either proves too much or too little.

So we have him saying things like:

The parables of Jesus are also full of the reversal of expectation theme...And so, the empty tomb story is probably itself a parable.³⁵²

But there are two major problems with this leap of logic:

i) The reversal of fortunes is a commonplace of human experience. We see it all the time in business, sports, politics, entertainment, &c. The reason we have so many fictitious stories on this theme is because it happens to be a dramatic fact of life.

ii) Here, Carrier is offering an explanation for the origin of the empty tomb account which flatly contradicts the explanation he offers in chapter 9, where he attributes the empty tomb to theft. So chapters 5 and 9 present a polemical case of mutually assured destruction.

Carrier also says:

This program leads [Mark] to “create” thematic events that thwart the reader’s expectation, and an empty tomb is exactly the sort of thing an author would invent to serve that aim. After all, it begs credulity to suppose that so many convenient reversals of expectation actually happened. It is more credible to suppose that at least some of them are narrative inventions.³⁵³

Several more problems:

³⁵² ET, 164.

³⁵³ Ibid., 164.

i) Some of these narrative “inventions” are not Markan inventions, but allegorical inventions, c/o Mr. Carrier himself—such as his Baroque interpretation of Simon as “foreigner, from the opposite side of Egypt, a symbol of death.”³⁵⁴

Here Carrier confuses his own creative mirror-reading with what is actually in the text.

ii) Is the empty tomb “exactly” the sort of thing an author would invent? I’m not aware that empty tombs are a common literary convention of world literature. And Carrier began this essay arguing that the Markan account is a post-Pauline contrivance. So Paul didn’t feel free to invent an empty tomb.

iii) Even more to the point, perhaps, what is credible is a value-laden judgment which is contingent on our worldview. For an atheist like Carrier, providential reversals are incredible because providence itself is incredible. This is not, however, a reasoned argument, but merely the expression of his personal prejudice. For an atheist, Christian theism is incredible; for a Christian, atheism is incredible.

Moving on:

The women go to the tomb...only to find their (and our) expectations reversed by finding his body missing, and a young man in his place—and this with an explicit verbal link to the exchange of one thing for another in Ecclesiastes.³⁵⁵

Confusion worse confounded!

i) Where is the explicit verbal link? The mere fact that Mark 16:5 and Eccl 4:15 (LXX) both use the same Greek word for “young man”?

ii) In Mk 16:5, the young man is sitting; in Eccl 4:15 (LXX) the young man is standing. And in Eccl 4:15 (MT), the Hebrew verb also means “to stand” rather than “replace.”³⁵⁶

iii) In context, the young man (in Eccl 4:15) is a usurper to the throne. The young man in Mark 16:5 does not usurp the place of Christ. His function is not to supplant Jesus, but to herald his resurrection.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 163-164.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 164.

³⁵⁶ Cf. T. Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans 1998), 146.

Moving on:

It cannot reasonably be doubted that the Gospels exhibit legendary embellishments upon the basic story of Mark...Mark tells a simple story about a Sanhedrist burying Jesus, women going to the tomb and finding it open, meeting a single boy in white, then running off. But by the time we get to Matthew, Joseph has become a “disciple of Jesus” (27:57) who buried Jesus “in his very own new tomb” (27:60); the boy has become an angel descending from heaven (28:2-3,5); the women experience a “massive earthquake” and watch the angel descend and open the tomb (28:2); guards have been added to the story...and the women run off but now get to meet Jesus, even touch him (28:9)...And all this embellishment took place in less than 40 years, since most scholars agree that Mark dates later than 60 CE and Matthew earlier than 100 CE.³⁵⁷

We can see the same trend in the other two Gospels...Joseph is only said to have been a swell guy who abstained from condemning Jesus (Lk 23:50-51), who buried Jesus in an empty tomb (not said to be his own: 23:53). But these are still details not mentioned by Mark. Likewise, the one boy has multiplied into two men, but who “suddenly appear in dazzling apparel” (24:4)...we get a tale now of Peter going to check the tomb and confirming that it is empty (24:12), also something not mentioned by Mark. John...makes the story entirely his own: Joseph is now a secret disciple (19:38), and again uses an unused tomb (not said to be his own: 19:41), but delivers an absurdly fabulous burial (19:39)...Luke’s two men now become two angels (20:12).³⁵⁸

Carrier’s summary is so spiteful, petty, and willfully obtuse that it’s hard to know where to begin:

i) He simply assumes, without benefit of argument, that if the other gospels differ from Mark, it must be because they made a change in their Marcan exemplar, a fictitious variant, rather than adding new material on the basis of an independent source of information. This assumes that each subsequent Evangelist only had one source of information—the gospel of Mark.

That’s a highly arbitrary assumption and one which isn’t even consistent with a lot of liberal scholarship, where Matthew, Luke, and John are allowed access to more than one oral or written tradition.

ii) Ironically, Carrier reads the Gospels with the same wooden literalism as Harold Lindsell. You are always going to get detailed variations in a story when you inter-

³⁵⁷ ET, 165.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 166.

view two or more well-placed informants, not because they contradict each other, but because each informant knows something the other doesn't. Indeed, that's a major motive for writing more than one gospel. Assuming Marcan priority, Matthew, Luke, and John choose to supplement the record on the basis of their own fund of information. They add to Mark because they know some things he didn't. They also add to Mark because each Gospel writer has a different target audience in view.

Just think of a family reunion in which a younger brother or sister has a vague, but accurate, recollection of a family event, at which point the older siblings jump in to flesh out all the details of the event.

Carrier is suspicious to the point of superstition. Such doctrinaire skepticism amounts to paranoia.³⁵⁹

iii) There is nothing apparently legendary about the various descriptions of Joseph. On the one hand, he would not have taken it upon himself to give a condemned man an honorable burial unless he were a sympathizer. On the other hand, it would be risky to make a public spectacle of his religious and political sympathies.

iv) Likewise, in whose tomb would he inter Jesus if not his own? The only available tomb for personal use would be one belonging to himself. He would hardly have the right to appropriate someone else's family crypt or mausoleum.

And even if another tomb were available, if he were a secret disciple, the point of the exercise would be to honor Jesus, and the best way to honor Jesus would be to bury Jesus in his (Joseph's) own tomb.

v) Did Matthew's angels evolve out of Mark's young man? There are a number of narrative clues in Mark pointing to an angelophany:

- a) In Biblical angelology, angels take the form of men, and since they're ageless, they presumably take the form of young men.
- b) In Jewish usage,³⁶⁰ this is a traditional designation for angels.

³⁵⁹ On the general subject of alleged development in the gospel material, see David Wood's response to Dan Barker: <http://www.answeringinfidels.com/content/view/39/51>

³⁶⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.8.2-3; 2 Macc 3:26,33; Tobit 5:5-10.

- c) The young man is arrayed in white, and in Biblical iconography, white is a symbolic color often associated with heavenly beings. I've already documented this practice.
- d) The women are afraid, and fear is a standard reaction in numinous encounters.
- e) The young man clearly plays the role of a divine messenger.

Frankly, Carrier has to make a real effort not to pick up on all these cultural assumptions and narrative clues. He doesn't know because he doesn't want to know, so he doesn't bother to find out. Knowing too much would spoil his beautiful theory.

vi) Some of the same narrative clues ID the men in Luke's account as angels, and just in case the reader was slow on the uptake, Luke specifically refers to the men as angels (24:23).

Of course, if you don't believe in the existence of angels, then, by definition, any reference to angels is "legendary." But that's a philosophical question, not a historical question.

vii) If the women informed the disciples, don't you just suppose that one or more would want to check out the empty tomb for themselves? Stands to reason, does it not? Wouldn't you do the same thing in their situation?

viii) What about the shift from one angel to two? Well, if there were two, there was at least one. So there's no discrepancy here. As to the reason, one can only speculate. It may be that Luke and John wish to emphasize the two-witness rule of legal evidence (Deut 19:15), whereas Mark is only concerned with message of the messenger, for which one spokesman will suffice. Any proposed harmonization is hypothetical, but by the same token, any denial of a proposed harmonization is equally hypothetical. So the sceptic enjoys no epistemic advantage.

ix) Did Nicodemus and Joseph give Jesus an "absurdly fabulous burial"? Depends on what you mean. At a practical level, most of our funereal rites are excessive. Why not just dig a hole and dump the corpse?

But every culture has rather elaborate rites of burial. Jewish civilization was nothing if not ritualistic. And this certainly extended to honorable burial. Indeed, their reverence for the mortal remains extended well beyond the grave (cf. Gen 49:29-31; 50:25-26; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32).

So the fact that Joseph and Nicodemus went to unnecessary extremes misses the point entirely. The symbolism is everything. They are giving Jesus a state funeral, befitting a king (cf. 1 Chron 16:14).

Incidentally, the fact that Nicodemus brought 65 lbs. of spices doesn't mean that he had to use it all. He brought what he had, and used what he needed. You bring more than you need to make sure you'll have as much on hand as you need and some to spare.

x) As to Matthew's account, the descent of an angel like lightening and seismic accompaniment is standard apocalyptic imagery associated with theophanic visitations. The angel is depicted in terms allusive of the Angel of the Lord, and his dramatic apparition is a foretaste of the Parousia (Mt 8:24; 27:7,54; cf. Rev 8:5; 17:17-18).³⁶¹ This is not, therefore, an "embellishment," but an integral feature of Matthew's eschatological outlook.

Whether or not we take it to be legendary depends, in turn, on whether or not we share Matthew's theological viewpoint. Since Carrier doesn't believe in God, he doesn't believe in theophanic angels or the Parousia. What can or cannot "reasonably be doubted" is the measure of what we take to be possible.

xi) Carrier is assuming Marcan priority. Although that's a reasonable assumption, it's only one possible and fairly indirect inference from the data. The supporting arguments are pretty weak. It's revealing that Carrier can be so skeptical about the historical record of Scripture, but so credulous about historical reconstructions of Scripture.

xii) As to the soldiers guarding the tomb, I'll address that in chap. 9.

xiii) What we actually find in the gospels is the opposite of legendary embellishment:

a) There's no Christological development from Paul to John. Paul's Christology is just as high as John's.

b) The Gospel of John is far less miraculous than the Gospel of Mark.

³⁶¹ W. Davies & D. Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (T&T Clark 1997), 3:364ff.; D. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Eerdmans 1995), 869; J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 368.

c) There's nothing legendary about the idea of a bodily resurrection. Indeed, the trajectory is just the reverse. The canonical gospels are anti-Docetic whereas the spiritualizing tendency comes to the fore in the Gnostic gospels, from the mid-2C onwards.

In this general connection, Carrier speaks of:

1 Tim 1:3-4, genealogies just like those conjured by Mt 1:1-17 (whose title is "the book of the genesis of Jesus") and Lk (3:23-38).³⁶²

There are numerous problems with this allegation:

i) Paul does not directly question the authenticity of the genealogies referred to in 1 Tim 1:4. He may just as well have in mind a speculative gloss on OT genealogies. In that event, what's at issue are not the genealogies, per se, but the speculative gloss thereupon.

ii) Biblical genealogies are not to be taken lightly.³⁶³ Genealogies are integral to primitive kinship systems. Ancient Jews comprised a tribal culture with eponymous place names, clan-ownership of property, a dynastic priesthood, and a dynastic monarchy:

Even today genealogies play significant roles in some non-European cultures. In antiquity genealogies bore tremendous importance...Simply stated, genealogies provided a means of social identification. As G. N. Knoppers summarizes, "Genealogies, whether from Israel, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, or Greece, are not simply compilations of traditional materials, but are assertions about identity, territory, and relationships. The names of ancestors, towns, and groups were of special relevance to ancient writers, because their genealogical connections define the ancestor's, town's, or group's position in relation to other" (Knoppers, 18). Genealogies "located" a person, family, city or wider group in relationship to others within their world. Genealogies mapped out the political, economic and social allegiances that individuals and groups possessed to each other and other groups.³⁶⁴

³⁶² ET, 224, n.302.

³⁶³ G. Rendsburg, "The Internal Consistency & Historical Reliability of the Biblical Genealogies," *VT* 40 (1990), 185-206; R. Wilson, *Genealogy & History in the Biblical World* (Yale 1977).

³⁶⁴ T. Alexander & D. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (IVP 2003), 346.

iii) Since we don't have direct access to the family records which Matthew and Luke redacted, we can't reconstruct the original; hence, we lack sufficient info to fully harmonize them.

iv) The Lucan and Matthean genealogies were not free creations, but have a basis in documentary tradition:

The extended genealogies of Jesus given in Matthew and Luke are not the sort of material to have been orally preserved; their documentary content suggests that they were in written form from the beginning, and they must have had an early and Jewish origin since they presuppose Jesus' human ancestry.³⁶⁵

Note that Matthew speaks of the "book (biblos) of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Even if this means "birth record," a documentary form is implied.³⁶⁶

That being said:

i) I think it's fair to say that ancient Jews had a broader concept of descent than modern Western Europeans. Israel was a tribal society, a society composed of extended families. The idea of the nuclear family is fairly modern and provincial.

ii) The patriarchal custom of Levirate marriage (Gen 38:8-10), later codified in law (Deut 25:5-10), is a special case in point. And the Book of Ruth, which is directly germane to the lineage of Christ, illustrates the flexibility of this custom, whereby marriage between a widow and not only her late husband's brother, but any close kinsman of the deceased, would be legally treated as the decedent's seed.

iii) We tend to think of a family tree as branching up and out. And that's one way of looking at it. But we can turn it upside down as well. I have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, &c.

iv) Most modern scholars agree that both genealogies belong to Joseph, though one traces natural descent, and the other legal descent.

v) Beyond the family records, which are unavailable to us, we know that Matthew made use of the LXX version of Chronicles while Luke made use of the LXX version of Genesis and Chronicles.

³⁶⁵ H. Gamble, *Books & Readers in the Early Church* (Yale 1995), 23.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 254, n.73.

vi) Putting (iii)-(v) together, there would be nothing inaccurate for Matthew and Luke to seize on different ancestors—in the case of Matthew, the Davidic line through Solomon, and in the case of Luke, the Davidic line through Nathan.

If at some point along the family tree you pick a different ancestor, that will result in a different set of names until the two branches reunite.

Matthew's reasoning is pretty straightforward. Luke's is more oblique. He's elaborating the tradition of Isa 11:1, Micah 5:2 (5:1, MT), and Jer 23:5-6 (par. 33:15-16).

vii) This accounts for the differences. But Matthew and Luke both share a unifying principle in their common use of septunarian numerology and typology. This has precedent in OT genealogies, such as Gen 46:8-27, with its multiples of seven.³⁶⁷

In Matthew's case, you have a triple septunarian scheme:

- a) The three sets of fourteen (multiples of seven).
- b) The numerical value of David's (Hebrew)³⁶⁸ name=fourteen (multiple of seven), generated by the technique of gematria.³⁶⁹
- c) The name of David occupies the fourteenth place (1:6).

In Luke's case, you also have a triple septunarian scheme:

- a) Seventy-seven names (multiples of seven).
- b) The seventh place is occupied by Enoch, the seventh from Adam (3:37; cf. Gen 5:18; Jude 14).
- c) Joshua (Hebrew name for Jesus) in the forty-ninth place (3:29).
- d) Jesus in the seventy-seventh place (3:23).

³⁶⁷ Cf. V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (Eerdmans 1995), 598-599.

³⁶⁸ "The Massoretic Text & the Qumran Scrolls: A Study in Orthography," D. Freedman, *Divine Commitment & Human Obligation*, J. Huddleston, ed. (Eerdmans 1997), 2:22.

³⁶⁹ Cf. M. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical & Semitic Symbolism* (Routledge 2001), 87-156; D. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe* (Sheffield 1989).

The general significance of the septunarian numerology is obvious enough: the Sabbath, the Jubilee, Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks.

Jesus is the antitype of Joshua and Enoch, the ultimate to their penultimate and antepenultimate respectively.³⁷⁰

Moving on:

Similar trends follow the appearance narrative...an overt polemical message (Jn 20:29-31).³⁷¹

By way of comment:

i) If an overt polemical message renders a source untrustworthy, then I can greatly abbreviate my book review, since the entirety of *The Empty Tomb* is overtly polemical.

ii) Actually, an overt purpose-statement is a mark of intellectual honesty and transparency.

In this same connection, Carrier refers the reader to a book on the "early split" between the Johannine "Sarcicist" faction and the Thomistic "Gnostic/Orphic" faction.³⁷²

Okay, this is how the game is played. The critic redacts a Johannine "community" from the Gospel of John. The critic also redacts a 1C Thomistic "community" from a 4C Gospel of Thomas. The critic then compares the Johannine communal postulate with the Thomistic communal postulate. What we have here is a purely papier-mâché creation that has no objective existence outside the imaginary construct of the critic.

I also notice that Carrier doesn't do this with other Greco-Roman authors. Where is his Plutarchian-community, or his Suetonian-community? Or his Plinyean-community? How can he resist all this raw material for Classical redaction criticism?³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Cf. R. Bauckham, *Jude & the Relatives of Jesus* (T&T Clark 1990), chapter 7.

³⁷¹ ET, 166.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 166; 224, n.303.

³⁷³ For a critique of this whole pseudoscholarly scam, cf. R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians* (Eerdmans 1998).

Moving on:

Caroline Bynum argues that the church could more easily promote (and thus benefit from) martyrdom, maintain its power hierarchy, and control the bodies of congregations, if it preached a resurrection of the flesh.³⁷⁴

Given that Carrier attributes the “invention” of the empty-tomb to the Gospel of Mark, which he dates to AD 60-80, this scenario, with “the church,” a cult of martyrdom, a “power hierarchy,” and centralized command-and-control, is absurdly anachronistic. Sounds like the deconstructionist revisionism of feminist hermeneutics. For Carrier, historical scholarship takes a backseat to radical chic and academic faddism.

Moving on:

Roman persecution would ensure that most sensible people...would gravitate to “accepted” salvation cults...leaving the Christian church to be flooded with fanatics, who dislike that idea [of spiritual salvation].³⁷⁵

This is not a historical argument, but a tendentious characterization of who, in Carrier’s prejudicial opinion, is “sensible” and who is “fanatical.”

Moving on:

This argument is already deeply challenged by such obvious evidence of legendary developments, not only (for example) in Matthew, but in the parallel developments of quasi-gnostic sects (whose own gospels were not preserved to us by the eventually victorious sect that opposed them), both taking place within two generations.³⁷⁶

This is very telling in several respects. Carrier is a professional student of ancient history. So you might expect some historical evidence for his allegations. Notice what his claim amounts to:

- a) There was a parallel development between the Christian “sect” and “quasi-gnostic” sects.
- b) The Gnostics had their own gospels.

³⁷⁴ ET, 167.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 167.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 168.

- c) The Gnostic gospels were not preserved.
- d) The canonical gospels and Gnostic gospels were both written within two generations of Easter.

Questions:

- i) What's a "quasi-gnostic" sect?
- ii) What's the difference between a Gnostic and a "quasi"-gnostic sect?
- iii) What's the historical evidence for this distinction?
- iv) What's the historical evidence for their 1C existence?
- v) What's the historical evidence for the existence of quasi-gnostic 1C gospels?
- vi) If these were not preserved, what's the evidence that they once existed, but are no longer extant because they were not preserved?

It is not Craig's argument which is deeply challenged by the evidence, but Carrier's. "Quasi-gnostic" looks suspiciously like a weasel word to immunize his claim from factual falsification. Then you have the beautiful postulate of 1C quasi-gnostic gospels which were not preserved by the church. Like any conspiracy theory, the best evidence is the absence of evidence. That just goes to show what a successful cover-up it was. To Carrier's sub rosa mindset, direct, tangible evidence is suspect while nonexistent evidence is probative.

As far as I'm concerned, the issue is not how long it would take for a legend to develop. Anyone can write anything at any time. The question is not the writer, but the reader. How far from the original events would it take for a legend to gain popular acceptance?

For example, this is a problem for liberals who classify the Pastorals and Prison epistles as deuterio-Pauline. There is no difficulty in the idea that someone might try to forge a letter in Paul's name. The difficulty is at the receiving end. To whom is the letter addressed?

What would be the constituency for a palpable fraud? Who would be taken in by a recent letter penned by a long dead apostle?

This is where the time-factor kicks in. A legend or pious fraud must be sufficiently distant from the living memory that the audience doesn't know any better.

This is how pseudo-Dionysius and the False Decretals were palmed off. They were sufficiently far removed from the events that they could go undetected by the unsuspecting.

This is why apocryphal gospels and other suchlike date to the 2C at the earliest. And liberals tacitly admit as much by dating the canonical gospels as late as possible. You have to wait until the contemporaries are all dead to rewrite history.

Moving on:

The Gospel authors never challenge or even question anything they report, and unlike Herodotus they never once name a single source, or consciously weigh the evidence for or against any particular claim.³⁷⁷

i) The comparison begs the question in several respects. A biographer who is either a personal friend of the subject or else a contemporary and acquaintance of those that were, has no good reason to challenge or question or doubt what he either saw and heard with his own eyes, or learned from those in the know.

It would be silly in the case of an eyewitness, and even in the case of a reporter who is getting his information from first-hand informants—he has no reason to doubt or challenge their accounts unless their accounts are at variance with one another. For if he is getting his information from others, he has no independent knowledge of his own against which to challenge their version of the facts. And to the extent that multiple attestation is congruent, that is not cause to doubt, but cause not to doubt.

What would be the point of naming your sources when you are your own source, or when your source is not a public document, but another eyewitness? What's the point of naming a nobody, of naming an individual that the world at large has never heard of? Being famous or not is irrelevant to the value of one's testimony. But unless one is a celebrity, naming the witness adds nothing to the testimony.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 169.

Carrier is simply assuming, without benefit of argument, that the canonical gospels were written long after the fact so that each Evangelist is in a situation analogous to that of Herodotus writing about ancient Egyptian history.

ii) One is also amused by the artless naïveté of Carrier’s appeal to “a careful critical historian like Herodotus”³⁷⁸ or a “real critical biographer of the period” like Suetonius.³⁷⁹ As Iain Provan points out:

One occasionally comes across the assertion in current debate on our topic that, even if some of our biblical authors are indeed properly called historians, the fact that they are not *critical* historians (like some of the Greeks) makes access to the past for us through their texts problematic. This is a proverbial red herring. It is questionable enough to “deduce” from the *claims* of certain ancient Greeks about their critical intentions and the *absence of such claims* in ancient Hebrew texts (as in other ANE literary traditions) that there is inevitably a substantive difference in reality between (some Greeks and (all) Hebrews.³⁸⁰

Carrier has no difficulty taking the stated intentions of a Greek or Roman historian at face value, while exhibiting a knee-jerk rejection of Bible history.

iii) Incidentally, when Carrier says that “the Gospel authors wrote after Jerusalem was destroyed,”³⁸¹ he is contradicting himself, for he had earlier given a variance of AD 60-80 for the Gospel of Mark. But when his argument needs the later date, he opts for the later date. He offers no argument for the later date. Rather, the later date is pressed into service for the sake of the argument.

iv) In the same vein, Carrier refers to “conflicting accounts” by Matthew and Luke over the details of the nativity.³⁸² Notice that he does nothing whatsoever to demonstrate their conflicting character. He simply asserts it to be the case. I have argued otherwise.³⁸³

Moving on:

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 169.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 224, n.313.

³⁸⁰ “In the Stable with the Dwarves,” V. Long et al., eds., *Windows into Old Testament History* (Eerdmans 2002), 164-165.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 169.

³⁸² Ibid., 224, n.313.

³⁸³ <http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2004/12/first-noel-1.html>

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2004/12/first-noel-2.html>

The truth could be recovered because it was preserved in an inscription, which Thucydides cites, yet obviously no inscriptions were available for the Gospel authors, or their readers, to check their story by.³⁸⁴

Have you ever noticed that no one is more gullible than a sceptic?

i) Why does Carrier believe that there was an inscription? All he has is the word of Thucydides.

ii) Assuming that there was an inscription, why assume that whoever inscribed the record of the event is any more or less reliable than Thucydides? Or Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

iii) As any student of Biblical archaeology knows, there is also epigraphical as well as numismatic corroboration for many Scriptural claims.

Moving on:

Mark's Gospel is more akin to a didactic hagiography (which are by definition legends—see below).³⁸⁵

Notice the slithery logic here: If Mark's Gospel is hagiographical, and the hagiographic genre is, by definition, legendary, then, by definition, Mark's Gospel is legendary.

The problem here is that he does nothing to prove either the minor premise or—more importantly—the major premise. Yes, he says, “see below,” but when you go to 7.2, all he does is to give examples of legendary hagiography. That doesn't prove that hagiography is, by definition, legendary. It only proves that legendary hagiography is legendary. So his argument amounts to a tautology—based on selective evidence. In the mean time, he does nothing to show that Mark belongs to the hagiographic genre. So the whole exercise is a harlequinade.

In this general connection, Carrier chooses to dust off the old allegation that “Luke may have cribbed most if not all of his historical ‘facts’ from Josephus.”³⁸⁶ How-

³⁸⁴ ET, 169.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 170.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 225, n.315.

ever, the putative evidence for this claim has been rebutted by a number of scholars.³⁸⁷

On this and other issues, Luke has repeatedly proven himself to be a conscientious and accurate historian.³⁸⁸ The only evidence regularly adduced for historical error in Luke is the census of Quirinius and the Theudas affair. The fact that his critics can only come up with one alleged anachronism per book is pretty pathetic.

Liberal critics of the census are hardly models of consistency. Fitzmyer says “the census is a purely literary device.”³⁸⁹ But if that were so, then Luke would not be in error, for if the census is a “purely literary device,” then it was never meant to be literally true. So, ironically, the liberal interpretation is quite consonant with inerrancy at this juncture.

My point is not to agree with Fitzmyer, but to merely observe that it’s a category mistake to say both that the census is a literary device and also say that it’s histori-

³⁸⁷ F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 43-44, 176; S. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee & Rome* (Brill 1979); C. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Eisenbrauns 1990), 94-100; B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 235-239.

³⁸⁸ Cf. L. Alexander, *Acts* (Routledge, forthcoming); *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel* (Cambridge 1993); P. Barnett, “History & Geography in Acts,” *The Birth of Christianity* (Eerdmans 2005), 187-205; C. Blomberg, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” *JSNT* 22 (1984), 53-80; D. Bock, *Luke* (Baker 1994-96); F. Bruce, “Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?” *BJRL* 58 (1975-76), 282-305; “Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles,” *BJRL* 68 (1986), 273-295; *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans 1990); “The Acts of the Apostles: Historical Record or Theological Reconstruction?” *ANRW*, 2.25.3 (1985): 2569-2603; C. Evans & J. Sanders, *Luke & Scripture* (Fortress 1993); E. Ferguson, *Acts of Apostles* (Abilene 1986); W. Gasque, “A Fruitful Field,” *Int* 42 (1988), 117-131; *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans 1975); “Did Luke Have Access to Traditions about the Apostles and the Early Churches?” *JETS* 17 (1974), 45-48; “The Speeches of Acts,” *New Dimensions in New Testament Studies*, R. Longenecker & M. Tenney, eds. (Zondervan 1974), 232-250; W. Gasque & R. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History & the Gospel* (Eerdmans 1970); C. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Eisenbrauns 1990); M. Hengel, *Acts & the History of Earliest Christianity* (Fortress 1980); H. Kee, *To Every Nation under Heaven* (TPI 1990); C. Keener, “Acts,” *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP 1993), 320-406; R. Longenecker, *Acts* (Zondervan 1996); I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian* (Zondervan 1989); S. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Hendrickson 2001); A. Sherwin-White, *Roman Law & Roman Society* (Oxford 1963); B. Winter, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (Eerdmans 1993-1996); B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans 1998); B. Witherington, ed., *History, Literature & Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge 1996).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:393.

cally inaccurate. It could only be inaccurate if it were intended to be a literal rather than a literary claim.

Likewise, Fitzmyer speaks of “Lucan hyperbole,”³⁹⁰ which he traces back to Roman hyperbole:

Though *oikoumene* means “inhabited earth,” the substantived adj. was often used with hyperbole in the official rhetoric of decrees and inscriptions of the Roman empire itself.³⁹¹

But “hyperbole” is another literary convention. To characterize hyperbole as inaccurate misses the point.

What is more, if Lucan hyperbole is modeled on Roman hyperbole, then this would actually be a mark of his historical accuracy. His usage conforms to period usage.

Raymond Brown also describes the census as a literary device or “Lucan device.”³⁹² If so, then this is no historical anachronism, for the above stated reasons.

Brown also makes the following admission:

[Luke] lived in the Roman Empire and may have undergone census enrollment himself. It is dangerous to assume that he described a process of registration that would have been patently opposed to everything that he and his readers knew.³⁹³

Yet Brown fails to heed his own admonition. For his own part, Richard Horsley also admits the “evidence on census and taxation is extremely fragmentary from Palestine.”³⁹⁴

That being so, how is he in any position to impute error to Luke?

This is all the more striking in view of the fact that Horsley spends a lot of time in documenting just how well the Lucan account dovetails with our general knowledge of socioeconomic conditions in the Roman Empire at large, as well as Herodian Palestine. A census was taken for tax purposes, while taxation was for the

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:405.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:400.

³⁹² *The Birth of the Messiah* (Doubleday 1977), 413.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 549.

³⁹⁴ *The Liberation of Christmas*, 71.

purpose of exacting tribute on a conquered people, in order to further subjugate them to Roman rule.³⁹⁵

From a more conservative viewpoint, Earnest Martin has argued, on the basis of interlocking sources of information from Josephus, Tertullian, Justin, Orosius, Moses of Khorene, and the Paphlagonian inscription, that the census was not for purposes of taxation, but for the citizens for the Roman Empire to take a loyalty oath to Augustus as the Pater Patriae.

He also observes that, according to Josephus, there was a chronological gap between the governorship of Saturnius and the governorship of Varus. He then argues that Quirinius was the acting governor to fill this gap.

The gap took place during the summer break of 2 BC. Martin then argues that the reason for the gap is that August was when Augustus celebrated his Silver Jubilee as well as the 750th anniversary of Rome, such that all the bigwigs would want to be in town at that time.³⁹⁶

As to Theudas, this is Greek for “Jonathan.” The Greek form was a popular appellation for Jewish boys because it was the name of two Jewish heroes: the son of King Saul and the Maccabean insurgent.³⁹⁷ There is, as such, no particular reason to assume that Luke and Josephus are even referring to the same individual. And even if they were, why assume that Luke got it wrong, but Josephus got it right? As one scholar has noted:

Since in many other cases Luke proves to be much more reliable than Josephus, it may be wise in this case to suspend judgment.³⁹⁸

Moving on:

Skeptics and informed or critical minds were a small minority in the ancient world...We are talking about an age of fable and wonder, where magic, miracles, ghosts, and gods were everywhere and almost never doubted. Some among the well-educated elite had enough background in science and skepticism not to be duped, but these men were a rarity even among their peers...We

³⁹⁵ Ibid., chapters 2 & 4.

³⁹⁶ *The Star that Astonished the World* (Ask 1991).

³⁹⁷ Cf. W. R. Farmer, “Judas, Simon & Athronges,” *NTS* 4 (1958), 147-155; G. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Macquarie 1987), 4:183-184; M. Williams, “Palestinian Personal Names in Acts,” R. Bauckham, ed., *BAFCS* 4:99-100.

³⁹⁸ C. Evans, *Luke* (Hendrickson 1990), 43.

should remember, too, that Christianity began, and for a century grew, mainly among the masses, not the elite.³⁹⁹

By way of reply:

i) It's very telling that you don't find Carrier applying his Marxist analysis of the church to the upper class historians. When he's talking about the church he drags out the old class warfare rhetoric about how history is written by the winners, who suppress the other side of the story. But he doesn't apply that same standard to the elite ancient historians as they characterize the lower classes.

ii) Were the upper classes any less superstitious than the lower? Were there not royal astrologers and other diviners of the aristocracy? Wasn't this a time and place in which the upper crust took portents and prodigies quite seriously?

iii) By contrast, Chesterton and Yeats have a very different take on the working class:

Now against this drab background of dreary modern materialism, Willie Yeats was calmly walking about as the Man Who Knew the Fairies. Yeats stood for enchantment; exactly where Hanking stood for disenchantment...he [Yeats] used one argument which was sound, and I have never forgotten it...it is the farmers who see the fairies. It is the fact that it is not abnormal men like artists, but normal men like peasants, who have borne witness a thousand times to such things; it is the farmers who see the fairies. It is the agricultural labourer who calls a space a space who also calls a spirit a spirit; it is the woodcutter with no axe to grind, except for woodcutting, who will say he saw a man hang on a gallows and afterwards hang round it like a ghost. It is all very well to say we ought not to believe in the ghost on an ignorant man's evidence. But we should hang the man on the gallows on the same man's evidence.⁴⁰⁰

iv) The Bible has a theological analysis of idolatry and the occult. It has a critique of pagan polytheism. It has an explanation for false religions as well as the true faith.

Therefore, for Carrier to draw our attention to the state of superstition in the heathen world is hardly a disproof of Scripture.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ ET, 171.

⁴⁰⁰ *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton* (Sheed & Ward 1936), 146.

⁴⁰¹ For some online material on the alleged gullibility of ancient people, see Glenn Miller's response to Carrier at <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/mqfx.html> as well as Christopher Price

v) One effect of the gospel is to exorcise the land. The more Christians you have, the fewer demoniacs you have. The more Christians you have, the less occult activity you have. If there is less evidence of occult phenomena at present than in the past, that is evidence, not of secularism, but of the success of the gospel. And it is no coincidence that the decline of the faith in modern-day Europe has corresponded with a rise of the occult.

vi) The miracles of Christ are not simply weird or random events, like other weird or random events reported in heathen mythology. They do not emerge from a worldview in which odd, inexplicable things happen every now and then. As Craig Blomberg documents in some detail:

The narratives of the nature miracles...depict in symbol the identical in-breaking kingdom, often with striking parallels in both imagery and significance to specific parables of Jesus. In short, the nature miracles and the parables closely cohere with each other.⁴⁰²

I'd add that OT miracles frequently have a typical dimension as well.

In the same connection, Carrier claims that "Lucian presents firsthand proof of just how quickly legends could arise and spread in *The Death of Peregrinus* 39-40."⁴⁰³

No, what is actually the case is that Lucian furnishes firsthand proof of how a 2C satirist could pen a spoof on the Christian faith. But Carrier is never one to let little matters of literary genre and relative chronology get in the way of a pet theory.

Moving on:

Travel, likewise, was expensive and dangerous. Thus, the ability to "check" a claim was almost nonexistent.⁴⁰⁴

It's quite surprising that a student of ancient history would make such a demonstrably false claim.⁴⁰⁵

at <http://www.christianorigins.com/miracles.html>. See also:

<http://nrminblog.blogspot.com/2005/09/supposed-gullibility-of-ancient-people.html>

⁴⁰² "Miracles as parables," *Gospel Perspectives* 6:347.

⁴⁰³ ET, 225, n.318.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. J. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan* (33 BCE-117 CE) (T&T Clark 1999), 418-424; F. Bruce, *In the Steps of the Apostle Paul* (Kregel 1995);

Moving on:

There was no mass public education at all—much less in science and critical thinking—and no mass media of any sort, nor any institution devoted to investigating the truth, or publishing what they found.⁴⁰⁶

Comments:

i) The Resurrection enjoys multiple attestation.

ii) In general, what mass education does is not to teach critical thinking skill, but to teach students to think like their teachers.

iii) The mass media is another example of groupthink. Not until the advent of alternative media outlets (the Internet, talk radio, cable TV) were we able to free ourselves from the death-grip of liberal bias.

iv) If you get your news from the mass media, you are putting your faith in the news reporter. What's the difference?

v) The hallowed halls of academe are yet another example of groupthink, of which illustrations could be multiplied without end, but here are a few which spring to mind. At Carrier's alma mater you had Ed Said, the professional Jew-hater and vile propagandist. At Harvard, Pres. Summers nearly lost his job for merely hinting that women may be majoring in different fields because men and women are different.

"Travel and Communication (The New Testament World)," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. Freedman, ed. (Doubleday 1992), 6:648-653; L. Casson, *The Ancient Mariners* (Princeton 1991); *Travel in the Ancient World* (Allen & Unwin 1974); M. Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1924); T. Cornell & J. Matthew, *Atlas of the Roman World* (Oxford 1982); J. D'Arms & E. Kopff, eds., *The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome* (American Academy 1980); D. French, *Roman Roads & Milestones of Asia Minor* (Oxford: BAR 1981-1988); J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Traveling Conditions in the First Century," *Brev* 1 (Summer 1985), 38-47; F. O'Sullivan, *The Egnatian Way* (Stackpole Books 1972); W. Ramsay, "Roads and Travel (In NT)," *HDB*, J. Hastings, ed. (T&T Clark 1904), 5:375-402; B. Rapske, "Acts, Travel and Shipwreck," *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, D. Gill & C Gempf, eds. (Eerdmans 1994), 1-47; N. Sitwell, *Roman Roads of Europe* (Cassell 1981); C. Skeel, *Travel in the First Century After Christ, with Special Reference to Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1901); M. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation," *The Gospels For All Christians*, R. Bauckham, ed. (Eerdmans 1998), 49-70.

⁴⁰⁶ ET, 171.

His indignant critics offered no scientific evidence to rebut his suggestion. Then there's the way in which any dissenting voice on Darwinian orthodoxy is systematically blacklisted. Indeed, the evolutionary community is even prepared to fabricate evidence in the absence of actual evidence.⁴⁰⁷

vi) Science is irrelevant to the Resurrection. The possibility of a resurrection is not a scientific question, but a metascientific question.

Section 7.2 is a hodgepodge of “comparable legends.” I agree with him that the life of St. Genevieve is comparable to the Bible inasmuch as the miracles attributed to her are obviously imitative of Biblical miracles—just as the forgeries of Han van Meegeren resemble Vermeer. So what?

He mentions a legendary event in Herodotus “that makes an ‘empty tomb’ look quite boring by comparison.”⁴⁰⁸ So that would not be a comparable legend, but an incomparable legend. Likewise, he relates another legendary event in Herodotus, after which he exclaims: “How trivial an ‘empty tomb’ must seem by comparison!”⁴⁰⁹ Once again, that would not be a comparable legend, but an incomparable legend.

So all he's succeeded in doing is to reinforce the contrast between sober, Biblical restraint and the fervid imagination of the pagan mind. Is he making a case against Scripture—or for it?

He then cites some “obvious legends” surrounding the Jewish War. The problem here is his hidebound habit of assuming what he needs to prove. If you have a pre-commitment to doctrinaire naturalism, then, of course, any report of a supernatural event is “obviously legendary.”

Another assumption of Carrier, or perhaps it's a rhetorical tactic, is to impose an all-or-nothing dilemma on the reader: either we credit all accounts of the supernatural, or else we discredit all accounts of the supernatural.

But, from a Christian standpoint, this is a perfectly absurd dilemma. It makes no more sense than to insist that we either credit all accounts of ordinary events, or else we discredit all accounts of ordinary events.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. J. Wells, *Icons of Evolution* (Regnery 2000).

⁴⁰⁸ ET, 173.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

Just as there are degrees of intrinsic or extrinsic probability or improbability in reported events of a normal, ordinary kind, so there are degrees of intrinsic or extrinsic probability or improbability in reported events of a paranormal or extraordinary kind. Some reporters are more credible than others. Some events are more credible than others. Remember that, in Scripture, a miracle is not a circus stunt.

As an atheist, Carrier regards all miracles as equally improbable and, indeed, impossible. But, again, from a Christian standpoint, there is a parallel in the way we probilify reports of normal and paranormal, natural and supernatural events.

In Carrier's worldview, miracles are metaphysically impossible inasmuch as they presuppose the existence of God. In the Christian worldview, not only are miracles possible, but every event is an act of God—even though every event is not an act of God alone.

Carrier also says that:

Josephus believed his accounts because they were “justified” by subsequent events (a rationale no historian would accept today).⁴¹⁰

This, of course, says a lot less about historicity than it does about modern historians, blinkered by their secular historiography.

What, in principle, is the problem with the idea of ex post facto confirmation? Putting the Bible to one side, there are various individuals in history, such as Savonarola, John Knox, and Gilbert Murray who had a reputation for precognition. If subsequent events did, indeed, bear out their premonitions, then why would that not count as corroborative evidence?

Of course, a historian would need to sift the quality of the evidence, in terms of the witnesses and the degree of correspondence between the putative powers of precognition and the subsequent events, but that's no different than historical criticism generally.

Carrier next mentions the Roswell legend. This, however, is a double-bladed sword:

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 173.

i) Ufology is the delinquent child of modern science. An ufologist is often a smart, sophisticated individual, deeply committed to secular science. His worldview is the same as Carrier's. And while it's easy to make fun of ufology, an astute ufologist has a well-lubricated answer to all the stock objections.

The very existence of ufology undercuts Carrier's Humean analysis of Christian faith as a throwback to the retrograde outlook of primitive superstition and ignorance. For an ufologist can be a very bright and highly educated individual—indoctrinated in the very fields, and professing the same presuppositions, which Carrier regards as the antidote to Christian faith. Once gain, Carrier is trying to ride two different horses.

ii) Actually, if you do some research on ufology, you find a striking connection between “alien abductions” and Old Hag Syndrome (also called ASP). Since Old Hag Syndrome appears to be a cultural universal, this would suggest that there is a core experience which underlies ufology. In prescientific times, this “encounter” was construed in occultic categories of possession and the like. But in the space age, with the popularity of science fiction, this is reinterpreted in terms of alien encounters rather than demonic encounters.

So, in my opinion, ufology should not be dismissed out of hand, but understood for what it really is, at least some of the time, as an essentially occultic phenomenon with a pseudoscientific overlay.

iii) The Roswell legend is, of course, just one thread in the fabric of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories are the snare of bright minds. They have just enough suggestive, tantalizing evidence to be appealing, but never enough evidence to be compelling. On the face of it, it does seem as though things are often a little too coincidental to be...well...to be coincidental.

And yet we know that such a grand conspiracy is far too large and complicated to be orchestrated and kept under wraps by human ingenuity alone.

But there is an explanation for this. There is, indeed, a conspiracy. A very well kept conspiracy. So well kept that it's even a secret to the coconspirators. They are not in on the plot.

For the mastermind is the “god of this world.” Satan is the one who, behind-the-scenes, is pulling the strings of human pride—pride in our tolerance and utopian cloud castles.

Inside the Devil's sleeper cell, you can be under deep cover without ever knowing so. You can do his bidding without any apprehension of the diabolical choreography. Most of the devil's militia are unwitting draftees, conscripted in the trippy state of sin.

So the conspiracy theorist is half-right and half-wrong. Indeed, the conspiracy theorist is often a dupe of the Devil himself—chasing after Jewish bankers and flying saucers. The Devil lays just enough crumbs in his path to keep him on the scent, but never enough to lead him to the infernal hideout and hellish headquarters of the movement.

Conspiracies are ultimately concentric: if a human conspiracy lies within the wider circle of a diabolical conspiracy, then the diabolical conspiracy lies within the wider circle of a divine conspiracy. In the end, the Devil is only God's useful idiot.

Carrier goes on to compare the NT writers with snake-handling charismatics. The problem here is that he offers the reader an argument from analogy minus the argument. Since the NT writers do not resemble snake-handling charismatics, this is a parallel without a parallel.

Carrier is taking Christianity at its worst and using that as the yardstick. One could just as well take science at its worst—say, Dr. Mengele—and use that to disprove science.

Sure, both groups believe in prophecy and miracle, but that is not any kind of disproof unless you already rule this out of court. So all Carrier has done is to repack-age his prejudice under another disguise.

Moving on:

The only reason we know the truth in this case is because our society proves enormous resources or an investigator; huge amounts of government records accessible to anyone, a national mass media system...books, libraries, newspapers...⁴¹¹

This is remarkably naïve on at least a couple of counts:

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 175.

i) There is, first of all, his blind faith in the “experts,” as if it’s impossible to form an intelligent opinion of the Roswell incident unless your opinion is preapproved by all the right authorities. But aside from the specifics of the case, surely there are quite a number of general reasons for disbelieving in aliens from outer space. Do we really need permission from the news media before we are entitled to pronounce judgment?

ii) In addition, if I wanted to play devil’s advocate, surely everything he says here is entirely consistent with a government cover-up. The only folks with first-hand information would be the military. Most of them would be dead by now, and if not dead by natural causes, well then, an accident could always be arranged: you know, “friendly fire”—that sort of thing. The only source material available to outside investigators would be filtered through insiders in a disinformation campaign. Hasn’t Carrier ever seen the X-Files?

Sure, it’s a truckload of blarney, but is Carrier so captive to authority, so incapable of exercising independent thought, that “the only reason we know” the Roswell incident to be an urban legend is because “those in the know” (and how do we know who’s in the know?) say so?

Moving on:

Mark’s “empty tomb” account cannot be regarded as historical with any more confidence than his claim that at Christ’s death the whole land was covered by darkness for three hours or that the Temple curtain miraculously tore in two. Neither claim is corroborated in other texts, which could not have failed to record them, and neither claim is credible. Josephus would surely have mentioned the tearing of the temple curtain (for if Mark could know of it, surely Josephus would have), as would many historians of that region and period who, though their works are no longer extant, could have been eagerly quoted by later Christian apologists and historians. Likewise, a miraculous eclipse could not have failed to find mention in the Natural History of Pliny or the Natural Questions of Seneca, or the Amagest of Ptolemy, or the works of Tacitus or Suetonius.⁴¹²

In reply:

i) I quite agree with Carrier that the empty tomb is on an epistemic par with the other events of the Passion narrative. I’d simply reverse his logic: just as they are historical, so is the empty tomb.

⁴¹² Ibid., 176.

ii) The appeal to Josephus is a splendid specimen of Carrier’s double-tongued criterion. Just a few pages before, Carrier summarily dismissed as “obvious legends” Josephus’ report of paranormal portents and omens surrounding the siege of Jerusalem.

Now, however, he pretends that if only Josephus were to corroborate the Gospel account at this juncture, that would suddenly make all the difference.

iii) Why should Josephus (b. c. AD 37), who was barely out of diapers at the time of the event (c. AD 33), be privy to this event? It was not exactly a public event—especially if the inner veil was rent. And this was hardly an incident which the religious establishment would wish to advertise. They had every incentive to hush it up and patch it up—the sooner the better. Since Mark was contemporaneous with the events in question, and a native of Jerusalem—unlike Josephus—he would be in a position, as Josephus was not, to hear of any sensational leaks—as was Matthew, who was also in town at the time of the incident.

iv) As to the darkness, the Bible does not identify this as an “eclipse,” in the astronomical sense, so there is no reason to suppose that it was anything other than a local phenomenon. Carrier seems to be assuming an Apollo 11 viewpoint, but that’s hardly the narrative viewpoint. In Jewish usage, “the land” is typically a term for the land of Israel (Ha Eretz Israel). It is vibrant with overtones of the Abrahamic covenant and the land-promises.⁴¹³

As Nolland observes:

Does *ge* here mean “land” or “earth?”...In light of the lack of intensifiers for “darkness” and the proleptic nature of the eschatology, the more modest scope of “land” fits better. It also fits better with the sharp Jerusalem focus of the whole Passion Narrative.⁴¹⁴

Once again we have the spectacle of a classicist who, in his overweening conceit, supposes that he can parachute straight into a Jewish text without a proper grounding in its theological matrix—for which a bit of pretentious name-dropping (Pliny, Seneca, Ptolemy, &c.) is no substitute.

⁴¹³ W. Davies, *The Gospel & the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley 1974); *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Fortress 1991).

⁴¹⁴ *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1205.

Even if we favor the global over the local interpretation, there is corroboration for that interpretation as well.⁴¹⁵

We can safely skip over section 7.3 since it merely reasserts a liberal NT chronology for which Carrier never offers any positive argument, much less addressing the counterarguments by a host of conservative scholars.

I will comment on one remark:

It only makes things worse that all written attacks on Christianity have been suppressed, in every century, including those of Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles, and Julian—all were destroyed by the Church and are known only in the quotations of Christian authors who rebutted them.⁴¹⁶

This allegation crops up quite often in the ET. Maybe it's true, but no supporting documentation is ever offered. At the very least, an elementary distinction needs to be drawn between the active destruction of extant writings and the failure to preserve them.

If they didn't survive, that could simply be because it was not a priority for the church to preserve the writings of her enemies. And why should she? If her enemies can't preserve their own writings, why should she do it for them? Carrier himself has already commented on the considerable expense involved.⁴¹⁷

To take an obvious point of comparison, the ET is put out by Prometheus Books, which is the primary publishing house for anti-Christian literature. Does Prometheus books feel duty-bound to publish Evangelical literature as well? Is its failure to preserve the opposing side of the argument equivalent to suppression or destruction?

We happen to know from literary references in the church fathers, as well as the Bibliotheca of Photius, that many perfectly orthodox works have not survived the vicissitudes of time. But they were never suppressed or destroyed. Indeed, some of this material would be quite useful to Christian scholars. So while a certain amount

⁴¹⁵ Cf. <http://www.tektonics.org/qt/thallcomp.html> & <http://www.tektonics.org/jesusexist/thallus.html>

⁴¹⁶ ET, 179.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 171.

of the anti-Christian polemic didn't survive, it's equally true that a certain amount of the pro-Christian polemic didn't survive. Both sides are in the same boat.⁴¹⁸

And let us not forget that Carrier's allegation is a doubled-edged sword. For in time of persecution, the Roman authorities would confiscate and destroy Christian literature as well. So some of our supporting evidence has also been lost at the hands of the enemies of the faith.

Carrier goes so far as to allege that:

Unwanted texts were simply not preserved, and sects that wanted them were actively hunted down and destroyed. This is a known fact of history.⁴¹⁹

In reply:

i) First of all, how is that a known fact of history? I thought he said that history is written by the winners. So we can't trust their version of events, right? Isn't that how the argument goes?

ii) Waiving the little matter of self-referential incoherence, it is true that heretical sects were hunted down and destroyed—in some instances—at least, but the question is what period of church history we're talking about.

Because the average atheist suffers from a persecution-complex, he is prone to crackpot theories of church history. This sort of cosmic paranoia is both understandable and irrational.

In fact, there's an ironic sense in which he's right: God really is out to get him! I don't suppose, though, that Richard Carrier would readily avail himself of this particular explanation.

⁴¹⁸ As Jason Engwer observes, "We largely know what these non-Christian sources were arguing from the Christian response to them. Is Carrier going to argue that the early Christians whose writings are extant universally ignored some good arguments against Christianity, then destroyed the documents when they later attained the power to do so? That's a large, multi-generational effort that doesn't seem likely to occur. And what about the preservation of so many documents with content that the later Christians disagreed with, such as the premillennialism of the earliest patristic literature, the heresies of Origen, and the anti-Christian sections of Pliny the Younger and Tacitus?" (private email, 12/26/05).

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 227, n.333.

In section 7.4 Carrier pays yet another visit to the charmed cuckooland of parallelomania. Here he runs a bit of Plutarch by the reader:

At the end of his life, amidst rumors he [Romulus] was murdered...and dismembered, just like the resurrected deities Osiris and Bacchus), a darkness covered the earth, thunder and wind struck, and Romulus vanished, leaving no part of his body or clothes behind; the people wanted to search for him but the Senate told them not to, “for he had been taken up to the gods”; most people then went away happy...but “some doubted”; later, Proculus...reported that he met him “on the road,” and asked him “Why have you abandoned us?” to which Romulus replied that he had been a god all along, but had come down to earth to establish a great kingdom and now had to return to his home in heaven...a scene so obviously a parallel to Mark’s ending of his Gospel that nearly anyone would have noticed—and gotten the point. Indeed, Livy’s account, just like Mark’s emphasizes that “fear and bereavement” kept the people “silent for a long time,” and only later did they proclaim Romulus “God, Son of God, King, and Father.”⁴²⁰

Already, the Romulan celebration looks astonishingly like a skeletal model of the passion narrative...It certainly looks like the Christian passion narrative is a deliberate transvaluation of the Roman Empire’s ceremony of their founding savior’s incarnation, death, and resurrection.⁴²¹

Before we proceed to the details, a few general observations are in order:

- i) It is always revealing to see what an unbeliever is prepared to believe or disbelieve. Carrier treats the Gospels as legendary or mythological, but treats the *Moralia* of Plutarch as if it were a sound historical source.
- ii) Plutarch is a generation younger than John-Mark. Plutarch was born around AD 46, at which time John-Mark was already on the mission field.⁴²² When issues of literary dependence are raised, this assumes a certain relative chronology.
- iii) Mark is a very Jewish Gospel. Among other respects, this is clear from his Jewish Greek, with its heavy Hebraic-Aramaic diction and grammar.⁴²³ Indeed, all four gospels are quite Jewish in varying respects.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 181.

⁴²² Cf. F. Bruce, *The Pauline Circle* (Eerdmans 1985), 74-75.

⁴²³ N. Turner, *A Grammar of the New Testament* (T&T Clark 1980), 4:11-25.

This tells you quite a lot, both about author and audience. To suppose that Mark and his fellow Evangelists would have modeled the life of Christ on the legend of Romulus shows absolutely no cultural sensitivity to either the author or his audience. You don't get this sort of blatant syncretism in a Palestinian Jew like Josephus or even a Diaspora Jew like Philo.⁴²⁴

To get the full flavor of the comparison, let's quote directly from the originals. Here is Plutarch's version, followed by Livy's:

27 Wherefore suspicion and calumny fell upon that body when he disappeared unaccountably a short time after. He disappeared...leaving no certain account nor even any generally accepted tradition of his death, aside from the date of it.

Romulus disappeared suddenly, and no portion of his body or fragment of his clothing remained to be seen. But some conjectured that the senators, convened in the temple of Vulcan, fell upon him and slew him, then cut his body in pieces, put each a portion into the folds of his robe, and so carried him away.

...when suddenly strange and unaccountable disorders with incredible changes filled the air; the light of the sun failed, and night came down upon them, not with peace and quiet, but with awful peals of thunder and furious blasts driving rain from every quarter...when the storm had ceased, and the sun shone out, and the multitude, now gathered together again in the same place as before, anxiously sought for their king, the nobles would not suffer them to inquire into his disappearance nor busy themselves about it, but exhorted them all to honour and revere Romulus, since he had been caught up into heaven, and was to be a benevolent god for them instead of a good king.

28 At this pass...Julius Proculus...went into the forum and solemnly swore by the most sacred emblems before all the people that, as he was travelling on the road, he had seen Romulus coming to meet him, fair and stately to the eye as never before, and arrayed in bright and shining armour. He himself, then, affrighted at the sight, had said: "O King, what possessed thee, or what purpose hadst thou, that thou hast left us patricians a prey to unjust and wicked accusations, and the whole city sorrowing without end at the loss of its father?" Whereupon Romulus had replied: "It was the pleasure of the gods, O Proculus, from whom I came, that I should be with mankind only a short time, and that after founding a city destined to be the greatest on earth for empire and glory, I should dwell again in heaven. So farewell, and tell the Romans that if they

⁴²⁴ As Jason Engwer observes, "If 'nearly everyone would have noticed' [the Romulan/Markan parallel], how is it, then, that both the earliest Christian interpreters of the gospels and the earliest non-Christian interpreters saw the documents as giving historical accounts?" (private email 12/26/05).

practise self-restraint, and add to it valour, they will reach the utmost heights of human power. And I will be your propitious deity, Quirinus.”

We must not, therefore, violate nature by sending the bodies of good men with their souls to heaven, but implicitly believe that their virtues and their souls, in accordance with nature and divine justice, ascend from men to heroes, from heroes to demi-gods, and from demi-gods, after they have been made pure and holy, as in the final rites of initiation, and have freed themselves from mortality and sense, to gods, not by civic law, but in very truth and according to right reason, thus achieving the fairest and most blessed consummation.⁴²⁵

1.16. After these immortal achievements, Romulus held a review of his army at the “Caprae Palus” in the Campus Martius. A violent thunder storm suddenly arose and enveloped the king in so dense a cloud that he was quite invisible to the assembly. From that hour Romulus was no longer seen on earth. When the fears of the Roman youth were allayed by the return of bright, calm sunshine after such fearful weather, they saw that the royal seat was vacant. Whilst they fully believed the assertion of the Senators, who had been standing close to him, that he had been snatched away to heaven by a whirlwind, still, like men suddenly bereaved, fear and grief kept them for some time speechless. At length, after a few had taken the initiative, the whole of those present hailed Romulus as “ a god, the son of a god, the King and Father of the City of Rome.”...I believe, however, that even then there were some who secretly hinted that he had been torn limb from limb by the senators—a tradition to this effect, though certainly a very dim one, has filtered down to us. The other, which I follow, has been the prevailing one, due, no doubt, to the admiration felt for the man and the apprehensions excited by his disappearance. This generally accepted belief was strengthened by one man’s clever device. The tradition runs that Proculus Julius, a man whose authority had weight in matters of even the gravest importance, seeing how deeply the community felt the loss of the king, and how incensed they were against the senators, came forward into the assembly and said: “Quirites! at break of dawn, to-day, the Father of this City suddenly descended from heaven and appeared to me.”⁴²⁶

Now let’s review the “parallels” once more:

i) In the Gospels, Jesus dies—dies unmistakably. It’s a public event. Indeed, a public spectacle.

In the legend, Romulus disappears, prompting the unsubstantiated rumor that he was murdered and dismembered.

⁴²⁵ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Romulus*.html

⁴²⁶ <http://www.hfac.uh.edu/mcl/classics/Rom/Livy.html>

ii) In the Gospels, Jesus is raised bodily from the grave.

In the legend, you have a translation or ascent to “heaven” without a prior resurrection.

iii) In the Gospels, you have three hours of darkness at the crucifixion. If you’re looking for a parallel to this event, the obvious place to look is the Egyptian plague of darkness.

In the legend, there is a brief thunderstorm, under cover of which Romulus mysteriously vanishes. Clearly the legend tries to harmonize conflicting traditions concerning his disappearance: was it through murder and disposal of the body, or was it through apotheosis?

iv) In the Gospels, Jesus is divine from start to finish.

In the legend we see the reworking of the apotheosis genre, either by legendary embellishment or the harmonization of conflicting traditions—did he become divine, or was he a god incognito?

v) In the Gospels, the Easter appearances serve to confirm his prophetic-redemptive mission.

In the legend, the reappearance of Romulus is an alibi to exculpate the Senate of murder.

vi) In the Gospels, Jesus leaves his clothing behind.

In the legend, Romulus leaves nothing behind.

vii) There is a *mysterium tremendum* motif common to both, but that’s a commonplace of numinous encounters generally. Indeed, Carrier admits this in section 8.⁴²⁷

viii) You might say that they share the common theme of divine sonship, but in the Gospels, the parallel for this lies in the sonship of Israel, as an adoptive metaphor for the divine election of Israel and the Davidic kingship.

ix) I guess that Carrier is trying to insinuate a parallel between the reappearance of

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 183.

Romulus and the Easter appearance of Christ on the road to Emmaus. But, again, the parallels for the latter lie in the prospective allusion to the Lord's supper, and beyond that to the Messianic feast (Lk 12:37; 13:29), as well as the retrospect allusion to the Last Supper, and before that, to the Passover.

Moreover, the Easter appearances are not characterized by any nimbic glow.

Once again, Carrier has a tin-ear for the text because his overriding agenda renders him tone-deaf to the text.

Carrier is salting the mine by the suggestive use of loaded words like "incarnation" and "resurrection" to describe Romulus, Bacchus, and Osiris. The only transvaluation lies in his strained efforts to baptize the legend of Romulus.

Carrier is looking for parallels rather than finding parallels. He is conflating different genres: pagan apotheosis/translation>Jewish resurrection.⁴²⁸

Carrier attempts to cover his tracks by postulating that the Gospels represent a "heavily Judaized" version of the Roman legend. But the problem here is threefold:

- i) The parallels are incidental and inexact.
- ii) This is a classic attempt to reinterpret the evidence consistent with your preconceived theory rather than theorize about the data consistent with the evidence.
- iii) The Jewish character of the Gospels runs far deeper than a Jewish paint job over Roman mythology.

Moving on:

Almost all divine manifestations on record take place in either of two forms: the God appears in an "obviously" supernatural body, or in disguise.⁴²⁹

By way of comment:

- i) There is some truth to this, although it oversimplifies the variety of OT theophanies.

⁴²⁸ J. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition*.

⁴²⁹ ET, 183.

ii) If there is a God, and he does appear to man, then there are only two logical possibilities: he would either appear (a) incognito, or (b) in some unmistakably divine manifestation.

So the stereotypical character of the literature is no argument against the reality of such appearances.

iii) The incognito mode is already present in the OT (e.g. Gen 18; Judg 13), so there's no need to go in search of pagan parallels (pace p.191).

In section 8.1, Carrier attempts to dust off the old mass hallucination theory. In defense of this theory he appeals to neuroscientific literature alleging that religious belief is "hard-wired" into the brain. But this is fraught with its own intractable difficulties:

i) Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the hallucination theory is true, why does Carrier even bother with source, form, and redaction criticism, or posit a conflict between the Pauline doctrine and the tradition of the empty tomb? For, on his hypothesis, the crowd could just as well hallucinate a fish-eating man with scars. So it seems that Carrier has little faith in the explanatory power of his hallucination theory, which is why he chooses to fall back on so much supporting material which is wholly unnecessary if mass hallucination could do the trick without all the complications.

ii) Neuroscience has yet to isolate and identify religious mechanisms or religious structures within the physical architecture of the brain, and it's hard to see, in principle, how that would even be observable. What does a religious belief look like? What is the chemical composition of a religious belief? What's the color of faith? Does Muslim faith have a different cerebral microstructure than Christian faith?

iii) Physicalism is subject to crippling scientific and philosophical objections.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Cf. J. Byl, *The Divine Challenge* (Banner of Truth 2004); R. Chisholm, "Mind," H. Burkhardt & B. Smith, eds., *Handbook of Metaphysics & Ontology* (Philosophia Verlag 1991), 2:553-557; J. Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting* (Regent 1995); J. Eccles, *How the Self Controls Its Brain* (Springer-Verlag Telos 1994); J. Foster, *The Immaterial Self* (Routledge 1996); J. Green & S. Palmer, eds., *In Search of the Soul* (IVP 2005); H. Lewis, *The Elusive Mind* (Allen & Unwin 1969); G. Martin, *Does it Matter?: The Unsustainable World of the Materialists* (Floris Books 2005); R. Paterson, *Philosophy and the Belief in a Life After Death* (Macmillan 1995); R. Penrose, *The Road to Reality* (Knopf 2004); D. Radin, *The Conscious Universe* (HarperSanFrancisco

iv) Presumptive materialism has never made any sense to me. It leaves the observer out of the observation, like a man who walks out the front door, peers back into the living room through the window, and takes this as proof positive that the house must be abandoned because he can't see the occupant inside.

He can't see the homeowner because he is the homeowner. Likewise, we cannot see the mind because we see with the mind. That's the lens through which we see everything else. That's our window onto the world. The observer, in looking outside himself, is overlooking himself. Where am I?⁴³¹

v) The neuroscientific theory of religious belief either proves too little or too much. How does it account for the difference between believers and unbelievers? Primitive belief and modern unbelief? The shift from belief to unbelief or the shift from unbelief to belief? Or the shift from belief to unbelief to belief? Or the shift from unbelief to belief to unbelief? Or the difference between one religious belief and another? Do we account for all this based on differences between one brain and another, or within the same brain, at different times of life?

1997); J. Schwartz & S. Begley, *The Mind & the Brain* (Regan 2003); J. Smythies, *The Wall of Plato's Cave* (Avebury 1994); J. Smythies & J. Beloff, *The Case for Dualism* (U. of Virginia 1989); C. Taliaferro, *Consciousness & the Mind of God* (Cambridge 1994); P. Unger, *All the Power in the World* (Oxford 2006).

⁴³¹ For some fine online resources regarding dualism, cf.:

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/dualism.htm>

<http://www.johndepoe.com/dualism.pdf>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/>

<http://moebius.psy.ed.ac.uk/~dualism/papers/>

<http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/soul.pdf>

http://www.sheldrake.org/controversies/RSA_text.html

<http://www.johndepoe.com/MindnotMechanism.pdf>

<http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/plantinga/Dennett.html>

<http://webware.princeton.edu/vanfraas/mss/SciencMat.htm>

http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/arn/groothuis/dg_mindsbodies.htm

<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?id=388>

<http://faculty.washington.edu/bonjour/Unpublished%20articles/MARTIAN.html>

<http://www.nd.edu/~mrea/Online%20Papers/Reply%20to%20Jacquette.pdf>

[http://www.epsociety.org/Moreland'sReviewOfKim%20\(PC%207.2-463-473\).pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/Moreland'sReviewOfKim%20(PC%207.2-463-473).pdf)

http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~lrb/work/publications/baker_are_beliefs_brain_states.pdf

<http://consc.net/chalmers/>

<http://dangerousidea.blogspot.com>

<http://maverickphilosopher.powerblogs.com>

<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/phillist.asp>

This is yet another example of Carrier’s intellectual enslavement to academic fads and authority figures. Instead of posing a few obvious questions, like a truly free freethinker would, he simply laps up whatever is poured into his saucer like a well-trained dog.

Carrier then relates a personal anecdote:

In addition to a vivid Taoist mystical experience of an obviously hallucinatory nature, there was a night when I fought with a demon trying to crush my chest—the experience felt absolutely real, and I was certainly awake, probably in a hypnagogic state. I could see and feel the demon sitting on me, preventing me from breathing, but when I “punched” it, it vanished. It is all the more remarkable that I have never believed in demons, and the creature I saw did not resemble anything I have ever seen or imagined before. So what was it? Supernatural encounter or hallucination? You decide.⁴³²

i) This is a classic case of “Old Hag Syndrome” or ASP, which is a widely attested phenomenon. Here we see the power of ideology to trump evidence. Here he recounts a personal experience of an especially immediate kind—equivalent to a self-presenting state. And yet his secular philosophy, which is based, at best, on second-hand information worked into a worldview with various interpolations and extrapolations, takes precedence over his own direct awareness.

ii) Notice that he expects the reader to believe this story without benefit of any multiple-attestation. He holds himself to one standard, and Scripture to another.

iii) Speaking for myself, I find it more than plausible that a man who was dabbling in the occult (Taoism) would leave himself wide open to the demonic—especially in the case of an apostate like Carrier. Those that pray to false gods become the devil’s prey.

Carrier concocts an armchair theory regarding St. Paul’s Damascus road experience, imputing subliminal motives to Paul.

By way of reply:

i) The beauty of imputing subconscious motives is that it requires no evidence.

⁴³² ET, 185.

ii) Carrier's Freudian psychobabble is on the same evidentiary plane as repressed memories of Satanic ritual mass murder. It's pretty interesting that a man who, just two pages before, was appealing to neuroscience, which claims to be a hard science, can, in the very next breath, go Freudian on us—even though this is regarded as pseudoscience by scientifically trained critics.⁴³³

iii) All we know about St. Paul comes from the pages of Scripture. Carrier has to exercise sufficient confidence in the Book of Acts—something he elsewhere derides and denies—to piece together his own interpretation from narrative details supplied by the text, but to do so in the teeth of the interpretation supplied by the text itself. This handling of the account, which just so happens to be reliable whenever he wants it to be and unreliable whenever he wants it to be, is opportunistic and unprincipled.

The only consistency here is that Carrier is consistently anti-Christian, and he's prepared to invoke any congeries of conjectures and theories, however inconsistent with one another, as long as they are all opposed to the Christian worldview.

Perfectly absurd is his hunch that Paul converted to the faith as:

A way to give his life meaning, by relocating himself from the lower, even superfluous periphery of Jewish elite society, to a place of power and purpose.⁴³⁴

The truth of the matter is just the opposite: as a protégé of the leading rabbi of the age (Acts 22:2), as a rising star in the religious establishment (Acts 9:1-2), as a Jew who enjoyed the distinction of dual citizenship (Rome & Tarsus), St. Paul began his career as a member of the social elite, and threw away a brilliant career for a grinding, thankless life of the Christian mission field.

In this general connection, Carrier also tries to impeach the credibility of the Easter accounts by noting that the timeframe begins around early morning. He gives two or three reasons (i) he supposes there to be a parallel with the first day of creation;⁴³⁵ (ii) he sees another parallel with the legend of Romulus,⁴³⁶ and (iii) he sees a parallel with trance states or hypnagogic visions.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Cf. A. Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis* (University of California Press 1985); *Validation in the Clinical Theory of Psychoanalysis* (International Universities Press 1993).

⁴³⁴ ET, 187.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 206, n.91.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 227, n.335.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 228, n.347.

But there are several problems with this analysis:

i) How can all three factors figure the Easter accounts? How can it be based on Gen 1 and the legend of Romulus and hypnagogic states? This suffers from causal overkill—like a B-grade horror movie in which you kill a vampire by staking him through the heart and dunking him in a vat of holy water and exposing him to broad daylight.

ii) Since he doesn't believe that the Resurrection could possibly be true, he ignores the obvious explanation in favor of any alternative explanation. The obvious explanation of the timing is quite mundane and practical. The women went to the tomb at first light because they couldn't see in the dark. There were no streetlights or flashlights back then. It's really that simple. No special explanation required.

They went back at the earliest available opportunity. They couldn't go back to anoint the body the next day, because that was the Sabbath, and such activity would violate the Sabbath. So they had to wait until the Sabbath was over, and then they had to wait until dawn, or a little before, to have enough light to see by. So they went back as soon as they could. The timing is perfectly natural.

Hence, the alternative explanations are superfluous and strained.

iii) I'd add that, once again, it's fascinating to see Carrier so utterly skeptical about the Gospels, and so utterly gullible about the legend of Romulus. He appears to treat this as a reliable record of an actual vision. That there really was a Julius Proculus who, in a trance state, really had a hypnagogic vision of Romulus. Perhaps Mr. Carrier could also fill us in on the ontological status of the Mock Turtle and the Cheshire Cat.

Moving on:

We would expect these "happy schizotypes" to find their most accepted place in religious avocations, and they would naturally gravitate into the entourage of miracle workers.⁴³⁸

In reply:

⁴³⁸ ET, 187.

i) We would “expect”? In other words, Carrier has no actual comparative statistical data to back up his claim. Humanists accuse “fundamentalists” of being anti-intellectual. But when it comes to a humanist making a case against the Resurrection, he feels free to pull things out of thin air.

ii) If the only rule of evidence is one’s seat-of-the-pants, I’d just offer my own impression: academia is the most accepted place for eccentric social misfits who gravitate to college life because they couldn’t survive for a day and a night out in the competitive, rough-and-tumble of the real world.

Moving on:

Even today people have “visions” of Jesus just like those in the NT.⁴³⁹

In reply:

i) This is one of those comments which proves everything and nothing. For you could make the identical statement about perfectly mundane sightings. The fact that some claim to see things that don’t exist, or claim to see things that do exist, but which they didn’t see for themselves, doesn’t create any general presumption against what any particular eyewitness says in any particular case, now does it?

ii) Carrier is assuming that NT sightings of Jesus were merely visionary. I’ve argued to the contrary.

iii) Carrier is also assuming that any contemporary vision of Jesus must be imaginary. I don’t see why. I don’t see why, say, a Christian could not enjoy a genuine deathbed vision of Christ.

In section 8.2, Carrier alleges that the Gospels contradict each other in place and time. Even if this were true, it would only amount to a formal rather than a material contradiction. It simply means that each Evangelist was necessarily selective in what he chose to report, and felt free to rearrange the material according to a topical rather than chronological scheme. That has no bearing on the historical authenticity of the record. It wouldn’t hurt Mr. Carrier to acquire a modicum of literary sensitivity.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 187.

⁴⁴⁰ C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP 1987); V. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (1994); V. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (P&R 1999); K. Van-

In section 8.3, he draws attention to the Exodus-typology in Matthew. This is hardly news to students of the Bible. And we regard the type/antitype dialectic in Scripture as evidence of divine inspiration and divine providence. The OT supplies the lock, and the NT the key.

Somehow, Carrier manages to equate typology with “a purely revelatory episode.”

This is terribly confused. Typology is literary, not visionary. It connects a NT event with an OT text. This is the opposite of direct revelation.

Carrier says that Matthew’s “appearance tradition is highly stylized.”⁴⁴¹ That’s true enough, but does nothing to subtract from the historicity of the account.

A historian is a writer. He is writing about a historical event. As such, literary values do figure into his reportage. Just consider Gibbon’s stylish history of the Roman Empire.

Carrier then says that if his account of the Easter appearance “originates entirely with Matthew, it is entirely false as well.”⁴⁴²

This is a complete non sequitur. It assumes that Matthew had no independent access to reliable information on the resurrection of Christ. That’s a naked assertion in search of a supporting argument.

In section 8.4, commenting on the Emmaus account, Carrier equates a polemical motive with pure propaganda. He does this quite often. But this objection is utterly brainless as well as self-incriminating.

Men often put pen to paper to defend a position against attack, or to attack the opposing position. They may do so to right the record and rebut false allegations.

Should such an exercise be dismissed out-of-hand as worthless propaganda? Carrier and his co-contributors have a polemical motive in writing for the ET.

hoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Baker 2005); K. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (Zondervan 1998).

⁴⁴¹ ET, 190.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 190.

Carrier also denies the Emmaus account because it lacks multiple -attestation. That's an odd comment coming from a classicist. Surely we lack multiple-attestation for many claims made by many classical historians.

Yet Carrier never hesitates to quote a classical writer against the Gospels whenever it suits his purpose. And he doesn't confine himself to historians either. A satirist will do.

In this same connection he says that John "completely rewrote" the Lucan account of the miraculous catch of fish.⁴⁴³

That there are similarities between the two events is obvious enough. That there are dissimilarities as well is equally obvious.⁴⁴⁴

Two general points are worth noting:

i) William F. Buckley once said that whenever he writes a novel he includes at least one unlikely coincidence for the sake of realism since coincidental events, however unlikely, do happen in real life.

ii) If it seems, at times, that two episodes in Scripture look artificially alike, that is often quite intentional. It doesn't mean that what we have here is a "doublet" or two different versions or variants traditions of the same event. Rather, the narrator has set up a deliberate parallel by selectively reporting what they most have in common while omitting what they least have in common. The use of catchwords and literary allusions is another way of emphasizing their typical affinities.

This is for the purpose of drawing the reader's attention to the theological significance and providential connectedness of separate events.⁴⁴⁵ Although they may be isolated in time and space, they are united in the plan of God.

Incidentally, this phenomenon is something that believers often experience in their own walk of faith. One thing happens to us, and then another thing happens to us, and at the time they seem to be unrelated or inscrutable. But looking back at a distance, we can see the hidden hand of providence guiding our steps.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 230, 363.

⁴⁴⁴ For a comparison and contrast, cf. D. Bock, *Luke*, 1:448-449.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. T. Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Zondervan 1987).

Likewise, although the Gospel writers are recording events in a rough chronological sequence from early to late, they are, of course, writing after the fact, with the benefit of inspired hindsight.

In the same vein, Carrier favors the reader with the following string of absurd conjectures, disguised as fact:

Luke also inverts the geography: Ovid reports that Proculus was going from Alba Longa to Rome...whereas Luke makes the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus...Both journeys are toward the sea, and the distances in both cases are nearly identical, an unlikely coincidence (about 14 miles—though Luke incorrectly estimates 7). Luke is also the only Gospel author to depict Christ's ascension to heaven (24:51; Acts 1:9-11), another link to Romulus...the only disciple named is Cleopas, which in Luke's spelling could be an eponym, for it means "All the Glory" or "all the Good News" (Klos + Pas).⁴⁴⁶

Where does one even begin? Was Carrier on mushrooms when he wrote this?

i) Rather than finding a parallel between Luke and Ovid, he fabricates one. He says that Luke has inverted the geography, which would make the two accounts disanalogous rather than analogous. He says that Luke got the mileage wrong, which would make the two accounts disanalogous rather than analogous. (And, of course, Luke only got it wrong if his account is, indeed, derivative.)

The fact that Ovid has someone walking from one town to another while Luke has someone walking from a different town than Ovid's to a different town than Ovid's is somehow taken to be evidence of literary dependence, when every piece of evidence that Carrier has given us is evidence of the difference between the two accounts.

ii) Luke may be the only Evangelist to "depict" the Ascension, but the Ascension is alluded to in the Gospel of John (3:13; 6:62; 7:33; 8:14,21; 13:33; 14:2,4,12,28; 16:5,7,10,17,28; 20:17), as well as the first epistle of Peter (1 Pet 3:22), epistles of Paul (Eph 1:20; 4:8-10; Phil 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16), and Hebrews (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

iii) His armchair etymology fails on two counts:

a) "Cleopas" is the short form for "Cleopatros."

⁴⁴⁶ ET, 230, n.364.

b) The nominal variant in Jn 19:25 is a Semitic derivative.⁴⁴⁷

So the whole argument is a farrago of concatenated nonsense.

iv) The parallels are not external to Luke, a la Romulus, but internal to Luke, for the Emmaus pericope has both a retrospective function as it represents the convergence and culmination of several Lucan themes, as well as a prospective function as it prepares the reader for the following stage in the Book of Acts.⁴⁴⁸ But Carrier has no incentive in reading the account on its own terms since that would spoil his theory.

In a passing aside,⁴⁴⁹ Carrier makes a perfunctory reference to Wright's detailed discussion,⁴⁵⁰ but he never allows that to interfere with his overriding agenda. For example, he says, with respect to the 500 witnesses (1Cor 15:6):

I find it hard to imagine Paul mean they were available for interrogation—he names no one, nor says where they are, thus the Corinthians would not know whom to ask...⁴⁵¹

But this objection has the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:6 exactly backwards. The reason Paul can mention this in passing is because the Corinthians already know what he's referring to. As Martin Hengel has pointed out:

It is amazing to what degree Paul constantly presupposes as a matter of course that people in the communities in Corinth or "Galatia" have knowledge of his own past and also of the earliest community in Jerusalem or Judaea and of leading men of earliest Christianity. Cephas, the Twelve and the other apostles, James and the brothers of Jesus are not unknown figures there. In other words, the preaching with which the community was founded also included reports about the beginnings of the earliest community in Jerusalem and its most important representatives. A text like 1 Cor 15:1-11 could not have been understood properly had it not been preceded by basic information about the persons and events cited in it in connection with the foundation of the community.⁴⁵²

In the same vein, Carrier claims that:

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 208.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. B. Robinson, "The Place of the Emmaus Story in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 30/4 (1984), 481-497.

⁴⁴⁹ ET, 231, n.372.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, chap. 16.

⁴⁵¹ ET, 231, n.371.

⁴⁵² *Paul: Between Damascus & Antioch* (WJK 1997), 15-16.

John deliberately suppresses this theme, by saying the empty tomb—and not scripture—led to their belief (20:9).⁴⁵³

Once again, Carrier evinces his constitutional inability to read a passage in context, with a feel for the flow of argument. As D. A. Carson explains, in reference to 20:29-31, with which the chapter culminates:

Blessed, then, are those who cannot share Thomas' experience of sight, but who, in part because they read of Thomas' experience, come to share Thomas' faith. For us, faith comes not by sight, but from what is heard (or read!).

The particles men oun connect vv30-31 with what precedes. The most common meaning of the second is "therefore." The flow of thought seems to be: Those who have not seen the risen Christ and yet believed are blessed; therefore this book has been composed, to the end that you may believe.⁴⁵⁴

Carrier then says that the Emmaus account "serves as a corrective to replace the vision to Mary in the Mark-Matthew tradition."⁴⁵⁵

That's it. No evidence is presented to substantiate this claim. Carrier's bare dictum will do. Truth by assertion.

If you didn't know better, you'd think that Carrier had a front-row seat on the proceedings. "Just take my word for it! I was there! I saw what really happened!"

Then you have this choice specimen of well-poisoning:

Paul may have suppressed this appearance event because of his notoriously low opinion of women, repeatedly insisting that they shut the hell up.⁴⁵⁶

By way of reply:

i) Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that Paul was a male chauvinist. So were his fellow Jews. So were the Greeks. So were the Romans. And Egyptians, and so on and so forth. The ancient world was patriarchal. So Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John would have the very same incentive to suppress the testimony of the women.

⁴⁵³ ET, 230, n.369.

⁴⁵⁴ *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans 1991), 660-661.

⁴⁵⁵ ET, 193.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

ii) It's nice to know that Carrier affirms the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals (e.g., 1 Tim 2). In fact, Carrier even affirms the Pauline authorship of Hebrews!⁴⁵⁷

iii) Why is Carrier judging Paul by modern politics? Does he try to tar other classical writers with this feminist brush? Clearly he's pandering to the average reader of Prometheus fare.

iv) Actually, Paul has a high view of female missionaries (Rom 16).

v) In my opinion, feminism is a euphemism for misogynism by treating women, like Michelangelo, as nothing more than men with breasts—except where abortion is concerned, at which point it treats women like little children who are irresponsible for their lifestyle choices.

In the same vein, Carrier claims that “Paul’s misogyny was based on the inheritance of sin through Adam and Eve.”⁴⁵⁸ But if the doctrine of original sin makes him a misogynist, then it also makes him a misanthropist, right?

Section 8.5 says nothing he hasn't said before. Finally he rounds out on this note:

After all, if it is sufficient today, for belief and conversion and martyrdom, that Jesus be available only in spirit, not in his flesh-and-blood body, why would a fleshy encounter have been important in the beginning? Evangelicals have no answer for this that makes any sense of contemporary Christian experience.⁴⁵⁹

Is Carrier so theologically illiterate that he can't grasp the issue?

i) The NT writers record a “fleshy encounter,” not because it serves any ulterior purpose, but because that's what happened.

ii) For the here-and-now, Jesus is available in the Scriptures, but the faith of the saints and martyrs is predicated on the fact that Jesus is available in heaven when we die or when he comes again.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 226, n.323.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 224, 309.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 197.

Chapter 6

The last chapter was so sweeping and detailed that reviewing the remainder of the book is largely a mopping-up operation. Other contributors frequently recycle Carrier's objections and arguments, so one can skip over the redundant material.

One basic weakness with his case against the empty tomb is Kirby's reliance on late apocryphal sources—a liability he shares in common with Bob Price in chapter 4.⁴⁶⁰ As one scholar expresses the problem:

One thinks of Bultmann's efforts to explain the origin of Pauline and Johannine Christology by appeal to 5C Mandaean sources, which were themselves full of allusions to NT passages and Christian ideas. Never able to appreciate the methodological error in this procedure James Robinson and Helmut Koester, the last of Bultmann's students, have in more recent times appealed to 3C and 4C Coptic sources, which, like the Mandaean sources, were also full of allusions to the NT.⁴⁶¹

There are a couple of reasons for this effort to demote the canonical gospels and promote the apocryphal gospels:

- i) We have liberals who are shopping around for a theological outlook more to their liking. This has nothing to do with historical evidence.
- ii) We have liberals who prefer a dehistoricized gospel because it doesn't saddle them with the paraphernalia of exorcisms and miracles. As one scholar has expressed the motivation:

It is ironic that whereas the gospel tradition itself announces the presence of the Kingdom of God in the midst of Jesus' contemporaries in the form of the exorcism of demons, Bultmann assigns all such embarrassing details to the later Hellenistic church and its recasting of the Jesus tradition. Not surprisingly, scholars of the second and third generation of Bultmannians are drawn to the Gnostic gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas, which consist entirely of sayings, with no reference to the activities or narratives about him. The Bultmann school now seeks to persuade others that the non-narrative—and hence, non-miraculous—gospels are indeed the oldest and offer us our best access to the historical Jesus. The controlling factor in this proposition is not the persuasive-

⁴⁶⁰ For a critical analysis of their historical dubiety, cf. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (Doubleday 1991), 1:112-166.

⁴⁶¹ C. Evans, *Jesus & His Contemporaries*, 47-48, n.134.

ness of the new evidence, which many find points to a much later stage in the development of the Jesus tradition, but the attractiveness of a Jesus who is not involved in those embarrassing miracles.⁴⁶²

Once again, the preference is not historical, but historiographical—driven by a cultural prejudice against the supernatural. If you hope to be a member in good standing with the smart set, you cannot cling to these old-fashioned beliefs.

Kirby kicks off the discussion by claiming that many scholars doubt the historicity of the empty tomb. He then refers the reader to “a very abbreviated list.”⁴⁶³

But anyone familiar with the individuals in question can instantly see that they deny the Resurrection, not on historical grounds, but quasi-philosophical grounds. They operate with a secular worldview which simply discounts the miraculous in advance of any historical inquiry.

And I say “quasi-philosophical,” for even though they are staking out a philosophical position, they did not arrive at their position by philosophical reasoning. You will never find them making a rigorous case for their unbelief. Rather, they don’t believe because they don’t believe.

Moving on:

Many make much fuss over the contradictions between the resurrection narratives, but...I will not list such discrepancies, not only because this has been done many times before, but more importantly because the matter under contention is not biblical inerrancy. My interest is in understanding the cause of these discrepancies. My theory is that the evangelists freely shaped their resurrection narratives with theological concerns, and that their few agreements derive from dependence...on the account in the Gospel of Mark for the empty tomb story.⁴⁶⁴

Like Carrier, Kirby has a theory which is trying to skirt the knife-edge of contradictory lines of evidence.

If the gospels have so little in common, then what is the evidence for literary dependence in the first place? Kirby’s problem is that he needs similarity to prove de-

⁴⁶² Kee, 292, n.5.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 236.

pendence, and dissimilarity to prove redaction. But is dissimilarity evidence of redaction, or evidence of literary independence?

Indeed, on the very same page, he quotes another writer as saying that:

Their disagreements are indicative of the fact that when these narratives were recorded by them there was no definite and settled tradition concerning the incidents around the tomb of Jesus.⁴⁶⁵

But if that were true, then the discrepancies would be due, not to redaction, but discrepant underlying traditions—before we ever get to redaction. Kirby has an illogical mind.

Mind you, I don't believe that there are any discrepancies in the Gospel accounts—except in the sense of purely formal as opposed to material discrepancies.

Moving on:

The location of Arimathea has not (yet) been identified with any assurance: the various “possible” locations are nothing more than pious guesses or conjectures undocumented by any textual or archaeological evidence.” Richard Carrier speculates, “Is the word a pun on ‘best disciple,’ ari (stos) mathe (tes)? Matheia means ‘disciple town’ in Greek.”⁴⁶⁶

In reply:

i) Matheia means “disciple town”? Really? I'd like to see the lexical evidence for that claim.

ii) In any event, this exercise in armchair etymology is a dead-end since the word is a Semitic place-name, not a Greek compound.⁴⁶⁷

iii) The literature I've just footnoted also supplies the textual and archeological evidence.

Moving on:

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 236.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 238.

⁴⁶⁷ ISBE 1:290; J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Doubleday 1983), 2:1526.

The story of the discovery of the empty tomb by the women integrates well with Mark's redactional themes.⁴⁶⁸

Marcan redaction? But Kirby's thesis hinges on Marcan priority. In that case, we have no extant documentary evidence of a pre-Marcan tradition that Mark redacted. So what supplies the basis of comparison?

Kirby, parroting Lüdemann, suggested that the young man at the tomb is a literary device to flag the author as the originator of the empty tomb account.

But aside from the utterly fanciful symbolism, we've already argued that the "young man" is an angelic figure.

Kirby then spends some time on the silence of the women (Mk 16:8). This is a familiar old crux. By way of reply:

i) Once again, Kirby is blind to the consequences of his own position. If, as he would have it, Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark, while Matthew and Luke, unlike Mark, include the Easter appearances of Christ, then that is one reason to believe that the original ending of Mark was lost.

ii) His sidekick, Richard Carrier, agrees.⁴⁶⁹

iii) A number of scholars have marshaled arguments for a lost ending.⁴⁷⁰

iv) What is paradoxical about 16:8 is the narrative viewpoint, which assumes an insider's knowledge of what the women, in fact, saw. So the cliffhanger ending presupposes that, at some future point, the women did, indeed, speak up. That's implicit in the narrative viewpoint—from the very fact that Mark is in a position to relay their encounter. So, barring other explanations, there are a number of good reasons to posit a missing original.

That Kirby doesn't even broach this possibility betrays his elementary ignorance of the exegetical literature.

⁴⁶⁸ ET, 238.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 223, n.298.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 1009-1012; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 617-24.

There is, however, another inviting explanation, which regards 16:8 as an extension of the Messianic secret. As Richard Bauckham, following on the heels of Catchpole, Dwyer, and Magness, puts it:

It is not plausible to read the end of Mark's story of the empty tomb as an ironic device that deconstructs the story's own truth claims.

There is no need to suppose that the women's silence is absolute or that it contradicts the young man's command to them to go and tell Peter and the others. Mark's Gospel itself provides a good analogy; in 1:44 Jesus tells the healed leper to "say nothing to anyone (medeni meden eipes); but go, show yourself to the priest" (cf. 16:8 *ouden den ouden eipan*). The general prohibition is not contradicted by the specific command. What the women did not do was to make the news generally known. They did not stop everyone they met in the street to tell them. They did not tell anyone else; but they did deliver the message as instructed to the male disciples.⁴⁷¹

The fact, once again, that Kirby is evidently ignorant of this explanation as well betrays his shoddy scholarship.

In my opinion, the Messianic secret is a better explanation than a lost original by sticking with what we know.⁴⁷²

Kirby then has a section on "improbabilities in Mark." Before we plunge into the nitty-gritty details, a general observation is in order:

Certainly the early Christians in Palestine who first told the story of Jesus' burial knew it, for when it came to matters of death and burial, they appear to have been quite ordinary and typical Jews. Their narratives clearly display a thorough familiarity with most of the Jewish burial practices of 1C Palestine. They knew, for example, that bodies were customarily buried promptly on the day of death, after being washed with ointment and wrapped in linen. They knew that the dead were customarily buried in underground tombs, and that they were mourned by their nearest relatives. And by the subtle ways in which they dignified the burial of Jesus without crossing the boundaries of Jewish custom, the texts show that the earliest Christians also knew that condemned criminals were not buried with their families and were not mourned.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ *Gospel Women*, 289.

⁴⁷² The standard monograph arguing against the short ending is N. Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Abdingdon 2003). A recent article arguing for the short ending is N. Denyer, "Mark 16:18 and Plato, Protagoras 328d," *TynB* 57.1 (May 2006).

⁴⁷³ B. McCane, "'Where no one had yet been laid': The Shame of Jesus' Burial," B. Chilton & C. Evans, eds., *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Brill 2002), 450

Notice, incidentally, how this makes a whole lot more sense if the Gospels were written by Jews before the sack of Jerusalem rather than by Gentiles after the sack of Jerusalem.

Moving along, Kirby seems to suggest that the women were free to anoint the body on the Sabbath due to their ignorance of “the intricacies of rabbinic law.”⁴⁷⁴

I’m not quite sure what this is supposed to mean. They didn’t need to study rabbinic law to know it, for they were living under it every day of their lives. Given the penalties for Sabbath-breaking (potentially a capital offense), they were certainly familiar with the blue laws, simply as a matter of cultural osmosis, by growing up in that culture and observing what was allowed and disallowed.

Kirby raises the question of whether Joseph could purchase a shroud on a holiday. Of course, this turns, in part, on the time-frame and fine points of chronology—difficult to reconstruct at this distance, given the paucity of the surviving evidence.⁴⁷⁵ It was not the Sabbath, but the day of preparation (15:42). Friday was a workday. The Sabbath did not commence until sundown—which accounts for the rush-job (Lk 23:54-56).

But even the blue laws made exception for the purchase of bare necessities.⁴⁷⁶

Kirby finds more troublesome the fact that they hurried over to the tomb without bringing anyone along who could move the stone away.

Yes, a pretty obvious oversight, is it not? Obvious to everyone—including the original audience. So why would Mark invent a dumb mistake like that? He includes this embarrassing detail, not because he fabricated it, but because that’s how things happened.

It’s a fact of life that real people screw up in these little ways all the time. That’s the stuff of comedy.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (IVP 2001), 254, 258; R. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Eerdmans 2002), 559-564.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (SCM 1990), 77-78.

The women make elaborate preparations to anoint the body, but forget all about this practical impediment. And their forgetfulness is quite understandable.

They've had to wait for the Sabbath to come and go, and the first light of dawn, before they could anoint the body. So they have all this pent-up energy. And in their eagerness to get over to the tomb as soon as possible, the simple logistics of the situation slip their mind entirely. Far from being a mark of inauthenticity, their hasty mistake strikes me as an artless sign of authenticity.

It's also quite possible that they were hoping to importune the guards into letting them enter the tomb, but by then the sentinals had fled the scene—scared away by the earthquake and angel:

The purpose of the guard was surely not to “prevent entry” but to prevent the corpse from being removed. (Many other women in history have believed that they could persuade guards of various kinds to allow them to do various things, legal or not quite legal.)⁴⁷⁷

Kirby then quotes Carrier on a telltale anachronism in the Gospels regarding the shape of the stone used to block the entrance into the tomb. If you go to Carrier's article, you see that he's dependent on another writer for his information:

The tomb blocking stone is treated as round in the Gospels, but that would not have been the case in the time of Jesus, yet it was often the case after 70 C.E., just when the gospels were being written. Amos Kloner, in “Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?” (Biblical Archaeology Review 25:5, Sep/Oct 1999, pp. 23-29, 76), discusses the archaeological evidence of Jewish tomb burial practices in antiquity. He observes that “more than 98 percent of the Jewish tombs from this period, called the Second Temple period (c. first century B.C.E. to 70 C.E.), were closed with square blocking stones” (p. 23), and only four round stones are known prior to the Jewish War, all of them blocking entrances to elaborate tomb complexes of the extremely rich (such as the tomb complex of Herod the Great and his ancestors and descendants). However, “the Second Temple period...ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. In later periods the situation changed, and round blocking stones became much more common” (p. 25).⁴⁷⁸

In reply:

⁴⁷⁷ R. Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford 2003), 179.

⁴⁷⁸ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/indef/4e.html

i) Since Joseph is described as a rich man (Mt 27:57), Kloner's data confirms the Gospel accounts.

ii) Kloner doesn't say how much later the situation changed and how long the transitional period took. So Carrier has overplayed his hand.

iii) The issue is not the meaning of the verb. Carrier is inferring the shape of the object from the verb. But that's a very crude inference. For example, the "rolling" stones in Josh 10:18 (LXX) and Jgs 7:13 (LXX) were rocks too large to carry, so the only way to move them was shoving them end-over-end. In context, these are natural boulders, not artificially rounded rocks.

Moving on:

The embalming of a body was apparently not in accordance with contemporary custom, since there is not a single example available.⁴⁷⁹

An utter straw man argument since the Gospels never say that Jesus was "embalmed"—an Egyptian practice (e.g. Gen 50:26).

Moving on:

If what the women were supposed to be doing was not embalming, what was it? There was no such thing as a second anointing.⁴⁸⁰

Answer: due to the hasty burial, the women hadn't had a chance to perfume the body. Remember that the women were in no position to actually witness the burial preparations. From a discreet distance they would watch Joseph, Nicodemus and their retinue come and go (Mk 15:47), but they were not party to or privy to the details of the burial preparations. They were outside, not inside (cf. Mt 27:61).

This is a persistent problem with unbelievers like Kirby. Because they don't believe the Bible, they don't enter into the narrative viewpoint and try to visualize what is happening.

What the women were doing is strictly unnecessary, but giving the dead (especially a Jewish prophet) an honorable burial has never been about strict necessity. It's a way of paying our respects, as best we can, to our departed loved-ones.

⁴⁷⁹ ET, 243.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 243.

Moving on:

In Mark, Joseph requests the body of Jesus specifically and disregards the other two crucified. The pious Jew presumably would have wanted to take care of all three; alternatively, if it is supposed that the thieves would have been buried by the Romans anyway, then there is no reason for the pious Jew to get involved at all.

The only motivation...would be a strong belief that the crucified deserved an honorable burial. However, this would require that Joseph considered the charge against Jesus to be unjust in the sight of God. Not only is it difficult to understand why a simple, pious Sanhedrinist would be moved to conclude that such a one had been crucified unjustly, but it is hardly plausible that Pilate would have allowed Jesus to be given a honorable burial, as this would be tantamount to an admission that Jesus was crucified without just cause.⁴⁸¹

The problem, here, is that the gospels give us a perfectly consistent rationale for who did what, but Kirby doesn't believe the given rationale. So his difficulties are generated by his unbelief, and not by the record itself.

The thieves died a dishonorable death, so why shouldn't they suffer an ignominious burial? Leave that to their families, or the Roman authorities, or the natural scavengers.

Moreover, as Lowder says in the very next chapter, we don't know when the two thieves died. Once again, you have two contributors at odds with one another.

But because we are expressly told that Joseph was a secret disciple who disapproved of the actions of his colleagues—and because that is implicit in his own actions, anyway, he would naturally take a personal and particular interest in seeing that Jesus received the best burial that he was able to provide under the trying circumstances.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴⁸² “I would add that, in Mark 12, Jesus has a profitable discussion with a wise scribe, whom he says was not far from the kingdom. Obviously, the text supports that there were those in authority in the Temple that understood Jesus more than their counterparts and whom Jesus even commended. It can't be that much of a stretch to consider that Mark is setting the stage for Joseph of Arimathea. Kirby could dismiss the discourse of Mark 12, but Mark 12 is one of the key dialogues that condemn the religious leaders, through prophetic interview. Jesus comes to examine them; they fail his examination; only one of them is commended. Later the majority condemn

In addition, there may well be another reason that Joseph chose to discriminate. As one scholar points out:

Jewish burial customs, in fact, can explain a detail in the Gospels which has puzzled some interpreters: why does Joseph of Arimathea bury only the body of Jesus? Why doesn't he also bury the others crucified with Jesus? Jewish traditions of dishonorable burial can make sense of this turn of events in the story, because the burial in shame was relevant only to those criminals who had been condemned by the action of some Jewish (or Israelite) authority. Dishonorable burial was reserved for those who had been condemned by the people of Israel. Semahot 2.9, in fact, specifically exempts those who die at the hands of other authorities. Mark's narrative conforms to this tradition. Since at least a few of the Jewish leaders had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus, they had an obligation to bury him in shame. But they were not necessarily responsible for Pilate's other victims.⁴⁸³

Pilate tried to accommodate the Jews whenever he could to avoid a diplomatic "incident" which would sour his reputation with the emperor. And Pilate had already shifted the blame to the Jewish authorities. He was always walking a tightrope, and remanding the body to the custody of a Sanhedrinist would just be one more petty favor to keep the Jews in check.

What is so mysterious about the idea that a Jew of his standing would become a follower of Jesus? After all, there were Jewish followers of Jesus, were there not? Messianism was in the air, and he was, to say the least, as good a candidate as any.

Even if Joseph thought him to be merely a prophet of God, in the tradition of Jeremiah and other persecuted prophets of God, that would justify a decent burial.

Indeed, Kirby contradicts himself a few pages later by saying that:

A request from some Jews for the bodies of the crucified to be taken down before the Sabbath may be historical, as this is plausible and even to be expected.⁴⁸⁴

Jesus after an unjust trial, and, again, one of them comes forward to request the body, in order to give the prophet an honorable burial" (Gene Bridges, private correspondence).

⁴⁸³ B. McCane, *ibid.*, 445. I'll have more to say about the honorable or dishonorable character of Christ's burial in the next chapter.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 247.

McCane adds that “Roman prefects like Pilate, in fact, often allowed crucifixion victims to be buried,”⁴⁸⁵ and then proceeds to cite a number of examples.

Kirby also has an odd habit of compartmentalizing our information, as though we should read each piece of information in isolation or opposition to every other piece, and then acting quizzical about how it could all fit together when he was the one who chose to read the text in this blinkered and atomistic fashion.

Next, Kirby raises the question of why the women didn’t cooperate with Joseph in the burial rites.

But a question like this assumes a kind of democratic informality which strikes me as highly anachronistic. This was a hierarchical culture, ranked by sex, race, religion, and socioeconomic strata (e.g. Jn 4:9,27).

Joseph and Nicodemus are both rabbis, both rulers, both men of means, with servants at their beck-and-call. Why would they either need or want the help of these female commoners? And would the women even dare approach them? This was a man’s world. A world with invisible, unspoken barriers between one social class and another.

The gospel accounts are exactly as I’d expect. The women keep a respectful and deferential distance. They wait and see, watching from afar and biding their time.

In his section on the “Burial Traditions,” Kirby goes over the rainbow into the land of Oz:

The Secret Book of James is thought to have been written in the first half of the 2C. This is mainly because the sayings of Jesus are thought to be dependent on oral tradition and not the canonical gospels, which is not likely after the mid-2C. It is known from a copy in Coptic found at Nag Hammadi.⁴⁸⁶

Translation, we have a 4C copy of a Gnostic gospel written in Coptic. We trace this to an original, written some 200 years earlier—which would still put it over 100 years after the events, based on the postulate of oral tradition, the existence of which can’t be documented since it’s oral tradition.

This washed-up clown act is what passes for liberal Bible “scholarship.”

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 435.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 246.

Incidentally, how many members of the Jesus Seminar actually read Coptic?

To this he adds such other worthies as the “Gospel of Peter”⁴⁸⁷ and the *Epistula Apostolorum*. He justifies this appeal to other “pre-Markan” traditions on the grounds that:

There is little cause for Christians to imagine that Jesus was buried shamefully when in fact he was properly interred in the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.⁴⁸⁸

Several problems here:

- i) One cannot assume that what would count as a dishonorable burial in Jewish custom would have the same cultural resonance in the case of Gnostic gospels.
- ii) Kirby is assuming that Gnostics and other heretics are Christians. But there was a lot of defiantly unscriptural nonsense emanating from these early “Christian” cults, viz., Ebionites, Cainites, Ophites, Marcionites, Peratae, Sethians, &c.
- iii) The whole point of having rival sacred scriptures is to present an unorthodox and anti-establishmentarian viewpoint.

Kirby suggests that Mk 12:8 preserves an alternative burial tradition. This confuses the parabolic genre with the historical genre, as well as assuming that an Evangelist would preserve rival traditions.

Likewise, he appeals to the wording of Acts 13:29 as evidence of yet another rival burial tradition.

- i) Again, this assumes that the author of Luke would contradict himself in Acts.
- ii) It also hangs a ridiculous amount of weight on the plural form. But as one scholar notes,

“They” in this case must be indefinite or generic, as a substitute for the passive, “he was taken down.”⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ For a critique, cf. R. Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *NTS* 33 (1987), 321-343.

⁴⁸⁸ ET, 248.

iii) Moreover, Jews were party to both the crucifixion and burial—just not the same Jews.

iv) Furthermore, a speech is not going to go into the same detail as a historical narrative.

The next section assumes that if one Gospel doesn't repeat everything said in another Gospel, that adds up to a contradiction or a rival account or renders it unhistorical. No argument is given for this assumption. The whole point of having more than one gospel is to say something different, to supplement the preexisting record.

One matter of note: Kirby takes the “young man” at the tomb to be an angelophany. I agree, but this is one of many instances in which one contributor contradicts another. For Carrier denied the angelic identity of the young man.

Not, of course, that Kirby believes in angels:

First, such an appearance would seem to nullify any utility in the message of the angel—if Jesus was to repeat the message, why bother with the angel? Second, it would seem strange that the first appearance would be to the women rather than to the official witnesses. Third, of what value would the appearance to the women be, whose report would have been suspect?⁴⁹⁰

As to the first objection, that's what angels do—they're messengers from God. And this heavenly herald would function as a divine witness to the Resurrection.

As to the second and third objections, notice the incurved quality of skepticism. Why, indeed, would an Evangelist make up such a story about the women? And if that's incongruous, then isn't the logical answer to deny the skeptical premise? But it never occurs to Kirby to question his unbelief, even when his unbelief carries a consequence which he himself finds illogical. A dubious premise will yield a dubious conclusion. Like a man who has shut himself inside a room full of trick mirrors, he can no longer find the doorknob.

⁴⁸⁹ J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Doubleday 1998), 515.

⁴⁹⁰ ET, 259, n.52.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, Jeff Lowder offers a critique of William Lane Craig's case for the Resurrection. Lowder's alternative theory is the relocation hypothesis.

This is really a variant of the wrong tomb theory. The tomb the women and/or disciples visited on Easter Sunday was, in effect, the wrong tomb, because the body of Jesus had been transferred, unbeknownst to them. He was rotting in another graveyard.

As so often with the ET, it's not so much a case of whose argument to believe, but whose argument to disbelieve. When the contributors fundamentally contradict each other, what's a poor unbeliever to do?

Several points are worth noting at the outset:

i) This is not an attack on evidence for the Resurrection, per se, but an attack on one particular apologetic strategy.

ii) By arguing for the empty tomb, Lowder is arguing against a number of his fellow contributors. When critics of the Resurrection are critics of one another, you have all the makings of a circular firing squad.

iii) Reburial would be pointless. Lowder believes that Joseph of Arimathea did indeed give Jesus an honorable burial in his own tomb. But, if so, what would be the possible point of going to all that effort and expense only to disinter him two days later? Such an action would dishonor the dead—an act of desecration.

What other tomb would Joseph move him to? If it was another tomb which Joseph owned, why would he move the body from one tomb he owned to another tomb he owned?

And how could he move him to a tomb he didn't own? Unless it was a mass, unmarked grave. But that would be a dishonorable burial. Why give Jesus an honorable burial to begin with, followed by a dishonorable burial?

iv) Borrowing a leaf from Michael Martin, Lowder structures his own case around the distinction between prior and final probabilities.

But Bayesian probability theory is only relevant if we have no knowledge of the concrete particulars, and must make a blind flying leap on the basis of abstract percentiles and general distribution patterns.

Suppose I don't know someone's blood type. But I know that whites have a low B-type frequency whereas Asians have a high B-type frequency. I also know that 70% of Americans are either O positive or A positive, while under 1% are AB negative.

By juggling prior probabilities of this sort I could arrive at a final probability.

Or I could simply run a blood test on the individual in question. Suppose he tests out as AB negative?

That outcome is highly unlikely, but it's not as though the test-results have to overcome a low prior probability. It's not as though we have to average out the test results with the prior probabilities to arrive at a final probability.

We might wish to repeat the test to eliminate the chance of a false positive, but if we enjoy direct knowledge of his blood type, then the prior probabilities, however low, are moot. So Bayesian theory is simply inapplicable to the case at hand.

Or, to take another example, what are the odds that someone weighs over 300 lbs? There's no simple answer to that question. Probable with respect to what? What's the sample?

If we took the world population as our frame of reference, then the odds are extremely low.

But suppose we took sumo wrestlers as our frame of reference. Then the odds would be quite high.

Or suppose we took Japanese men as our frame of reference? The odds would be lower than sumo wrestlers, but higher than the world population.

If I knew that the individual in question was a sumo wrestler, I wouldn't take the world popular as the benchmark of prior probabilities, and then quantify the odds of this individual weighing over 300 lbs by averaging the odds of a sumo wrestler weighing over 300 lbs against the odds of any man or woman alive tipping the scales at over 300 lbs.

Or, if I didn't know that he was a sumo wrestler, but I knew that he was a Japanese man, then—since sumo wrestlers are generally a subset of Japanese men—that would supply the frame of reference.

If I knew his age, that would make a difference. What are the odds of a nonagenarian sumo wrestler?

Of course, Japanese men are a subset of Japanese human beings (men, women, children), who are subset of non-Japanese human beings. But that's irrelevant.

What are the odds that Jesus was crucified with a few other victims, and received an honorable burial? There's more than one way to probabilify the event. Probable relative to what?

Lowder says probable relative to mass crucifixion and dishonorable burial. But if we're going to play the odds, there are many other ways of fixing prior probabilities.

The prior probability that a 1C Jewish Palestinian male was crucified with a few other victims and received an honorable burial is vastly higher than the prior probability that a 1C Roman Emperor was crucified, or a Roman citizen, or a Jewess.

So, depending on what other variables you plug into your calculus, you can raise or lower the odds at will. The outcome is controlled by your initial sampling and selection criteria.

iv) The Resurrection is not an extraordinary event that happened upon an ordinary individual, but an extraordinary event commensurate with an extraordinary individual. The “probability” of the Resurrection needs to take that factor into account.

As Warfield has said:

It is appropriate that this miraculous life should be set between the great marvels of the virgin-birth and the resurrection and ascension. These can appear strange only when the intervening life is looked upon as that of a merely human being...The entrance of the Lord of Glory into the world could not but be supernatural; His exit from the world, after the work which he had undertaken had been performed, could not fail to bear the stamp of triumph.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ *Works* (Baker 2003), 3:176.

And as F. F. Bruce once put it:

That a man should come to life again the third day after his death is certainly improbable; but, in the view of those who knew him, it was impossible that this man should not come to life again...That a man should rise from the dead after three days is, as we have said, certainly improbable; but we are not concerned here with a man, but with this man. There are many other things recorded of this man which in isolation are equally improbable—his virginal conception, his life and works—but in him all these improbabilities coincide. Does the coincidence of improbabilities amount to sheer impossibility, so that we conclude that picture is a cunningly wrought invention? Or is the picture that of God incarnate, in whom the “improbabilities” coincide like a threefold cord that is not quickly broken? That God incarnate should enter human life by a unique way (“conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary,” as the ancient creed says), is not improbable, but perfectly fitting. That God incarnate should live a life of perfect holiness, marked by works of miraculous power and teaching of preeminent wisdom, is not improbable, but just what we should expect. That God incarnate should die—there is something in the highest degree amazing. Die he did, nonetheless; but this could not be the end. When we have seen this act in the drama of our salvation, we wait breathlessly for the sequel, and greet it as something divinely natural; this is the one “whom God raised up, loosing the bonds of death, because it was not possible that death should hold him fast.”⁴⁹²

v) And even if Bayesian theory were applicable, Lowder still misapplies it. Consider the following:

Prior to considering the unique circumstances surrounding a given Roman crucifixion, there is a low prior probability that the crucifixion victim would be buried...Therefore, for victims of mass crucifixions, the prior probability of burial is not only low, but extremely low...Thus, the prior probability of burial for victims of small crucifixions is also low (although not nearly as low as that for victims of mass crucifixions)...Given the low prior probability of a buried crucifixion victim, those of us who lack a general presumption for historicity will reject the claim that Jesus was buried until a convincing argument can be made specifically for Jesus’ burial. But I believe that the specific evidence for Jesus’ burial is sufficient to overcome the intrinsic improbability of a crucifixion victim being buried.⁴⁹³

Notice the concentric reasoning: generally speaking, crucifixion victims were left unburied. That sets the baseline for prior probabilities.

⁴⁹² *The Spreading Flame* (Eerdmans 1995), 69.

⁴⁹³ ET, 264-265.

But the probability that victims of small crucifixions were left unburied is lower than for the probability of mass crucifixions. Finally, the specific evidence for Jesus' burial is sufficient to overcome the prior probabilities to the contrary.

So the pattern is to take the most general class as his benchmark for prior probabilities, then move to a subset, whose prior probability is averaged out in relation to the general class, then move to an individual case, which must overcome the cumulative mean average of the subset and the general class combined.

Now, this is totally artificial. We have evidence for mass crucifixions. We have evidence for small crucifixions. We have evidence for the crucifixion of Christ. But the evidence for one doesn't count for or against the evidence for another. What we have is separate evidence for separate events.

What is probable in any particular case is dependent on the evidence we have for the membership of the individual in a mass crucifixion, or else a small crucifixion, or else direct evidence without reference to any inference from a more general category.

Prior probability has reference to the probability of an event apart from some particular piece of information. But what Lowder is actually doing is to compare one particular type of crucifixion with another particular type of crucifixion. Same thing with honorable or dishonorable burial.

So he's using evidence of one specific type (mass crucifixion, dishonorable burial) of more general phenomenon (crucifixion, burial) as if that supplied the background information for another specific type (small crucifixions, dishonorable burial) of the same general phenomenon. This commits a level-confusion. While one might probabilify a special case from a general class, one cannot probabilify a special case from another special case of the same general class.

Going back to the illustration of blood types, there is a relative overall probability of being one blood type rather than another, and if you knew nothing else about the individual, that would establish the benchmark, but the distribution pattern varies by race; indeed, some blood types are specific to a specific race. If you knew the race of the individual, then that would change the prior probabilities, and render moot the aggregate figure of all races combined. If you could select for race, you would no longer retain the aggregate figure which the racial stats had to overcome. And if you could run a blood test, the whole statistical framework would be moot.

vi) Moreover, the evidence for mass crucifixion is simply irrelevant to the case of Christ. As one scholar explains:

These mass crucifixions, it turns out, all come from times of acute crisis, when Roman military officers were being called in to stabilize situations which had gotten out of control...Throughout most of the 1C, by contrast, and especially at the time of Jesus' death, Judea was not in open revolt against Rome and was not under the control of Roman generals commanding legions of soldiers...At the time of Jesus, in fact, the situation was peaceful enough that events in and around Jerusalem were not always under the direct control of the Roman prefect...A small Roman force was stationed in the city in the fortress of Antonia, but the routine day-to-day government of Jerusalem was largely in Jewish hands, specifically the High Priest and the council.⁴⁹⁴

In addition, you have to separate out Jewish victims from Gentile victims since Jews had their own burial customs. It's mindless to first lump Jews and Gentiles together to generate a prior probability only to then separate them out to generate a final probability.

It is striking that even within his Bayesian scheme, Lowder, after reviewing Jewish sources, contradicts the position of some of his co-contributors like Kirby. He says, for example:

There is a high prior probability that an official representative of the Jewish council would have approached Pilate and requested Jesus' body...Jesus died right before a Jewish holy day. It is highly likely the Romans would have been respectful of Jewish law regarding burial of executed criminals before Passover, especially since this would "avoid unrest among the large numbers of visitors for the festival."⁴⁹⁵

At other times he makes bald-faced assertions bereft of any supporting evidence or argument:

Although the other gospels assert the tomb in which Jesus was buried belonged to Joseph of Arimathea and had never been used—claims which have an extremely low prior probability.⁴⁹⁶

He seems to treat this as self-evidently true, for reasons known only to himself. I don't regard either claim as improbable.

⁴⁹⁴ B. McCane, *ibid.*, 434-435.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

vii) Furthermore, any alternative theory positing that the body was spirited out of the tomb without anyone taking notice is up against the degree of public scrutiny attaching to the life and death of Christ:

Crucifixions were public events. Intended as deterrents, they were set up to call attention to themselves. Surely it was not otherwise with Jesus: he was publicly displayed as crucified in order “to deter resistance or revolt.” When one adds that Jesus was surely some sort of religious sensation whose fate would have been of interest not just to sympathizers, that his torture would even have been of entertainment value to some, it is hard to imagine that there was no cloud of witnesses. That the Gospels say there were passersby is no reason to think that there was not. It is instead quiet likely that people, friendly, hostile, and indifferent, witness Jesus’ end and its immediate aftermath, and that his crucifixion and burial became immediately the stuff of street gossip, so that anyone who wanted to learn what happened could just have asked around. Crossan says that those who knew did not care and that those who cared did not know. My guess is that most everyone knew whether they cared or not.⁴⁹⁷

viii) Finally yet another weakness with Lowder’s underlying thesis is the degree to which he’s indebted to G. A. Wells—a frailty he shares in common with Parsons.⁴⁹⁸ But Wells’ work has come under fire from various quarters.

Habermas, for one, has marshaled a summary critique of Wells.⁴⁹⁹

Wells’ ideas are wide open to criticism at a variety of junctures. Rather than attempt the more systematic approach I have employed in earlier writings, I will list problems that indicate significant flaws. At several places which he admits are integral, Wells resorts to almost any explanation, no matter how incredible, in order to disallow apparent textual meanings. If these texts are taken at face value, he realizes his thesis is in deep trouble. So Wells must disallow all time references to Jesus being a contemporary of New Testament persons.

(1) Wells’ late-dating the earliest gospel (Mark) to 90-100 AD and the others to well into the second century certainly helps his thesis by divorcing Jesus from the early sources. For example, it allows him to remove Pilate’s connection with Jesus until at least 90 AD (DJE, 47, 65; HEJ, 10-11). But these dates are opposed by virtually every other scholar writing on this subject, whether liberal or conservative. Even critical scholars usually date these four books from 65-

⁴⁹⁷ D. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 362.

⁴⁹⁸ 298-299, n.3; 450, nn.16, 19.

⁴⁹⁹ http://garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_summarycritique/crj_summarycritique.htm

100 AD. So Wells dates Mark about two or three decades earlier than almost everyone else, including those same scholars he cites so positively.

Though we definitely cannot respond in detail here, just a brief line of reasoning will be mentioned. Most of the Book of Acts is devoted to the careers of Peter and Paul, with many chapters centering in Jerusalem. The deaths of Stephen (7:54-60) and the apostle James (12:1-2) are recorded, and the book ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome (28:14-31). Yet nothing is mentioned about the deaths of Paul and Peter (mid-60s AD), or James, the Lord's brother (about 62 AD). Further, the Jewish War with the Romans beginning in 66 and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 are also absent. These five events are not arbitrary; each is absolutely central to the book's key persons and geography, making them absolutely integral to the theme.

So how could the author of Acts not mention these last five events, which dwarf many of the other items in the book? By far the best solution is that none of these things had yet occurred. These absences argue very strongly for an early date, before the mid-60s.

Since Luke was written prior to Acts,⁵⁰⁰ but after Mark and Matthew, we may then date all five books before 65 AD. Even if we are too early by ten or so years, this is still a serious challenge to Wells. If the majority of contemporary scholars is right, then Wells would still be crucially wrong by about 25 years on each book. This would indicate that facts regarding the historical Jesus circulated at a much earlier date than he asserts. The more Wells is mistaken on these dates, the closer our historical information gets to Jesus.

(2) Wells realizes that if Paul's reference to "James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19) means that he met with Jesus' sibling, then this alone is very troubling to his thesis (HEJ, 167-174; DJE, 21). But here we perceive Wells' special pleading at its very best. Rather than admit Paul's straightforward meaning, he suggests that there was a zealous group in the early church who were not relatives but were called "the brethren of the Lord"!

Very surprisingly, Wells even admits the severity of his plight: If Paul means blood brother of a historical Jesus, then it would suffice to establish--against my view--that Jesus had really lived in the first half of the first century. Furthermore, I must admit that this interpretation of Paul's words does seem the immediate and obvious one. Here, then, is a case where what seems to be the plain sense of a text...would weigh very heavily indeed against my view of Christian origins. (HEJ, 167)

But there are several reasons that Paul was referring to Jesus' brother. As Wells states, this is the normal way to understand this passage. Second, in I Corin-

⁵⁰⁰ Compare Luke 1:1-3 with Acts 1:1.

thians 9:5, the Lord's brothers refer to individuals who are authoritative enough to be compared to Peter and the apostles, not to some obscure group of believers. Third, all four gospels refer to Jesus' physical brothers.⁵⁰¹ James is even specified as one of them (Mk. 6:3; Matt. 13:55-56). Whatever date is assigned to these books, they plainly understood the tradition in a way that disagrees with Wells. Fourth, we will discuss below Jewish historian Josephus, who also calls James the brother of Jesus.⁵⁰² But Josephus would hardly be referring to a sectarian group of believers known within the church! Fifth, there is no historical evidence to support Wells' specific contention concerning James.

So this leaves Wells to face his own critique stated above. That he is clearly wrong about James weighs heavily against his entire thesis concerning the historical Jesus, just like he admits.

(3) Paul appears to refer to those who were physically present with Jesus, calling them the twelve (I Corinthians 15:4) and the apostles (15:7). As with James, Wells fully realizes that if this is so, then his thesis suffers at another key point: "If these words were really written by Paul, then it looks as though he was aware that Jesus chose twelve disciples; and if Paul in this respect corroborates what the gospels say, then it would be reasonable to infer that he also knows the principle facts of Jesus' life..." (DJE, 124). But Wells contends that "apostle" does not mean a physical companion of Jesus (HEJ, 227, note 14). Further, "the twelve" was interpolated into Paul's epistle (DJE, 124), even without textual evidence for this conclusion! Again, Wells recognizes a crucial passage, and once again, the sense of special pleading is apparent. He is willing to say virtually anything to avoid a clear text opposing his view, even if he has to ignore the contrary evidence and hold that it was added, relying on little more than his own assertion.

(4) Wells' treatment of the many nonbiblical references to Jesus is also quite problematic. He downplays those presenting difficulties for his position (Thallus, Tacitus), and suggests late dates for others, again in contrast to the wide majority of scholars (Thallus [perhaps second century AD!], Polycarp [135 AD!], Papias [140 AD]). Yet, he provides few reasons why these dates should be preferred (DJE, 10-15, 78, 139; HEJ, 15-18).

The most important problem for Wells' treatment is Josephus' testimony. In order to dismiss this important Jewish documentation, Wells resorts to questioning both of Josephus' references to Jesus. Not only does he disallow them as interpolated comments, but he asserts that this is also "widely admitted" by scholars (HEJ, 18; DJE, 10-11). But he is so wide of the mark here that one is tempted to question his research altogether.

⁵⁰¹ Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; John 7:5.

⁵⁰² *Antiquities* 20:9.

While virtually everyone thinks that portions of Josephus' longer statement in Antiquities 18:3 has been added, the majority also think that a fair amount still came from Josephus. Princeton Seminary's James Charlesworth strongly concludes: "We can now be as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus."⁵⁰³ John Drane adds that "most scholars have no doubts about the authenticity" of the passage's nucleus.⁵⁰⁴ Written about 93-94 AD, Josephus' statement, among other claims, clearly links Jesus to his disciples and connects his crucifixion to Pilate. It is independent of the gospels, according to Wells' dating.

Josephus' second statement refers to James as the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ (Antiquities 20:9). This also hurts Well's thesis significantly, because it likewise links Jesus to a first century person who was known to Paul and other apostles.⁵⁰⁵ In spite of Wells' dismissal (without citing a single scholar who agrees--HEJ, 18), Yamauchi concludes, "Few scholars have questioned the genuineness of this passage."⁵⁰⁶

Thus it is no wonder that Wells would dearly like to squelch Josephus' two references to Jesus. Both clearly place Jesus in a specific first century context connected with the apostles and Pilate, cannot be derived from the gospels on Wells' dating, and come from a non-Christian. Wells even notes that such independent data would be of "great value" (DJE, 14). So it is exceptionally instructive, not just that Wells dismisses both, but that he clearly wishes his readers to think that contemporary scholarship is firmly on his side when it very clearly is nowhere close. Charlesworth specifically refers to Wells' treatment of Josephus, saying that, "Many solid arguments can be presented against such distortions and polemics."⁵⁰⁷

Other problems abound with Wells' thesis that attempts to disconnect Jesus from a first century AD context. For example, he tries to dismiss Paul's dating the resurrection appearances to the third day after Jesus' death in I Corinthians 15:4 (DJE, 31). While Wells readily admits that many like Peter and Paul claimed to be witnesses of resurrection appearances, this fails to connect Jesus to the first century (DJE, 32; HEJ, 43-44)! While earlier he compares Christianity to ancient mythology (DJE, 182-193), he later criticizes such efforts (HEJ, 218-219). Further, he regularly stumbles when attempting to summarize recent scholarship. But Wells recognizes his lack of specialization, as a self-proclaimed "amateur" (DJE, 2), having taught German.

⁵⁰³ *Jesus Within Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 96.

⁵⁰⁴ *Introducing the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 138.

⁵⁰⁵ Galatians 1:19; I Corinthians 9:5; Acts 15:1-20.

⁵⁰⁶ "Josephus and the Scriptures," *Fides et Historia*, Vol. 13 (1980), 53.

⁵⁰⁷ Charlesworth, 98. For further details, see 90-98; Yamauchi, 42-63; Drane, 138; and Habermas, 43-44, 192-196.

The entire subject of the resurrection is also troublesome for Wells. Responding to my debate with atheist Antony Flew,⁵⁰⁸ noting that Flew did not do well, Wells wrote a response that repeats his tired thesis.⁵⁰⁹ Still he struggles, trying to explain the resurrection by the same discredited methods discussed here. Although he notes the repetition during the debate (4), this did not keep him from repeatedly misunderstanding my arguments (especially 23-36).

Continuing with Lowder,

If Jn 20:2 has a historical basis, Mary apparently thought Jesus had been moved.⁵¹⁰

i) This is a vague way of putting things. Lowder is attempting to create some narrative elbowroom for his relocation theory. But Mary could just as well have had grave-robbery in mind.

ii) Beyond whatever Mary was thinking, in a distraught state of mind, is the narrative viewpoint. An author ought to be understood as he was meant to be understood. Since, for John, the empty tomb is a prelude to the post-Resurrection appearance of Christ to Mary and the disciples, it does extreme violence to the text to cite Jn 20:2 in support of the relocation theory. If one refuses to accept the account at face-value, then it's more honest to simply deny the account rather than reinterpret it in defiance of original intent.

Moving on:

The hypothesis that Joseph gave Jesus an honorable burial in his tomb (“honorable burial hypothesis”). Nevertheless, the latter hypothesis has an extremely low prior probability, which can be seen from the following dilemma.⁵¹¹

i) Before we get to the “dilemma,” we need to comment on the framework. Lowder is very free with the word “hypothesis.” However we classify the burial of Christ, there is nothing hypothetical about the record of his burial.

A hypothesis would be a hypothetical reconstruction of events, either in the absence of direct evidence, or in defiance of direct evidence, like the theory of a stolen body, or Lowder's relocation hypothesis.

⁵⁰⁸ *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, ed. Terry Miethe (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁵⁰⁹ *A Resurrection Debate* (London: Rationalist Press, 1988), 3-4, 44-46.

⁵¹⁰ ET, 267.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

To classify the honorable burial as a hypothesis implies epistemic parity with the other theories. But the other theories have no basis in the actual record of events. There is no rival version of the facts.

The other theories are not factual, but artifactual. The critic doesn't believe in miracles, but he also doesn't find it credible to dismiss the Gospels in toto, so he tries to finesse a mediating position by offering a naturalistic explanation for the "evolution" of the Easter accounts. The result is a messy conceptual hybrid, grafting bits and pieces of the gospels onto his philosophical preconception.

ii) And this brings us to a larger point. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we do classify the Resurrection as just one more theory of the evidence. This is, in fact, the only "theory" of the evidence that accounts for all the evidence because it is the only "theory" of the evidence which makes use of all the evidence.

Every other theory of the empty tomb or Easter appearances makes selective use of the evidence. It credits certain details of the Gospel accounts, but suppresses the other details. It tries to pit one Gospel against another.

In addition, each contributor to the ET isolates a different slice of the evidence. At most, each alternative theory can only account for part of the evidence, and each alternative theory stands in contradiction to every other alternative theory.

So, by their very own methods, the contributors to the ET tacitly admit that it is only the Resurrection which does, in fact, account for every piece of textual evidence. There is no comprehensive alternative which explains all of the documentary evidence. That, of itself, makes the Resurrection the best explanation, and, really, the only explanation. A partial explanation is not an explanation.

Every other theory of the Easter-event is an ad hoc hypothesis. It has no positive evidence. It goes against the only available evidence we have. The only inspiration for an alternative theory of Easter is not an independent tradition of Easter, but a secular worldview.

And while we're on the subject of prior probabilities, what is the prior probability that a merely makeshift theory which has no evidentiary support, but is, in fact, opposed to the evidence, could be true? This is a stopgap masquerading as an explanation.

iii) Lowder's distinction between honorable and dishonorable burial is rather arbitrary. True, such a distinction existed in Jewish law and practice. But let us remember that the Bible itself is a primary source of information on Jewish burial customs.

iv) What is more, the exigencies of a real world situation often force the parties into a pragmatic compromise. On the one hand, Jesus was condemned by both the religious and the civil authorities. As such, he was only entitled to a dishonorable burial. On the other hand, Joseph explicitly, and Nicodemus implicitly, regarded his condemnation as a miscarriage of justice.

If it were up to the Jewish authorities, Jesus would only receive a dishonorable burial. If it were left up to Joseph and Nicodemus, Jesus would receive an honorable burial. Joseph and Nicodemus give Jesus the most respectful and respectable burial they can get away with, given the constraints they are under. Given that Christ was convicted of treason and blasphemy alike, their options are limited. Their associations with a condemned man already left them open to the charge of complicity. That's why the disciples fled the scene.

That's why it was "daring" of Joseph to even ask for the body (Mk 15:43). They could not afford to be provocative. Utmost discretion was called for.

On the one hand, Jesus is denied the rites of mourning and burial in the family crypt. This is a mark of dishonorable burial.

On the other hand, Joseph and Nicodemus try to offset the odium as much as possible: Joseph lays him in his own tomb while Nicodemus brings along enough spices for a state funeral.

This point of tension is quite essential to the atonement. On the one hand, Jesus must endure a shameful conviction and death (Gal 3:13; Phil 2:8). This was a shame culture, and his public humiliation was a necessary feature of the atonement. That's the scandal of the cross.

On the other hand, his death must also be seen as a travesty of justice. He was unjustly condemned. The compensatory efforts of Joseph and Nicodemus are one way, among others (e.g. Lk 23:47), of letting the reader know that.

Back to the alleged "dilemma":

Either Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus or he was not. If Joseph was not a follower of Jesus, then it is extremely unlikely that he would have buried a condemned criminal like Jesus in his own tomb. If, however, we assume that Joseph was a follower of Jesus, that would explain why Joseph might have buried Jesus in his (Joseph's) own tomb, but such an assumption itself has an extremely low prior probability.⁵¹²

The first option is not a live option. Since the gospel tradition does identify Joseph as a sympathizer, it would be nonsensical to defend the Resurrection by denying the inaccuracy of the accounts. And, as Lowder correctly notes, his actions would be otherwise inexplicable.

But then he says that such an assumption has an extremely low prior probability. Yet this assertion, and that's all it is—mere assertion—is hardly self-explanatory.

Perhaps what he means is that if only a handful of the Jewish establishment were believers in Jesus, it is improbable that anyone in particular was a follower.

Even if we play along with this logic, such as it is, it confuses the probability of the action with the probability of the actor. In a special ops unit of, say, 5 men, where one soldier is assigned to perform a particular task, there's only a 20% chance that any one soldier in particular will be assigned that task. Yet there's a 100% chance that one of them will be assigned that task, and which one is assigned is irrelevant to the mission.

Likewise, if, say, only two members of the Sanhedrin (Joseph, Nicodemus) were disciples of Christ, the chances are only 50/50 that Joseph will take the initiative rather than Nicodemus, but if one doesn't do it, the other will, so the precise identification is irrelevant. The issue is not the probable identity of the actor, but the probability of the action given the probability of the actor(s).

And, again, the whole business of prior probabilities is misplaced. In a nation of 300 million, there's only a 1-in-300 million chance that Jeff Lowder will be the founder of Internet Infidels, Inc. Compare this to the 2-in-71 chance that Nicodemus and Josephus will break with the Sanhedrin.

Given those odds, why should anyone believe in Lowder's resume? What evidence could possibly overcome such staggering odds?

⁵¹² Ibid., 268.

For that matter, what are the chances that someone by the name of J. Duncan M. Derrett should write a book entitled *The Anastasis*? Consider the odds against someone by that name. Consider the odds against a book by that name. Consider the multiplied improbability of each improbability combined.

But should it not be obvious that this is a completely misconceived way of quantifying historical evidence? Lowder is confounding the statistical or metaphysical probability of a historical event with the psychological probability of a historical witness to the event.

Moving on:

Once the Sabbath has passed, surely Joseph, as both a pious Jew and a member of the Sanhedrin, would have moved the body out of his own tomb and into a permanent location more suitable for a criminal.⁵¹³

Far from being a sure thing, this is quite illogical. If Joseph had suffered from such scruples, he would not have interred Jesus in his own tomb to begin with. He didn't regard Jesus as a criminal, but rather, as the innocent victim of an unjust judicial process (Lk 23:51). Moreover, Joseph was a follower of Jesus (Mt 27:57; Jn 19:38).

Of course, Lowder may not believe that, but that's all we have to go on, and it makes perfect sense of the action.

Lowder then discusses the "second" tomb. But, of course, we have no evidence of a second tomb. Indeed, the evidence we have rules out a second tomb.

Lowder has no evidence of a second tomb in the gospels. And he has no independent evidence of a second tomb outside the gospels. If he deems the gospels to be unreliable, then he has no good reason to infer a second tomb by picking and choosing and ripping isolated verses out of context, contrary to original intent.

Lowder then attempts to mount an argument from silence based on the absence of the empty tomb in Paul.

i) But we wouldn't expect Paul to comment on the empty tomb. He was not writing a gospel, so historical narrative and narrative theology don't figure in his epistles.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 271.

ii) Since he was not an eyewitness or an immediate disciple of Christ, he's not especially qualified to dwell on the historical details. He can leave that to others.

iii) As a matter of fact, others more qualified than he did write a record of the life of Christ. So he can rely on his readers to get their information from that source.

iv) Indeed, St. Luke, his traveling companion, wrote a gospel—based on his own, independent investigation of events, likely reading the Gospel of Mark and interviewing members of the Jerusalem church.

v) Paul appeals directly to the Resurrection itself.

Lowder says that 1 Cor 15:3-8 “is the earliest of all extant resurrection accounts.”⁵¹⁴ This makes certain assumptions about the dating of the gospels for which no argument has been presented.

Lowder speaks of “disagreement between the lists in Mark 15:47 and 16:1.”⁵¹⁵

i) But a difference is not a disagreement. For one thing, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are two different events, so the fact that you might have a different set of women at each event is hardly a disagreement.

ii) And even if the same women were present at each, it doesn't follow that Mark would mention that fact since Gospel writers regularly omit extraneous details. Lowder is acting like Lindsell.

iii) Remember, too, that the Gospel of Mark wasn't written at one sitting. So there may be some abrupt transitions as he resumes his writing from one pericope to another. That is not a disagreement. Rather, that is making allowance for the fact that ancient writers didn't use word processors. So we can't expect the kind of smooth, seamless narrative flow we take for granted from a modern historian who does a lot of rough drafting.

In this same general connection, Lowder says:

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 275.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 277.

If one accepts the authenticity of Lk 8:2, that verse suggests that Mary Magdalene may have been mentally ill. And if that were the case, then her testimony would not even be prima facie evidence of the historicity of the empty tomb...⁵¹⁶

Of course, what the verse actually says is that the Magdalene was a demoniac until Jesus performed an exorcism. Since Lowder doesn't believe in possession, he reinterprets the verse. But why appeal to the verse if you don't believe it? To secularize the verse is to foist upon it a philosophical framework extraneous to, and opposed to, the narrative viewpoint.

Lowder says the angel, as a "typical literary motif," represents "at least one major legendary embellishment" in the gospel of Mark.

This, however, is equivocal. Angelic messengers are a literary motif in the sense that Scripture is a literary record or document. Any writing is literary, including historical writing.

Again, it is "typical" because it happens with some frequency. But that is true of historical incidents as well.

It is common to argue that female eyewitness testimony is a sign of authenticity. Lowder denies this on the grounds that, under certain circumstances, women were allowed to give testimony.

True, perhaps, but rather obtuse. Why were women generally debarred from giving testimony? Because they were considered unreliable. Their testimony was only admitted as a last resort.

The issue, then, is whether, if the Gospel writers were making things up, they'd make up the story of women at the tomb. For even if women could sometimes give testimony, their testimony was regarded as second-best. So if you're going to fabricate the story of the empty tomb, why not embellish the witness list. Indeed, that's precisely what the apocryphal gospel of Peter does:

But Pilate gave over to them Petronius the centurion with soldiers to safeguard the sepulcher. And with these the elders and scribes came to the burial place. [32] And having rolled a large stone, all who were there, together with the centurion and the soldiers, placed it against the door of the burial place. [33] And

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 301, n.69.

they marked it with seven wax seals; and having pitched a tent there, they safeguarded it. [34] But early when the Sabbath was dawning, a crowd came from Jerusalem and the surrounding area in order that they might see the sealed tomb.

[35] But in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; [36] and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. [37] But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. [38] And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding).⁵¹⁷

In the same general connection, Lowder says there is no evidence equating the Beloved Disciple with the Apostle John.⁵¹⁸ This is, of course, an assertion, not an argument—an assertion which flies in the face of many arguments to the contrary.⁵¹⁹

Moving on:

Although one of the Lukan verses (12) explicitly refers to Peter, that verse is absent from some Western MSS. If v12 is set aside...then the remaining, authentic text of Luke would no longer contain an unambiguous reference to a visit by the disciples...the only authentic, clear-cut story of Peter's and John's visit to Jesus' burial place would be found in the latest canonical gospel, John.⁵²⁰

In reply:

i) The authenticity of Lk 24:12 is defended by the leading textual critics (Aland, Metzger).⁵²¹

ii) Since Luke records a number of Easter appearances of the Risen Lord, the reality of the Resurrection was never in doubt—not from a narrative viewpoint.

⁵¹⁷ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter-brown.html>

⁵¹⁸ ET, 303, n.100.

⁵¹⁹ For an up-to-date discussion with an extensive bibliography, cf. D. Carson & D. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Zondervan 2005), chapter 6.

⁵²⁰ ET, 286.

⁵²¹ "Most interpreters today regard it as authentic," J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans 1997), 840, n.17.

iii) Lowder is assuming, without benefit of argument, a liberal dating scheme. And even on a liberal dating scheme, why assume that John is the latest canonical gospel? Beyond Marcan priority, what's the evidence that one post-70 gospel is later than another? I know the arguments for the early dating sequence.⁵²² What are the arguments for the late dating sequence?

Seemingly out of the blue, Lowder chooses to attack Craig's epistemology. I agree that this is a weak link in Craig's case for the Resurrection.⁵²³ That is not, however, a lacuna in the evidence for the Resurrection, but merely a lacuna in one man's apologetic system.

Moving on:

Even if a non-Christian had been motivated to produce the body, for all we know, it could not have been identified by the time Christians began to publicly proclaim the resurrection.⁵²⁴

He goes on to cite Jewish sources and modern forensic pathology.

i) But Dale Allison disposes of this objection rather handily:

On the one hand, if Jesus was, as the Gospels have it, buried alone, then all that would have mattered was the place. One could have checked the cave for its one corpse no matter what the condition of that corpse. On the other hand, if Jesus was buried with others, m. Sanh. 6:5-6 is evidence that his body would still have been identifiable. The rabbinic text presupposes that, even if a criminal had been buried dishonorably, it was yet possible for relatives to claim the skeleton after some time had passed: "When the flesh had wasted away they gathered together the bones and buried them in their own place." If relatives could collect the bones of an executed criminal after the flesh had fallen off, then those bones were not in a humbled pile of corpses, but must have been deposited in such a way as to allow for later identification...Even if it were sometimes otherwise, in the case of Jesus probably "all that would have been necessary would have been for Joseph [of Arimathea] or his assistants to say, 'We put the body there, and a body is still there.'"⁵²⁵

⁵²² Consider Paul Barnett's argument for the pre-70 composition of the Fourth Gospel. Cf. *The Birth of Christianity*, 169-175.

⁵²³ Cf. J. Frame, "A Presuppositionalist's Response," *Five Views on Apologetics*, S. Cowan, ed. (Zondervan 2000), 74-81.

⁵²⁴ ET, 288.

⁵²⁵ *Resurrecting Jesus*, 318.

McCane makes a similar point:

Secondary burial [after the process of decomposition is complete] is discussed at length in the Mishnah and Talmudim, and the tractate Semahot is almost entirely devoted to the topic.⁵²⁶

Remember that Lowder believes in the honorable rather than dishonorable burial thesis, which makes Allison's case all the stronger.

One is also reminded, in this connection, of the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to the Promised Land.

ii) In addition, Lowder is not the only man who can interview a forensic pathologist:

In the arid climate of Jerusalem, a corpse's hair, stature, and distinctive wounds would have been identifiable, even after fifty days.⁵²⁷

This information was obtained from the Medical Examiner's Office for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The physician in charge said that even in Virginia, which has a climate warm and damp enough to promote quick decomposition, an unprepared corpse undergoing a normal rate of decomposition should still after fifty days have its hair and an identifying stature. The wounds would "definitely" be identifiable. Thus, a corpse in a much worse state than what would be expected for arid Jerusalem would still be identifiable after fifty days.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ "The shame of Jesus' burial," *ibid.*, 442.

⁵²⁷ G. Habermas & M. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel 2004), 70.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 287, n.32.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 is a study in comparative mythology. Referring to Mt 12:39-40, Fales says, “it appears to conflict strikingly with the chronology provided by Matthew’s own narrative.”⁵²⁹

This raises several questions:

- i) What is the intended timeframe of Mt 12:39-40? Is it literal or conventional/idiomatic?
- ii) What is the intended timeframe of the passion account? Is it literal (exactly 72 hours), conventional/idiomatic, or a round number (beginning on one day and ending on another)?
- iii) What is the intended relation between the two? Is the function of Mt 12:39-40 to supply a narrative chronology? Or is the emphasis on analogy and typology?

On (i)-(ii), let’s remember that ancient writers didn’t have digital quartz clocks which calibrated time down to the millisecond, so it’s quite anachronistic to impose our obsession with chronological precision on authors living at a time and place when that was both unattainable and unintended.⁵³⁰ The ancients generally regulated their lives by agricultural seasons and naked-eye astronomy—the sun, moon, and stars, seedtime and harvest. Chronometers were rare and rather crude.

Moreover, there is, in Scripture, a conventional numerology regarding certain time-intervals, viz., three days, seven days, forty days. This occurs with enough frequency to suggest that the figure is less than literal.

Furthermore, this convention can graduate to the notion of sacred time, which is a major theme of Scripture. In the Torah, for instance, the third-day motif symbolizes ritual purity (Exod 19:11; Num 19:12,19-20)—a theme quite germane to the Resurrection.

On (iii), the question is whether the timeframe supplies the point of comparison, or else the common experience of Jesus and Jonah, viz., a supernatural deliverance from death.

⁵²⁹ ET, 308.

⁵³⁰ Cf. D. Landes, *Revolution in Time* (Harvard 1983).

The time-marker comes from the literary allusion to Jonah 2:1, and not from the narrative proper. And the fact that the time-marker is not reproduced in Mk 8:11-12 and Lk 11:29-32 suggests that these are simply different ways of citing Scripture, or denoting the event described therein, rather than isolating or accentuating the duration of the event, per se.

Moving on, Fales says “there was no such thing in the 1C as ‘orthodox’ Judaism; there were Judaisms.”⁵³¹ But as I’ve already argued, this is an overstatement.

Moving on,

I think Hume was correct in arguing that no sensible person will accept a miracle report as veridical, except possibly on the basis of massive, verifiably independent testimony from verifiably competent witnesses.⁵³²

This is a key presuppositional judgment call. For if you deny miracles, then, of course, the Bible can’t be true, so you then offer a naturalistic explanation for the origin of its stories, on loan from the surrounding cultures.

His book review did not go unchallenged. To the contrary, it drew forth a response from David Beck, Francis Beckwith, Winfried Corduan, David Clark, W. L. Craig, Stephen Davis, Doug Geivett, Norm Geisler, Gary Habermas, J. P. Moreland, Ronald Nash, Bob Newman, and Richard Purtill.

Despite its central importance in the acquisition and transmission of human knowledge, the role of testimony is a neglected topic in the field of epistemology. The standard monograph is by C. A. J. Coady.⁵³³ And he devotes an entire chapter (four) to Hume. Among other things, he says the following:

My criticism begins by calling attention to a fatal ambiguity in the use of terms like “experience” and “observation” in the Humean statement of RT [the Reductionist Thesis]. We are told by Hume that we only trust in testimony because experience has shown it to be reliable, yet where experience means individual observation and the expectations it gives rise to, this seems to be plainly false and, on the other hand, where it means common experience (i.e. the reliance upon the observations of others) it is surely question-begging. To take the second part of the ambiguity first, we find Hume speaking of “*our* experience

⁵³¹ ET, 310.

⁵³² Ibid., 311.

⁵³³ *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford 1994).

of their constant and regular conjunction.” And it is clear enough that Hume often means by such phrases to refer to the common experience of humanity and not to the mere solitary observations of David Hume. Our reliance upon testimony as an institution, so to speak, is supposed to be based on the same kind of footing as our reliance upon laws of nature (Hume thinks of this as an important premise in his critique of miracles) and he speaks of the “firm and unalterable experience” which has established these laws. It is an important part of his argument that a miracle must be a violation of the laws of nature.⁵³⁴

We may ignore, for our purposes here, the validity of this highly debatable account of a law of nature and the blatant question-begging of his “never been observed in any age or country” and yet gather from this extract the need Hume has to mean by “experience,” “observation,” and the like, the common experience of mankind.⁵³⁵

Evidently then, RT as actually argued by Hume is involved in vicious circularity, since the experience upon which our reliance upon testimony as a form of evidence is supposed to rest is itself reliant upon testimony which cannot be reduced in the same way. The idea of taking seriously someone else’s observations, someone else’s experience, already requires us to take their testimony (i.e. reports of what they observe (equally seriously. It is ludicrous to talk of their observations being the major part of our justification in taking their reports seriously when we have to take their reports seriously in order to know what their observations are.⁵³⁶

Now I characterized this sort of position as “plainly false” because it seems absurd to suggest that, individually, we have done anything like the amount of fieldwork that RT requires. As mentioned earlier, many of us have never seen a baby born, nor have most of us examined the circulation of the blood nor the actual geography of the world nor any fair sample of the laws of the land, nor have we made the observations that lie behind our knowledge that the lights in the sky are heavenly bodies immensely distant nor a vast number of other observations that RT would seem to require.⁵³⁷

It seems to me that “kind of report” may have meant to refer either to the kind of speaker who gives the report or to the kind of content the report contains...So the RT would go something like: we rely upon testimony because we have each personally observed a correlation between expert (or authoritative) reports and the kinds of situations reported in a large number of cases.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 80-81.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 83.

But the major difficulty for this interpretation is that a man's being an expert or authority on some matter cannot be a matter of mere inspection in the way that his being white or tall is. That some man is an expert on, say, geography or South-East Asian politics, is either known on the testimony of others (by far the most usual case) or it has to be established by observing some high correlation between his reports and the relevant situations in the world. If the former, then we are no further advanced upon the RT programme of justification since the same problem of establishing expertise must arise again and again. If the latter, then the notion of an authority or an expert no longer provides us with any specification of a kind of report. That is to say, we cannot use the idea of a kind of report as equivalent to report of a kind of speak and then proceed to validate testimony along the lines of RT because the kind of correlation situation whose existence we would supposedly be investigating would have to be known by us to exist already before we could set up the terms of the investigation.⁵³⁹

I want to raise what seems to me to be a more fundamental problem. This difficulty consists in the fact that the whole enterprise of RT in its present form requires that we understand what testimony is independently of knowing that it is, in any degree, a reliable form of evidence about the world...Hume's position requires the possibility that we clearly isolate the reports that people make about the world for comparison by personal observation with the actual state of the world and find a high, low, or no correlation between them. But it is by no means clear that we can understand this suggestion.⁵⁴⁰

Continuing with Fales:

One consideration that guides me is a principle of interpretive charity...the greater the evidence we have that an author is deeply intelligent and has an audience which includes others of great intelligence whom he or she succeeds in convincing; that he or she has a serious purpose with much at stake; is sincere, and so on. On the face of it Matthew scores high on all these measures.⁵⁴¹

This goes to a very important point. It's an underdeveloped aspect of apologetics.

When we talk about historical evidence, for the most part this is not quantifiable. Rather, it's a question of psychological probability. Is the author intelligent? Is the author reasonable? Is the author consistent? Is the author evasive or persuasive? Does he argue his case? Does he respond to objections? Does he appeal to evidence?

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁴¹ ET, 312-313.

Not just Matthew, but many other Bible writers score high on all counts.

The authors of Scripture are not equally intellectual. And their veracity doesn't depend on their intellectual aptitude. Their veracity is secured by divine providence and inspiration.

There is, nevertheless, a relation between character and credibility. When we see less gifted writers like Peter and Mark saying the same things as the more gifted writers, it lends intellectual credibility to their own efforts. And their moral earnestness was never in question.

As I say, this is not something we can factor out into exact percentiles, but we don't need to. As fellow human beings, we have the inside track on human psychology. We can tell the difference between a charlatan like Muhammad or Joseph Smith and a credible witness.

St. Paul is a good example. In the words of one scholar:

- i) It cannot be maintained at all plausibly that the zealous persecutor of the disciples was in any way predisposed to accept the truth of the Resurrection. Having committed himself so publicly to the attempt to root out the new movement as something mischievous, he had a personal interest in not believing. For him to accept that Jesus had been raised from the dead was a volte-face involving a high degree of personal humiliation.
- ii) As one who had been working in conjunction with the Jewish authorities, he is likely to have been well-acquainted with their views on the ministry of Jesus and subsequent events. He must surely have known what answer or answers they were giving to the claim that he was risen.
- iii) His unquestionable intellectual power (about which no one who has been at all seriously engaged in the study of the Epistle to the Romans is likely to have any doubts) must be taken into account.
- iv) He was clearly a deeply religious man, fully aware how serious a thing it would be to bear false witness about God by proclaiming that God raised Jesus from the dead, if in fact he did not raise him (cf. 1 Cor 15:15). The testimony of this man, with his background, his qualities, his character, with his mind which has left us so much authentic evidence of its workings (in—at the very least—1-2 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans), I personally find extraordinarily convincing.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴² C. Cranfield, *On Romans* (T&T Clark 1998), 144.

George Steiner likewise ranks St. Paul among “a handful of supreme thinkers and writers,” as well ranking St. John with Plotinus.⁵⁴³

Fales has already commented on the high integrity and intelligence of Matthew. Similar considerations apply to the studious Luke and the subtle author of Hebrews—both of whom testify to the Resurrection.

Incidentally, one doesn’t have to be brilliant to be a reliable witness. It is sufficient that Mark, for one, was a well-connected informant (cf. Acts 12:12).

Two neglected sources are James and Jude. Although they do not testify directly to the event of the Resurrection, their writing presupposes that their half-brother is alive and well.

And yet however intelligent a Bible writer may be, he is but a vessel of an altogether higher intelligence. Even a man like Steiner, who is far from pious, can sense as much:

Reason as I can, there are passages in the Old and New Testaments which I am unable to accord with any sensible image, however, exalted, of normal authorship, of conception and composition as we seek to grasp them in even the greatest of thinkers and poets.⁵⁴⁴

Fales frames his analysis in categories supplied by Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss—although he modifies them according to his own philosophical preferences. There are several problems with this analysis:

- i) A number of different scholars have propounded a number of different mythopoetic models. Why favor Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss over rival paradigms?
- ii) The whole approach is extrinsic to the subject-matter. The worldview of Scripture is at odds with the worldview of Fales, Durkheim, and Lévi-Strauss. A textbook example is his statement that “religion is politics.”⁵⁴⁵

As one scholar notes:

⁵⁴³ *No Passion Spent* (Yale 1996).

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 388-389.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 315.

Moreover radical, however, is the assertion that analysis must not at all focus on the components or on the phenomena at the observational level, but on the structures “below and behind empirical reality.”⁵⁴⁶

This enterprise [of Eliade’s] closely resembles in its results the structuralist methods of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who has also been powerfully affected by the views of Foucault. The structuralist goal of discovering recurrent patterns in the human mind leaves out of account, and has no interest in, the unrepeatable uniqueness that is ingredient in every historical event. The legitimacy of this sort of enterprise—whether among literary critics, philosophers, aestheticians, or psychologists—I shall leave to others, but it should not be allowed to masquerade as historical investigation.⁵⁴⁷

Hence, the mythopoetic classification is prejudicial. It does not arise organically from the nature of the text itself, but is superimposed from the outside—what with its abstract, ahistorical apriorism. Fales has his own definition of reality, and he uses that as his interpretive prism. So the entire exercise begs the question of what is possible and what is real.

iii) The Bible is written from a self-consciously polemical standpoint with respect to pagan mythology. The Bible writers were acutely aware of their pagan neighbors, and often write in studied opposition to their cultural surroundings. It will not do, therefore, to simply lump them in with all the rest.

iv) What is more, Scripture has its own analysis of mythology. This figures in its running critique of idolatry (e.g., Ps 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa 44:9-20; Ezk 8:7-16; Hos 8:4-6; Rom 1:18-32).

v) Before we judge truth-claims, we must know what is being asserted. By taking such an outsider’s perspective, rather than grasping the text from within, through the eyes of the author, Fales is interposing himself between meaning and truth.

Fales speaks of:

The nearly isomorphic mappings commonly found between the personae and doings of the supernatural pantheon and the institutions and processes of the social order.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ H. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*, 27.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁵⁴⁸ ET. 314.

This is largely true—with the conspicuous exception of Biblical faith. Yahweh has no consort, no parents, no siblings, and no offspring.

Moving on:

It is hard to imagine a “projective” process by means of which tribal thinkers would have constructed unconsciously religious systems that reflect social realities and needs in so much detail and with such power.⁵⁴⁹

So, according to Fales, mythology is a code language for the social order, and the mythmaker did not believe his own propaganda.

Now there may be individual cases in which this is true. Plato comes to mind. But are we really to suppose, as a general proposition, that most Jews, Greeks, Romans and other suchlike did not, in fact, believe in the existence of supernatural entities?

As a matter of fact, Fales has to admit that if:

Modern Jews and Christians did not consciously identify their pantheon with social or political realities, why should one suppose that primitive peoples do?⁵⁵⁰

Why indeed? Fales’ argument is rather ironic. Ordinarily, skeptics cast the history of ideas as the triumph of science over superstition. But Fales is suggesting that the ancients were always irreligious at heart—their religiosity was just a metaphor.

To my knowledge, the mythic genre is confined to what the ancients regarded as prehistoric events—events concerned with the origin of the world, origin of the gods, origin of man, origin of the social order, and so on, and not with contemporary events.⁵⁵¹

To compare this with the Gospels is an argument from disanalogy rather than analogy. The Gospels are not about the distant past, but a contemporary of the writers.

Moving on:

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 315.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 315.

⁵⁵¹ For further analysis, cf. C. Brown, ed., *History, Criticism & Faith* (IVP 1977); P. Hughes, *Scripture & Myth* (Tyndale 1956).

Gods, I suggest, function roughly as the Platonic Forms of corporate persons: tribes, nations, institutions, and the like.⁵⁵²

Even if this were roughly true, the fact that you might have an archetypal/ectypal relation between the divine and human orders (e.g., the *imago Dei*) is in no way inconsistent with the actual existence of a divine exemplar. For the nature of God would be the repository of all possibilities.

Fales attempts to politicize and secularize the Biblical doctrine of the afterlife. That the theocratic state of Israel had a political dimension is a truism. But to reinterpret promises and images of the afterlife in this exclusive fashion is simplistic in the extreme.

To begin with, as social creatures human beings will have a political life. That's a practical necessity. But this in no way implies that all of life is reducible to the political arena.

In addition, even the political aspect of the OT theocracy was instrumental to a Messianic expectation. It didn't begin and end with nationalism.

He associates the story of Jonah and like imagery with death (=sheol) and rebirth, which he then broadens out into a generic rite-of-passage, which is, in turn, treated as a mere metaphor for socioeconomic survival.

Each step in his analysis is flawed:

i) His cavalier resort to free association. In general, he conflates different images and ideas without regard to their actual combination or genre. As Philip Johnston sorts out the usage:

Others do seem to portray their distress in terms of actually being in the underworld itself...nevertheless, these psalmists can still pray to Yahweh and hope for his deliverance of them, which implies that they are not really dead.⁵⁵³

Following Gunkel, most older scholarship derived *tehom* from the Akkadian *tiamat*...Most scholars now accept that the Hebrew does not derive directly from the Akkadian, but that both words derive independently from a common

⁵⁵² ET, 317.

⁵⁵³ *Shades of Sheol* (IVP 2002), 87.

proto-Semitic root *tiham*. In this case the term itself does not have an immediate mythological background.⁵⁵⁴

While various water terms are sometimes associated with chaos, destruction and death, they are not normally seen as underworld names in scholarly study.⁵⁵⁵

Attention is also sometimes drawn to Baal's defeat of Yam (Sea) in Ugaritic mythology...but Yam is completely different from Mot (Death). While there are obviously conceptual associations between forces of destruction and death, the Ugaritic texts do not support a terminological association between water and the underworld.⁵⁵⁶

Westermann shows that "the deep" like waters more generally, is often the source of blessing (e.g., Ps 78:15). Even if the term had some etymological link with a cosmic enemy, this positive use means that *tehom* is an unlikely name for the barren underworld. Interestingly, the equivalent Ugaritic term *thm*, "ocean" has no apparent underworld reference in its various contexts.⁵⁵⁷

Water obviously has various associations with the underworld. Though a source of life and blessing, it is also a source of death and destruction. It is a force of chaos opposed to Yahweh, and is found under the earth, though its geographical relationship to the underworld is never clearly defined. Various terms for water, depths and mire are images of and metaphors for the underworld, but hardly underworld names. Water, like earth, is associated with the underworld, but is not confused with it.⁵⁵⁸

ii) On Jonah in particular, Johnston observes that:

Jonah 2 is often thought to locate Sheol in water, since it portrays drowning at sea (3,5), a visit to the underworld, and deliverance from it (2,6). However, Sheol is also described as a land with bars and as the pit (6), and this mingling of imagery cautions against its identification simply with water. The writer describes himself as near death and already in the underworld (2,6), but is not concerned here with its location.⁵⁵⁹

iii) "Rebirth" is, itself, a metaphor—not to be interchanged with other metaphors.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

iv) To further equate this with a rite-of-passage is a disguised description rather than an explanation. It is not literally a rite of passage, such as a bar mitzvah. It is, at most, a figurative rite-of-passage. Moreover, this designation is not the result of exegesis, but is a sociological construct.

v) The OT didn't limit survival to national survival, as opposed to the afterlife. For one thing, the Patriarchs had no national identity. They were nomads.

Grasping at straws, he talks about:

Speculation that the Psalms may have played a liturgical role in Jewish ritual dramas of royal renewal in which the Davidic kings were portrayed as descending into the realm of death and then being resurrected.⁵⁶⁰

This, of course, has no textual basis. Since Israel was a theocratic monarchy, it's not surprising if some of the Psalms are adapted to the transition of power from one king to the next, as the viceregent of God. This is also a major messianic theme.

Fales then attempts to contrive a spatial symmetry between heaven and earth, mirrored by a temporal symmetry in which the ordeal of Jonah and harrowing of hell are bifurcated into equal periods of time. There's simply no textual basis for this analysis, which is pretty far-fetched to begin with.

The whole framework of Jesus' descent into hell and the harrowing of hell is a Medieval tradition without solid foundation in Scripture.⁵⁶¹

He then treats the presence of the women at the cross and the tomb as a framing device. They are "symbols of parturition."⁵⁶² Appeal is made to weeping women in association with usual suspects, viz. Adonis, Bacchus, Osiris, Tammuz, &c.

By way of reply:

i) Midwife and mourner are hardly homologous concepts.

ii) There is nothing in the text to suggest the theme of "parturition."

⁵⁶⁰ ET, 324.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. H. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 530:36; P. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans 1999), 293-296; T. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* (Broadman 2003), 183-190.

⁵⁶² ET, 326.

iii) Female mourners are a literary motif because, in real life, women did assume the role of ritual mourners in ANE culture as well as Jewish life.

iv) Not only did you have women present at both events, but men present at both events. Why aren't the men a framing device?

v) Matthew is targeting a Jewish audience. Jews would be offended by pagan allusions.

vi) The cult of Tammuz is condemned in Scripture. Indeed, the whole of Ezk 8 is an exposition and denunciation of syncretism.

As to the usual "parallels" dredged up in Fales' dragnet, Johnston again has a useful summary of the evidence:

Various [Egyptian] texts record in great detail the progress of the deceased through the underworld, until their eventual arrival in the Great Hall of judgment, where Osiris presided⁵⁶³ ...those judged worthy proceeded to immortality in the Field of Reeds or Field of Offerings, an Egyptian paradise...The Egyptians never envisaged a bodily resurrection. While the dead are pictured in human form and the underworld is portrayed as an extension of this life, there is never any hint of a return to earth in renewed human bodies.⁵⁶⁴

Two [Mesopotamian] texts mention some form of escape from this "land of no return." In Gilgamesh...And in The Descent of Innana...[and] the related Death of Dumizi...Neither of these is a paradigm for human resurrection; the former concerns simply the occasional resurfacing of a spirit, the latter the cyclical descent and ascent of god and goddess in turn.⁵⁶⁵

The Ugarit epics recount how Baal was killed by Mot and later returned to life...Thus Baal is a seasonal dying-and-rising god...Human resurrection is not at issue....there remains no reference in the Ugaritic texts to human resurrection.⁵⁶⁶

The main religion of the Persian empire established by Cyrus the Great was Zoroastrianism...Ezekiel's vision (Ezk 37) comes in a section of the book dated shortly after Jerusalem's fall, at the height of Babylonian power. It is most unlikely that Zoroastrianism had already so penetrated the Babylonian empire

⁵⁶³ Notice that Osiris is not a resurrected god, but the judge of the Netherworld.

⁵⁶⁴ *Shades of Sheol*, 231-323.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

that an exiled Jewish prophet fell under its influence...most of the details of Zoroastrian eschatology come from a 9C AD text (the Bundahishn).⁵⁶⁷

The Greeks maintained a strong antipathy towards bodily resurrection...the reaction to the apostle Paul's preaching in Athens indicates a mocking skepticism regarding resurrection (Acts 17:18,31f.).⁵⁶⁸

Let us also repeat the fact that, as a NT category, "resurrection" has a highly specified content. It is not just a return from the dead, but the divine bestowal of an ageless and immortal body. It is not merely a case of coming back to life.

In this same general connection, Fales tries to relate the wedding at Cana with "water-to-wine ritual in nearby Dionysian cultic centers."⁵⁶⁹

Since Bacchus was the god of wine, his cult would naturally involve the use of wine. And wine was a standard beverage for all concerned. But the evidence doesn't bear out his contention. As John Meier notes:

Specifically, he [Noetzel] shows that nowhere in the Dionysus myth or cult is Dionysus said to turn water into wine.

Linnemann...never quite overcomes Noetzel's basic objection: there is no firm indication that the Dionysus legend or cult presented Dionysus as a god who turned water into wine. Nor does Linnemann ever explain adequately where she thinks a particular Christian community had contact with the mysteries of Dionysus. Other authors have tried to fill in these gaps...Contrary to Smith's claim, the text he produces from Achilles Tatius does not provide a "striking parallel" to Jn 2:1-11, since the key element of the miraculous transformation of a given amount of water into wine is absent. An attempt to remedy this basic weakness in the arguments of those championing the influence of the Dionysus cult on Jn 2:1-11 is offered by Broer...[but] there are no unambiguous texts from the pre-Christian period that depict the cult-god Dionysus changing water into wine. The texts Broer brings forward either do not bear the clear sense he wants to see in them or stem from the 2C AD and later.

A similar theory of derivation from a story about the child or boy Jesus is proposed by Pesch, who appeals for support to the 2C apocryphal *Epistula Apostolorum*. Personally, I doubt whether the *Epistula Apostolorum* gives us access to any independent tradition about the first Cana miracle; I think it more likely

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 234-236.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵⁶⁹ ET, 345, n.53.

that the text in the *Epistula Apostolorum* is a very brief condensation of Jn 2:1-11.⁵⁷⁰

The true background for the miracle at Cana is to be found, as you'd expect, not in heathenism, but Judaism. As Blomberg explains:

To Mark, before Jesus' Galilean ministry can get underway with its call for new wineskins (Mk 2:22), Jesus must provide the new wine which will necessitate them. Before he can point to the appropriate celebration which his presence as bridegroom requires (Mk 2:19) he must illustrate the proper festivity for the weddings of others. The similarities between the Cana miracle and Mark's narrative are thus not limited to vv21-22 but also involved the preceding dialogue on fasting and weddings (vv18-20). This in turn calls to mind the rich antecedent symbolism of marriages and marriage feasts in Jewish literature as foreshadowings of the coming eschatological banquet. Again the parables reinforce this interpretation, as one notices how often Jesus uses a banquet to represent the new age he is inaugurating (cf. Esp. Mt 22:1-10; Lk 14:7-24; Mt 25:1-13). The most plausible purpose for Jesus turning the water into wine at this celebration was to show that "the final 'wedding feast' between God and his people [had] begun"...If additional significance must be sought, the OT and Intertestamental background of wine as one of the abundant blessings of the Messianic age (see esp. Isa 55:1, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13) would appear more likely to have been influential.⁵⁷¹

Fales then makes the claim that "the meal at Bethany...marks the descent of Jesus into the realm of the tehom."⁵⁷²

Again, there are no narrative markers in the text to this effect. The descent into the Netherworld or summoning forth of the dead (necromancy) is a familiar theme in the literature.

Needless to say, the meal at Bethany doesn't depict a descent into the Netherworld or trafficking with the dead. So Fales has to treat this as an allegory.

Once again, there are no textual clues to indicate that this pericope belongs to the allegorical genre. To my knowledge, no one in the history of the church—including the church fathers, who were certainly conversant with classical mythology, and who, in fact, believed in the descensus ad infernos and harrowing of hell—ever de-

⁵⁷⁰ *A Marginal Jew* (Doubleday 1994), 2:1021-1022.

⁵⁷¹ "Miracles as Parables," *Gospel Perspectives* 6:335-336.

⁵⁷² ET, 329.

tected in this account an allusion to a descent into the Netherworld. Neither did the heathen critics of the faith.

Fales dismisses the history of Jonah as “apocryphal.” He doesn’t say why. Presumably because he doesn’t believe in miracles. The historical genre of the book has been defended by a number of scholars.⁵⁷³ This is the traditional Jewish view, defended by Josephus. Many things credible to a believer are incredible to an unbeliever, just as many things credible to an unbeliever are incredible to a believer.

Moving on:

The question of miracles aside, it is the uniform experience of human affairs that their historical unfolding does not exhibit the kinds of structural patterns and symmetries so characteristic of myth.⁵⁷⁴

By way of reply:

i) The patterns and symmetries to which Fales is appealing are the artifact of his own fanciful analysis.

ii) There is a promissory structure to Scripture, of promise and fulfillment, undergirded by the plan and providence of God.

We wouldn’t expect ordinary providence to display this pattern. We would expect special providence to display this pattern, since that figures in historical redemption. And the witness of Judeo-Christian experience does, in fact, testify to just such a historical unfolding of events.

Moving on:

For Rome itself, the preeminent theoretical problems were establishing the legitimacy of the Caesars...Matthew, writing in the wake of Judea’s failed revolt,

⁵⁷³ G. Aalders, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah* (Tyndale 1948); T. Alexander, “Jonah,” *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (IVP 1988); “Jonah & Genre,” *TynB* 36 (1985), 35-59; G. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody 1994); J. Baldwin, “Jonah,” *The Minor Prophets*, T. McComiskey, ed. (Baker 1993), vol. 2; R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans 1969); D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Nelson 1987); D. Wiseman, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” *TynB* 30 (1979), 29-51.

⁵⁷⁴ ET, 332.

presents, in the royal figure of Jesus, a new way of solving these enormous challenges that preoccupied conqueror and conquered alike.⁵⁷⁵

In reply:

i) This assumes the late-dating of Matthew, for which no argument is presented.

ii) Who does Fales imagine would be the constituency for this solution? Neither Jews nor Romans were the least bit interested in a Jewish Caesar.

iii) There were two Jewish revolts. So the first one did not satisfy national aspirations.

iv) Both Luke (Luke-Acts) and John (Revelation) are far more interested in Roman politics than Matthew.

Moving on:

Was Jesus bodily raised from the tomb after a day and two nights? Anyone who accepts the interpretation offered here will recognize this question to be profoundly misguided...to entertain it is to reveal a complete incomprehension of Matthew's purpose, a misunderstanding so fundamental as virtually to preclude recognition of the truths Matthew means to convey.

Those who seek a risen Jesus reveal their own religious obsession with the problem of death. But to impose this existential concern upon the Gospel texts is to turn them into what they were never intended by their authors to be: reflections on the personal or biological fate of individuals. Their concern was with social and cultural survival.⁵⁷⁶

By way of reply:

i) This reinterpretation is so idiosyncratic as to be solipsistic. It isn't just Christian readers who believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are concerned with the "personal or biological fate of individuals." Most people who read the gospels, whether Jews or theological liberals or humanists believe that the authors are asserting the bodily resurrection of Christ. They don't deny the assertion. What they deny is the veracity of the assertion. This holds true for most-all of Fales' fellow contributors.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 333.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 334.

ii) In a footnote, he appeals to *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* by Eusebius. But to interpret the political outlook of Matthew by reference to a 4C post-Constantinian Christian is hopelessly anachronistic and, if anything, undercuts his thesis.

iii) Obsession with the problem of death is not a religious obsession, but a human obsession. The fear of death, the loss of loved ones—these are cultural universals.

What religion brings to the table is an explanation of how death came to be as well as a solution to the problem.

Somehow, Fales is able to link visions and apparitions with “millenarian movements,” the Ghost Dance, and St. Theresa, as well as “groups that are socially marginalized or have experienced severe collective trauma of some other kind that threatens the continued existence of the group.”⁵⁷⁷

i) I’m not aware that St. Theresa suffered severe collective trauma or a threat to her social existence.

ii) I’m not aware that St. Theresa was a “millenarian.” And to classify the Plains Indians as “millenarian” imports a category from Christian eschatology into a pagan warrior culture.

iii) Is the visionary aspect of American Indian religiosity just the after effect of 19C persecution and genocide?

iv) I don’t feel any pressing reason to dismiss the experience of St. Theresa out of hand. My inclination is to judge these sorts of reports on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁷⁸

Moving on:

What transfixed Ezekiel’s religious imagination was not the medical reconstruction of deceased ancestors, but the reconstitution of a defeated and dispersed nation.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 347, n.64.

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Modern Library 1994); J. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics* (Magi Book 1985); N. Pike, *Mystic Union* (Cornell 1992); R. Zaehner, *Mysticism* (Oxford 1957).

⁵⁷⁹ ET, 335.

This represents an exceptionally shallow grasp of Ezekiel's vision—which is pregnant with allusions to creation and the fall. Indeed, the creation/fall/recreation motif is a central theme in Ezekiel, as eschatology recapitulates protology, and carries it a step further by realizing the original aim of creation. These are not metaphors for the exile and restoration; rather, exile and restoration typify these theological themes.

In Ezk 37, what we have is not resurrection as a metaphor for national restoration, but national restoration as a metaphor for resurrection.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. D. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Eerdmans 1998), 2:367-392.

Chapter 9

In chapter 9, Carrier tries to dust off the original alternative to the Resurrection, to wit: the body was stolen.

There are a couple of problems with this thesis peculiar to Carrier. In chapter 5 he had argued at exhaustive and exhausting length that the story of the empty tomb was a post-Pauline invention. But if, as this chapter would have it, the body was stolen, then the tomb really was empty on Easter morning, so what need was there to concoct a story of an empty tomb?

Hence, if you find Carrier's argument in chapter 5 to be compelling, then that makes it a compelling argument against the argument in chapter 9; but if you find his argument in chapter 9 to be compelling, then that makes it a compelling argument against the argument in chapter 5. Perhaps the reader should wait until Mr. Carrier makes up his mind.

But, wait—it doesn't stop there. Since the time of writing, Carrier has adopted yet another view:

Historian Richard Carrier, the atheist author of "Sense and Goodness Without God," said he had been "agnostic" about the existence of Jesus until Flemming interviewed him for the film. Now, he said, "I think that more likely than not, Jesus did not exist."⁵⁸¹

It would appear, then, that the grave-robbers spirited a nonexistent body out of the tomb. Speaking for myself, this strikes me as no less miraculous that the Resurrection—although decidedly less well-attested than the canonical account!

Aside from what this says about the instability of atheism, can we make any sense of his opportunistic recourse to any and every objection, however incoherent? This seems to be his reasoning:

Not only must one show that its [the resurrection] final epistemic probability is greater than for theft (as also for each and every other alternative), which I doubt can be done, but one must also show that the sum of the final epistemic

⁵⁸¹ <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/12035/Documentary-Questions-the-Existence-of-Jesus>
<http://www.iidb.org/vbb/showthread.php?t=72048>

probabilities of theft and all other explanations that exclude a resurrection—is less than 50%.⁵⁸²

Short answer: why? Would we apply that rule of evidence in a court of law? A man is charged with murder. The evidence of guilt is overwhelming: eyewitness testimony, circumstantial evidence, means, motive, and opportunity, while the whole thing was caught on tape by a security camera.

Ah, but just begin to consider all the possible alternatives. The murderer was really the evil twin brother of the accused—separated at birth. The murderer was really a clone—in a lab experiment gone awry. The accused was framed by the gov't. They planted evidence, suborned witnesses. The murderer was really an ET, wanting to experience the full range of human emotions. The accused was a werewolf at the time he murdered his victim, and thus in a state of diminished responsibility—quite literally a lunatic. And so on and so forth.

At this rate you could never bring a case to trial, much less convict a man of murder, since the police would have to investigate every possible alternative theory of the crime and tally the odds.

But this side of Alice in Wonderland, we understand that what Carrier is proposing is a recipe for cumulative improbabilities rather than probabilities.

I'd reiterate that the Resurrection is not just one explanation among many. It is the only explanation with any evidence. The Resurrection is not a theory of the events. The Resurrection is what the NT actually and directly attests.

But, for the sake of argument, let's assume that the Resurrection is just one hypothesis among many to explain the account of the empty tomb and the Easter appearances. If so, why single out that particular hypothesis for a special burden of proof? Why weigh that against the sum total of every other hypothesis combined? Why not do that for each hypothesis? The swoon theory. The stolen body. The wrong tomb, &c.

Moving on:

One general motive we know of is that the body parts (especially, it seems, of a holy or crucified man), along with such things as crucifixion nails, were valuable for necromancy ... Though corpses used specifically in curse spells techni-

⁵⁸² ET, 368, 38.

cally did not have to be moved, they sometimes were...But besides their use in curses, surviving magical papyri disclose other uses that did require bodysnatching.⁵⁸³

This paragraph raises more questions than it answers:

i) How common was necromancy in Jerusalem?

ii) Why does Carrier say, “it seems” the body parts of a holy or crucified man were especially valued? Does he or does he not have evidence for this specific claim?

iii) Does the evidence differentiate between holy men and victims of crucifixion?

iv) By his own admission, the body didn’t need to be moved for certain magical purposes. If all they want are body parts, like a skull, it would be simpler to take the parts they wanted and leave the rest of the body behind. Wouldn’t it be easier to hide the body parts in a sack rather than haul a body around town? A body is a rather conspicuous and cumbersome object to move from place to place. Tends to attract unwanted attention.

v) If grave-robbers stole the body of Jesus, why would they first unwrap the corpse? Wouldn’t that be time-consuming? Wouldn’t grave-robbers be in a hurry lest they be apprehended? Wouldn’t it be easier to move a body wrapped in a shroud than unwrap it and have it flop about? Wouldn’t it be less conspicuous to smuggle a body wrapped in a shroud?

vi) If we turn to the footnotes, the only evidence he gives for the magical value of crucifixion nails is taken from a single source and a silly source at that: an epic poem by Lucian, full of grotesque and macabre inventions—like a slain soldier who is reanimated and forthwith proceeds to forecast the future.

vii) Notice that Carrier doesn’t favor the reader with any information on the provenance of the magic papyri. Where was this papyri discovered? From what part of the Roman Empire? From what period? Pre-Christian? The Second Sophistic?

viii) How did they get past the guard?

If Carrier doesn’t believe in the guard, why believe there was a tomb to be robbed?

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 350.

From this, Carrier moves to the suggestion that one of the disciples stole the body: “it is not improbable that at least one of them would be willing to engage such a pious deceit.”⁵⁸⁴

Not improbable?

i) Would he not be on the run from the authorities? The disciples fled the scene.

ii) Could he move the stone all by himself?

iii) Wouldn't he contract ritual defilement?

iv) Wouldn't he be afraid of a haunted graveyard at night?

v) How did he get it past the guard?

vi) What about the Easter appearances of Christ?

If Carrier doesn't believe in (v)-(vi), why believe in the other details?

Carrier says, “grave robbers would not likely be Jews.”⁵⁸⁵ True, which knocks out of consideration his theory that one of the disciples might have stolen the body. So by his own admission, it is “improbable” that one of them would be willing to engage in such a “pious deceit.”

Notice that Carrier has absolutely no positive evidence that a disciple stole the body. There's no NT evidence to that effect. There's no evidence outside the NT to that effect. His theory goes against all of the available evidence. It even goes against some of his own admissions.

Carrier is such a fanatical unbeliever that he will affirm one thing for purposes of one theory, while denying the very same thing for purposes of another theory. This is like a leaf torn from the pages of Kafka's *The Trial*.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 352.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 352.

Carrier says, “Matthew assumes that the location was known well enough that a guard could be placed there.”⁵⁸⁶ So much for the theory that the women went to the wrong tomb.

Moving on:

We have to be especially wary of such license, for embellishments are very common when one or two generations of oral tradition have intervened between the events and their written record.⁵⁸⁷

This, of course, assumes one or two generations of oral tradition. Why make that assumption?

Shortly after I turned 40, I decided to write a memoir. It was a way of taking stock of my life up till then. And 40 seemed like a natural break.

This, of course, meant my writing about things that had happened 20, 30, 35 years or more before. Up until then I had never committed these memories to writing. But there was no intervening oral tradition. I’d carried these memories around in my head for years and years, and it went straight from memory to the page.⁵⁸⁸

And even if the church relied on oral tradition in preaching the gospel for the first several years, it hardly follows that the gospel writers relied on oral tradition when they wrote the gospels.

For example, the fact that Apollos relied on oral tradition in preaching the gospel doesn’t mean that St. John relied on oral tradition in preaching the gospel. He relied on his own memory—both in preaching and in writing.

Jews knew how to read and write. Before the NT there was the OT, as well as the OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha—not to mention Philo and Josephus, among others

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 352.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 352.

⁵⁸⁸ “Carrier argues for the necessity of an unreliable oral tradition. The only thing I would add here is that, even if we stipulate to an oral tradition, we are still discussing a first century society in which pneumatic skills were very highly developed, so even if oral tradition did inform their writing, not just their preaching, it would be extremely reliable. If human beings can pass down entire liturgies over multiple generations, why can’t they pass these narratives down just as accurately over a shorter period?” (Gene Bridges, private correspondence).

And they only had the OT because they had scribes to copy the OT. And as long as Jews could write letters, they could just as well write gospels.

Moving on:

Craig knows very well that to establish a historical fact, at least six criteria must be met...and at least a majority of these criteria must be met overwhelmingly against competitors in order to justify steady confidence in the conclusion.⁵⁸⁹

This is, admittedly, a standard of evidence which Craig has set for himself—although he doesn't use the word "overwhelming" that I'm aware of.

But this sixfold criterion is highly artificial. As far as I'm concerned, I believe it sufficient to establish an historical fact if the reporter was in a position to know what he's talking about and has no reason to lie—whether it's the Life of Johnson by Boswell, the Letters of Christina Rossetti, Of Plymouth Plantation by William Bradford, The Captive by Mary Rowlandson, The Journals of George Whitefield, &c.

Unsurprisingly, Carrier doesn't believe in the guarded tomb. Other issues aside, since the account is so clearly polemical, there is no reason for Matthew to make it up. If you don't believe in the account of the Resurrection, you won't believe in the account of the guarded tomb. It's like asking a man if he's trustworthy: if he is, you don't need to ask him; if he isn't, he's the wrong man to ask.

For his part, Swinburne finds the account quite plausible:

My reason is that Pilate had very good reason to do just this. Jesus had been crucified on a charge of treason...it would be a bad example to others to show compassion by handing over the body of Jesus' family for a normal burial, let alone handing it over to Jesus' disciples, who might use it to strengthen a cult (which would lead to further trouble with the Jewish leaders). Roman governors tended to treat the bodies of those crucified for treason differently from the bodies of those executed on other charges.⁵⁹⁰

Carrier makes the silly statement that "no one is said to have checked to see if the tomb was already empty."⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 354.

⁵⁹⁰ *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 178.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 358.

The reason that Pilate posted the guard was to prevent grave-robbery, so the soldiers would naturally check the tomb and report back to Pilate if it were already ransacked. Otherwise, they would be charged with dereliction of duty if it were found to be empty on their watch.

This is just one example of many of Carrier's captious and fanatical unbelief. If he acted this way in ordinary life he wouldn't have any friends left.

He says it's "incredible that no other author knows" the things distinctive of Matthew's account.⁵⁹²

i) The fact that one writer doesn't reproduce another writer doesn't necessarily mean he's ignorant of what the other writer said.

ii) For that matter, there's nothing incredible in the idea that one writer knows something another writer doesn't. It all depends on the particular experience of a particular individual.

Beyond that, Carrier says that Matthew reports details which he was in no position to know.

i) Carrier is very free to speculate in opposition to the account, but never in support of the account. State secrets have a way of leaking out. And Matthew may have gotten his inside information from Roman converts to the faith (Mt 27:54). This is, of course, pure conjecture, but it's on a plane with Carrier's fondness for pure conjecture, so it answers him on his own level.

ii) It is also true that in Scripture we have the convention of the omniscient narrator. Depending on your worldview, this is either a mark of fiction or inspiration.

In the next section, Carrier tries to draw some parallels between Matthew and Daniel, such as the timing of events (at dawn).

But Carrier had elsewhere explained the timing of Easter with reference to Gen 1:3-5 as well as the legend of Romulus. So now he offers three divergent sources of literary dependence: It was dependent on Gen 1; no, it was dependent on Daniel; no, it was dependent on Romulus. Carrier is such a clown.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 359.

He also detects a Danielic background in the description of the angel. But this is simply stock imagery for the appearance of an angel—presumably because angels are, in fact, luminous beings.

He then attempts to fabricate a forced parallel between the accusers who were “killed” and the guards, who became like “dead men.”

Again, the reaction of the guards is a stock feature of numinous encounters—the *mysterium tremendum*. It received a classic exposition in Rudolf Otto’s *Idea of the Holy*.

He then says that “equally crucial is the fact that in the earliest Christian artwork, Daniel was associated with the Persian magi.”⁵⁹³

How is Christian iconography germane to the interpretation of Matthew? It doesn’t date to the time of Matthew. Moreover, Jewish piety is aniconic.

Carrier relates other telltale signs of “fiction”:

The hoard of undead descending on Jerusalem, 27:52-53; and the fable concerning Herod and the killing of the babies, 2:16, a legendary motif attached to kings and great men for centuries before Jesus, from Oedipus and Cypselos of Corinth, to Krishna, Moses, Sargon, Cyrus, Romulus, and others.⁵⁹⁴

Regarding Mt 27:52-53, there is no more reason to balk at this than the Resurrection itself, of which it is a piece. What we have here is a piece of inaugurated eschatology, as the Resurrection of Christ draws in its train a foretaste of the resurrection of the just (Isa 26:19; Ezk 37:12-14; Dan 12:2; 1 Cor 15:20-23). The resurrection of these particular OT saints is a proleptic microcosm of the macrocosmic resurrection to come.

It is precisely because prodigies and portents were taken so seriously in the ancient world that God makes occasional use of these event-media to get their attention in order to then redirect their attention to his word.

As to the massacre of the innocents, this is exactly how you’d expect an oriental despot to react to unwelcome news of a political rival—especially such a paranoid

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 361.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 363.

individual as Herod, who had a habit of murdering his own family members. Matricide, patricide, and fratricide were hideously commonplace in struggles over succession. It becomes a literary motif because history has a way of repeating itself.⁵⁹⁵

The incident may well have precedent in the life of Moses, given the Exodus-typology in Mt 2. Here the historical and literary themes are converging in the providence of God.

Finally, Carrier says that “we have no good evidence that any form of supernaturalism is true.”⁵⁹⁶

That is, of course, a key presupposition in judging the record of Scripture—although, as a practical matter, conversion can occur in either direction—from faith in God to the word of God, or vice versa.

In support of his claim, Carrier says:

On the issue of evidence for naturalism against supernaturalism, see, for example, Taner Edis, *The Ghost in the Universe*, and my forthcoming book *Sense and Goodness without God*.⁵⁹⁷

By training, Carrier is a classical historian while Edis is a physicist. This is what Carrier has to say about his own book:

There is one thing I have tried to make clear throughout this book. Metaphysical Naturalism is the only worldview that is supported by all the evidence of all the sciences, the only one consistent with all human experience, the established truths of history, and reason itself. No other worldview, including theism generally or Evangelical Christianity in particular, is supported by any evidence of any of the sciences.

And if you go to Edis’ homepage, he refers the reader to a number of reviews. This is what one reviewer has to say:

The book contains nine chapters, of which two or three will most interest the strictly scientific reader. These chapters cover theological and philosophical notions of God, evolution, physics and cosmology, history and sacred texts, the

⁵⁹⁵ Cf. R. France, “Herod & the Children of Bethlehem,” *NovT* 21 (1979), 98-120.

⁵⁹⁶ ET, 364.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 367, n.36.

historicity of Jesus, miracles, mysticism and the mind/brain problem, faith and reason, and morality.

The chapters that bear most directly on science are the second and third, with relevant explorations in the seventh (mysticism) and eighth (reason). In the second chapter (evolution), there is a worthwhile examination of “intelligent design”, with which all scientists need to be familiar. The third chapter (cosmology) naturally ranges over the Big Bang, quantum physics, and the so-called “anthropic principle”—another back-door theistic notion that scientists need to know about. The seventh (mysticism) reviews the “scientific” argument about mystical experiences and brain states.

So Carrier’s best evidence for naturalism against supernaturalism consists of one book by a nonscientist (Carrier) writing about science, along with another book by a scientist (Edis) writing about non-science.

Of the nine chapters in Edis’ book, only three are devoted to science, and of the three chapters devoted to science, only one is devoted to his field of expertise—while Carrier presumes to summarize all the findings of all the sciences; indeed, the totality of history, human experience, and reason itself!

Chapter 10

In chapter 10, Carrier challenges the historicity of the trial of Christ as recorded in the Gospel on the grounds that the proceedings conflict with Jewish law. This is an old objection, so there's an extensive literature on the subject.

There's no need to offer a blow-by-blow refutation to Carrier's contention inasmuch as he pins his hopes on a number of dubious assumptions so that his case is no better than the operating assumptions.⁵⁹⁸

True to form, his presentation is completely one-sided. Since he doesn't bother to interact with conservative scholarship, although conservative scholarship does interact with critical scholarship, it is sufficient to present the other side of the argument:

Technically, the scene is not a trial. It is more of a charge-gathering phase, much like our grand jury process. The Jewish leadership did not possess the legal authority to execute Jesus. They could only recommend a course of action. This restriction is why they eventually brought Jesus to Pilate. It also was a sound move politically. A Roman execution would make the foreign rulers responsible for Jesus' death, thus mollifying those who objected to it. This would limit any public impression about the leadership's ultimate culpability.

The absence of an official trial is important for two reasons. First, it is often said that the leadership violated their own legal rules in at least three ways by having a capital trial during a religious festival, at night, and without defense witnesses. However, if this was more like a grand jury recommendation than an official trial, no such violations took place. Second, the goal was not to bring a religious indictment, because that would be of little legal interest to the Romans (e.g., Acts 25:18-20). The goal was to bring a political allegation that would cause the Romans to act in their own self-interest. This explains the examination's starting point being Jesus' remarks about the temple in Matthew and Mark. Actions against the temple had both political and religious overtones, including the potential for charges of blasphemy to undercut Jesus' Jewish support. This sacred locale, as an extremely sensitive religious site, was a potential flashpoint for trouble. If Jesus could be shown to have designs on damaging this site, he would be a threat to law and order, something on which Pilate was charged to keep tight rein. This also explains the interest in a messianic claim. If Jesus claimed to be a competing king, Caesar would not be pleased.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ But if you're looking for a blow-by-blow reply to Carrier and Lowder alike, consult Glenn Miller's rebuttal over at <http://www.Christian-thinktank.com>.

⁵⁹⁹ D. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Baker 2002), 371-372.

For one...It is now clear, however, that it is very difficult to establish the authenticity of situations described in the Talmud that predate AD 70. Often what they describe are idealized portrayals of institutions and practices that in reality were quite different. In this respect the question can also be raised whether a Sadducean-dominated Sanhedrin would try criminal cases according to the Pharisaic rules found in the Talmud.

Second, it should be noted that discrepancies exist between what the tractate Sanhedrin claims to have existed and what contemporary Jewish writers such as Josephus state.

A third consideration...Early Christians claimed from the beginning that Jesus did not receive a fair trial...The information in b. Sanhedrin 43a must be understood as counterpropaganda to the Christian claim that Jesus did not receive a fair trial. This attempt to defend Jesus' trial, however, suggests the very opposite. He did not receive a fair trial. Certainly few would argue that for forty days before Jesus' execution an attempt was made to find witnesses on his behalf.

Finally...The Gospels, of course, were written from a Christian point of view, but the Talmud was likewise written from an idealized Jewish point of view of what should have taken place. As for dating these sources, if it is argued that the oral sources underlying the Talmud date back to the events, the same claim can be made for the oral sources underlying the Gospel accounts. As for their written dates, the Gospels were written well over a century earlier than the Mishna and more than three or four centuries earlier than the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. Furthermore, the Gospels were written at a time when eyewitnesses were still alive.⁶⁰⁰

Carrier also misses a basic point which his fellow contributor, Evan Fales, is quick to pick up on:

The numerous irregularities and illegalities implied by the Gospel accounts of the actions of the Jewish authorities during the passion would have served to highlight the Evangelists' portrayal of the legitimacy of the Jewish hierarchy as forfeit. So far from meriting the rulership of Israel as heirs to the Mosaic covenant, they are not even competent administrators of the law.⁶⁰¹

F. F. Bruce has drawn attention to a number of incidental details which attest the factual accuracy of the trial:

⁶⁰⁰ R. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* (IVP 1996), 235-236; Cf. D. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus; A Study in the Gospels and Jewish Historiography from 1770 to the Present Day* (Brill 1971); C. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (T. Nelson 2001), 430-467.

⁶⁰¹ ET, 347, n.61.

Another incidental token of the historical tradition is the remark that the high priest's servant whose ear was sliced by Peter's sword was named Malchus (Jn 18:10). Malchus is a common enough name in the Greco-Roman Near East.⁶⁰²

One point that Mark and John have in common here is the fire in the courtyard (Mk 14:54; Jn 18:18). The fire is an incidental feature which confirms the holding of a night session. Such an exceptional session was necessary because the time was short. The festival was drawing near, and if Pilate was to be approached before the festival, he would have to be approached next morning. Roman officials liked to complete the transacting of daily business between 6 and 10 AM. So what A. N. Sherwin-White calls "the quite unessential detail of the fire" confirms the account of both Mark and John, both of whom add that it was "early morning" (proi) when Jesus was brought before Pilate (Mk 15:1; Jn 18:28).⁶⁰³

Why go to Pilate? According to John, the Sanhedrin lacked the authority to carry out the death-sentence...There was indeed an area in which the Jewish authorities were allowed to retain capital jurisdiction—that of offences against the sanctity of the temple...it would also throw light on the attempt, in the Marcan narrative to Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, to convict him of a verbal threat to the temple (Mk 14:57-59). Had this attempt succeeded, it might not have been necessary to secure Pilate's confirmation of the death sentence...The Sanhedrin's loss of capital jurisdiction is attested by a baraita in the Palestinian Talmud: "Forty years before the destruction of the temple the right to inflict the death penalty was taken away from Israel."⁶⁰⁴

John's framework for the Roman trial is judicially accurate, though he fills it with theological as well as historical content (the theological interpreting the historical).⁶⁰⁵

The use of nails on this occasion to fasten the crucified man to the wood, explicitly attested by John (20:25), is illustrated by the discovery in an ossuary in 1968 of the bones of a young man who had been nailed to his cross through each wrist separately and through both heels together. He had also been subjected to the *crurifragium*, like the two criminals crucified along with Jesus (Jn 19:31.).

It has been emphasized already that the presentation of data in a theological manner does not diminish their historical validity. This is illustrated afresh by the incident of the dividing of Jesus' clothes. John quotes the words of Ps 22:18

⁶⁰² "The Trial of Jesus," *Gospel Perspectives* 1:10.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

as being fulfilled in this action of the soldiers at the foot of the cross (19:24)...It would be easy to regard the incident as an invention in the primitive church, fulfilling a detail in what was in any case recognized as a passion psalm—were it not that, “as has been familiar since Mommsen, legal texts confirm that it was the accepted right of the executioner’s squad to share out the minor possessions of their victim.”

John presents the trial and execution of Jesus, as he presents everything else in his record, in such a way as to enforce his theological Leitmotiv: Jesus is the incarnate Word, in whom the glory of God is revealed. But the events which he presents in this way, and preeminently the events of the passion, are real, historical events. It could not be otherwise, for the Word became flesh—the revelation became history.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 18.

Chapter 11

In chapter 11, Derrett tries to dust off the old swoon theory. But if you believe his argument for the swoon theory, then you can't believe Lowder's argument for the wrong tomb theory or Carrier's argument for the stolen body theory. So we have three contributors to the same volume contributing three mutually exclusive theories of what "really" happened. At most, you can only believe one, to the detriment of the others.

It may be objected that there is also disagreement between one Christian apologist and another. But the cases are not parallel. In Christian apologetics, the disagreement is not over the underlying event, but over the best argument for the event.

Derrett's chapter makes for some really strange reading. His essential argument, if you can call it that, is that the disciples cooked up the Resurrection as a moneymaking racket. You know—heaven as the opiate of the masses and all that.

Now there's no doubt that Christianity can be turned into a cash cow. And if he'd turned his guns on the Renaissance papacy or health-and-wealth preachers, he'd have a point.

But as is clear from the Gospels, Acts, Revelation, 1 Peter, and the Prison Epistles, to be a Christian in the 1C was a prescription for persecution and martyrdom, and not a get-rich-quick scheme.

Frankly, his view of Jewish financiers (399) smacks of the old anti-Semitic stereotype. Jews are Shylocks; Christianity is a Jewish sect; the same mercenary motives are in play.

In a culture where ethnic religion prevails, most folks never consider conversion to another faith to avoid being socially ostracized or worse.

It is also true that, in many mainline denominations, you have liberals who keep up appearances so as not to put themselves out of business. But anyone can see that they are only going through the motions. And, in any event, they are not the sort who ever put their life on the line.

Derrett says it's a fact that some crucified victims were taken down alive. This may well be so, but that general possibility is irrelevant to the particular case in hand.

We might as well say that since there are so many different ways of killing a man, we shouldn't believe that Caesar was stabbed to death. After all, it's possible that he was burned to death, or stoned to death, or drowned, or decapitated, or fed to the lions, &c.

But this is not how one deals with a historical claim. It is not a question of what is abstractly possible, but the actual state of the evidence. Not only was he crucified, but flogged and impaled.

In addition, it isn't enough to say that Jesus survived the crucifixion. A swoon theorist must also explain how Jesus was able to extricate himself from his winding sheet (cf. Jn 11:44) and escape from the tomb. How did he roll the stone away from the inside (cf. Jn 11:39)?

Remember, Derrett doesn't believe that Jesus had any supernatural powers at his disposal. He was just a man, and a mortally wounded man at that—by Derrett's own account.

He also says that Christianity was in competition with Buddhism. This is just plain weird.

Yes, Buddhism coexisted with Christianity in time, but not in place. 1C Christian missionaries were not in competition with 1C Buddhist missionaries. The church in India dates to about the 4C, while the church in China dates to about the 7C.

Indeed, Derrett's essay is littered with a number of references to Buddhism. The only reason seems to be that Derrett, as a professor emeritus of oriental law, happens to know a lot about Buddhism. But it has absolutely no bearing on the historical evidence for the Resurrection.

The life of Buddha isn't remotely close to being on an evidential par with the life of Christ,⁶⁰⁷ and even if it were, the two rival religions don't cross paths in 1C Palestine or the Levant.

He says that Jesus "was buried by one of the richest men available."⁶⁰⁸ In this he contradicts the view of Kirby and Carrier, according to whom Joseph of Arimathea never even existed.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. E. Yamauchi, *Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, Socrates, Mohammad* (IVP 1972).

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

He also says that:

A doctrine of resurrection is now part of normative Judaism and was then a notion of the Pharisees.⁶¹⁰

Here he contradicts the position of Carrier in chapter 5. Since Derrett is a seasoned scholar whose academic credentials considerably exceed Carrier's, his view of 1C Judaism carries (pardon the pun) more weight than Carrier's.

Regarding the disposal of the body, after Jesus supposedly succumbed to his wounds, Derrett says that "naturally we have no record of their secret debates."⁶¹¹

So, although we have no record of their secret debates, we know they had secret debates. How's that for probative evidence? For a law prof., his standards of legal evidence leave much to be desired.

Moving on:

The corpse of a wonder-working rabbi would be valuable as a magnet for the speculators who auctioned scarce grave plots (1 Kgs 13:31; 2 Kgs 23:17-18); also to work necromantic spells; to provide a place of pilgrimage; or a scene for "incubation"; and as a source of prophecy to solve all kinds of problems (lost property, Etc.). In all these roles he would have been a huge income earner for that lowly breed, the custodians of the tombs. Government would soon put a finger in the pie, and cream off a percentage of the offerings...Even the aroma of a bone of Jesus would have been worth a fortune, and there would have been more bones than pieces of the True Cross.⁶¹²

To some extent this intersects with one of Carrier's arguments.⁶¹³ But how does this constitute an argument against the Resurrection? Does it not, in fact, constitute an argument for the Resurrection? If Jesus didn't rise from the death, and if turning his tomb into a reliquary and pilgrimage site was both feasible and financially lucrative, then why did it not, in fact, become a major shrine and drawing-card—as, indeed, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is today, and has been since the Middle Ages?

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 237-238.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 397.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 400.

⁶¹² Ibid., 401.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 350-351.

As we review every alternative explanation for the empty tomb and Easter appearances, it is important to keep in mind that this very effort is a rear-guard action which confirms the primacy of the Biblical account.

The contributors to the ET would not be going to such fanciful lengths to concoct an alternative theory of events unless they recognized the absolute need to come up with an alternative explanation.

You see, even if you don't believe in the Resurrection, it is not enough to merely deny it. You must still account for the account itself. You must explain how a non-event generated the record of an event.

The contributors constantly remind us of how far-fetched the Resurrection is. That's the bedrock of their unbelief.

But it doesn't occur to them that the more far-fetched the event in question, the harder it is for them to explain why anyone would believe it in the first place. The more they willfully accentuate the improbability of the Easter fact, the more they unwittingly accentuate the improbability of the Easter faith. They are putting the burden of proof on their very own back, and loading it down with cinder blocks and boulders.

Chapter 12

At this point I'm going to skip over chapter 12 in the ET for now and return to it at the end. I'm dropping out of sequence because I think that chapter 12 is a more representative note to end on. So the present chapter division from 12-15 refers to my own title, and not the ET.

In chapter 13, Keith Parsons dusts off the old hallucination theory. The strategy of the ET is apparently to make a case for every major alternative to the Resurrection. The reasoning seems to be that any other explanation is more likely than the Resurrection, so that by arguing for every alternative, one somehow covers all the relevant bases and makes a cumulative case against the Resurrection—the opposite of proof by process of elimination.

That would make some sense if these arguments were convergent rather than divergent. But when they pull in opposing directions, the cumulative effect is for each theory to negate its contrary in an ascending series of cumulative improbabilities.

Chapter 13 poses a dilemma for the reader. If hallucinations are as commonplace as Parsons—and Carrier who, in his kitchen sink approach, appeals to the hallucinatory theory as well—then maybe there is no book by the title of *The Empty Tomb*. Maybe I'm just hallucinating when I imagine that I'm reading his chapter on the hallucination theory. Sure, I could pinch myself, but that's part of the hallucination too, right?

In sizing up Parsons' contribution, it is useful to begin at the end rather than the beginning. If you flip over to the footnotes and consult his bibliography, you have the equivalent of a high school talent show or amateur night down at the local bar.

He cites two books by Crossan and one book by Lüdemann—both charter members of the slapstick Jesus Seminar. Remember, these are the same jokers who contend that 4C copies of Gnostic gospels preserve a more primitive tradition than the 1C canonical gospels. Uh-huh.

Then there are two books by G. A. Wells—a retired German teacher from Birbeck College.

He cites two titles published by Prometheus Books, as if that were a recognized publishing house for Bible scholarship.

He relies on one-volume ready-reference works like *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* and *The Oxford Annotated Bible*.

He also lists Michael Martin's *The Case Against Christianity*. This is on the same scholarly plane as Asimov's *Guide to the Bible*.

He has a one-page reference to the Resurrection in the *Oxford Companion*, a two-page reference to "the conflicts between the Gospel stories and recognized historical facts" in a Prometheus title, a two-page reference to a book by Wells and one-page reference in another work on "the inconsistency of the Gospels with each other."

The upshot is that Parsons is a nearly complete and total ignoramus. He has only read one side of the argument. He knows absolutely nothing of the standard conservative literature.

What is more, he isn't even conversant with the standard critical literature, viz. Brown, Koester, Kümmel, Meier, Perrin, Sanders, the Anchor Bible, Hermeneia, &c.

Let's single out a few related claims for further scrutiny:

The Gospels were written by persons unknown—with the possible exception of Luke, who admits he was not an eyewitness.⁶¹⁴

i) To say that the canonical gospels are anonymous runs contrary to our unanimous textual traditional.

ii) If the gospels were originally anonymous, why would the church name them after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Two of the four are not even apostles, while Matthew is second-tier apostle.

Indeed, Matthew's Gospel is his chief claim to fame. It's not his name that made his gospel famous, but his gospel which made him famous. Were it not for his gospel, he'd be a footnote.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 439.

In addition, why would the church name a gospel, addressed to the Jews, after a Roman collaborator? As a one-time tax-collector, Matthew would have been reviled in the Jewish community as a traitor to his race.

By contrast, the apocryphal gospels assume prestigious, high-profile names like Mary and Peter.

iii) By the same token, (2) would undermine the incentive of pseudonymity. What forger would name his gospel after Matthew or Mark or Luke?

iv) Were it not for the Gospel of John, the apostle John would not be such a coveted name.

Let's examine another one of Parsons' claims:

[The Gospels were] composed 40 or more years after the events they purport to describe, based on oral traditions, and therefore subject to all the frailties of human memory.⁶¹⁵

This is not only a lynchpin of Parsons' argument, such as it is, but of every other contributor to the ET. But it's fun to pick on Parsons since his combination of arrogance and incompetence makes him an irresistible target. Parsons' allegation suffers from a couple of crippling flaws, one particular and one general:

i) In particular, it doesn't occur to poor little Parsons that he's enmeshed in a dilemma. On the one hand, if he's going to say that the Easter appearances were hallucinatory, then doesn't he need reliable case-studies to make his point? What would be the evidentiary value of an unreliable report of a hallucination?

Why insist that the gospels are unreliable? Why date them late and base them on oral tradition? How does that help the hallucination theory? If you don't have a reliable record of what the eyewitnesses thought they saw on Easter morning, then on what do you base your theory of mass hallucination?

Yet assuming, for the sake of argument, that you do have a reliable account of the first Easter, then you presumably have a reliable account of the first Christmas, and

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 439.

the words of Christ, and the miracles of Christ, and the trial and crucifixion of Christ—not to mention his prediction of the Resurrection.

But because Parsons can't think for himself, what he does is to graft the hallucination theory onto the standard liberal view of Scripture. Yet they don't go together.

ii) Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the gospels were written forty or more years after the fact, so what? Autobiographies are typically written towards the end of life. Yet we don't cavalierly dismiss a man's own memoirs.

Barring senility—which is not an inevitable result of aging—long-term memory is pretty stable. We generally misremember, not because our long-term memory fails us, but because our short-term memory fails us.

We misremember because we misperceive the event at the time we saw it or heard about it, or because it didn't transfer from the short-term memory to the long-term memory.

And what's true of an autobiography is equally true of a biography, written by a close acquaintance.

For that matter, what's wrong with second-hand information? Historians constantly rely on secondhand information. It all depends on the quality of the source.

iii) In general, he acts as if the culture in which the NT came to be written was illiterate or preliterate—hence the appeal to oral tradition. Now this is indeed, as he says, “old hat for higher critical students of the NT,” but it was stupid then, and it's stupid now. Dumb ideas don't grow wiser with the passage of time. I'm reminded of Vincent Taylor's old quip that if the form critics were right, then “the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection.”⁶¹⁶

Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that an oral stage preceded the writing of the Gospels, oral tradition is a conservative principle rather than a creative principle. As the authors of *Reinventing Jesus* have pointed out:

[The disciples'] recollections were not individual memories but collective ones—confirmed by other eyewitnesses and burned into their minds by the constant retelling of the story. Thus, both the repetition of the stories about Jesus and the verification of such by other eyewitnesses served as checks and bal-

⁶¹⁶ *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (Macmillan 1993), 41.

ances on the apostles' accuracy. Memory in community is a deathblow to the view that the disciples simply forgot the real Jesus.⁶¹⁷

There is, however, no good reason to posit an oral stage. Alan Millard has written an interesting book on the subject. After a very long chapter on "Writing in Herodian Palestine," he says the following:

The literacy situation in Jewish society differed from that in the Graeco-Roman in a notable way because there was a strong tradition of education in order that men, at least, should be prepared to read from the Scriptures in synagogue services. In theory, every Jewish male was expected to do so.⁶¹⁸

There were synagogues all over the country...Those synagogues owned copies of the Scriptures on rolls which were read and studied weekly, according both to Josephus (Apion 2.175) and to Philo (Vit. Mos. 2.216)...If a small place like Nazareth had a copy of Isaiah (Lk 4:17), and so as a matter of course a Torah roll and most likely an Esther roll for the festival of Purim, then we may deduce most synagogues had collections of biblical books, even if not a complete set of the Scriptures. The book of Acts suggests that was the case in a synagogue of the Diaspora, at Antioch in Pisidia by specifying "after the readings from the law and the prophets" (Acts 13:15), and assumes it was so as the Scriptures were read everywhere (Acts 13:27; 15:21; cf. 2 Cor 3:15)...A report by Josephus supports that conclusion.⁶¹⁹

The Roman authorities expected to be able to communicate through writing on imperial monuments, by displaying the Senate's decrees in Rome and by dispatching written orders and decisions to provincial governors for them to convey to their subjects...Placards were another form of public notice.⁶²⁰

The wider demand for writing in the Graeco-Roman world is exhibited in the masses of legal deeds from Egypt and the smaller number from Palestine...The letters and notes found at Masada and in the Bar Kochba caves attest the same expectation that addressees could read or easily find readers...Material in Chapter 4 implies quite a lot of people could read to some extent...The legends on coins were pointless unless some users could read them, they were intended as propaganda.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ J. Komoszewski, M. Sawyer, & D. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Kregel 2006), 33-34.

⁶¹⁸ *Reading & Writing in the Time of Jesus* (NYU 2000), 157. Cf. A. Millard, "Zechariah Wrote (Luke 1:63)," P. Williams et al., eds., *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting* (Eerdmans 2004), 47-55.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Everyday life generated a variety of bureaucratic documents. The Jewish kings, the Herodian dynasty and the Roman governors all exacted taxes from the people and they had to be assessed and collected. There were central records, inevitably of considerable volume, and local records and records kept by individual tax-collectors.⁶²²

Writing was essential in military circles, too.⁶²³

Letters, proceedings in councils and debates in law courts all required clerks able to write fast and accurately, raising the question of the use of shorthand.⁶²⁴

Outside official circles, commerce, legal matters and family affairs all called for secretarial skills, providing a livelihood for a multitude of scribes in Palestine, in the same way as is so amply illustrated in Egypt.⁶²⁵

All of these considerations, together with the material presented in Chapter 4, suggest many non-professionals wrote to some extent, keeping accounts, putting names on pots, ossuaries and other possessions, perhaps writing for their own information memoranda, and notes and even copying books in Aramaic or Hebrew or Greek, as we know others did in Egypt at the same time and at Dura Europos a century or two later.⁶²⁶

S. Liberman, a leading Jewish authority on the early rabbinic period, is worth citing: following his study of the evidence for writing among the early rabbis, he concluded, “in line with the foregoing, we would naturally expect the logia of Jesus to be originally copied in codices.”⁶²⁷

Well before the Fall of Jerusalem the early Christians were familiar with written texts, through the letters the Apostles wrote to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Pisidia (Acts 15) and especially Paul’s correspondence beginning shortly before AD 50.⁶²⁸

This is just a sampling of the evidence that Millard marshals to document the extent of reading and writing in the 1C Roman Empire.

Another scholar makes the same point from a somewhat different angle:

⁶²² Ibid., 170.

⁶²³ Ibid., 172.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 175.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 176.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 210-211.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 211.

A purely oral state of transmission of Gospel tradition also faces other historical objections:

1. Literacy was widespread in Palestinian Judaism. “The society where Jesus appeared—even the small towns in the Galilean countryside—was no pre-literary society.”

2. The occasion that necessitated a written transmission of Christian traditions was the separation of believers from the teaching leadership, as the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:22-29) and the letters of Paul show. It was already present in the earthly ministry of Jesus which was conducted both in Galilee and also in Judea.

3. The bilingual and Greek-speaking background of some of Jesus’ followers also would have facilitated a rapid written formulation and transmission in Greek of at least some of his teachings.

4. Even among the more “establishment” rabbis of the 1C the teaching process was apparently not totally oral.⁶²⁹

Teachings of Jesus were in all likelihood already being circulated during his earthly ministry. They were of necessity used by his apostles in their “kingdom of God” missions since it was his message and not their own that they preached. Some of the teaching may well have been written down, repeated and discussed by the apostles’ converts, that is, by (family) clusters of Jesus’ adherents in the various cities, towns and villages in and around Galilee and Judea.⁶³⁰

As Gamble notes:

Christian communities, though they were not more literate than society at large, and indeed, were probably less so, were nevertheless strongly oriented toward the written word. For Christians, texts were not entertainments or dispensable luxuries, but the essential instruments of Christian life. One cannot imagine a Christian community in antiquity, even the earliest, that would not have relied upon texts, for like the Jewish synagogue, the literature of faith was part of the *raison d’être* of the community. Texts had a constitutive and regulative importance for Christian thought and action. This was preeminently and primitively true for the scriptural texts that Christianity appropriated from Judaism. It was hardly less true for those specifically Christian documents that were soon written for the instruction and administration of fledgling congregations by early Christian missionaries, and, later, those written in the service of communication and support among small, scattered churches in a large, unsympathetic, and hostile social environment. Unlike every other religious movement in the Roman world save Judaism and perhaps Orphism, Christianity was constitutionally oriented to texts. Though not every Christian could read, every Christian regularly heard reading. Texts were read aloud in worship, interpreted in preaching and catechesis, cited in apologetical debates, deployed in intramural

⁶²⁹ E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, 22.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

theological disputes, and perused for personal edification—all the routine, practical activities of any Christian community. Books were essential to the ordinary life of a Christian congregation. Christians had a standing need for them, and produced, procured and employed them accordingly.⁶³¹

The concluding statements of the epilogue (Jn 21:24-25), like the prologue to the Gospel of Luke, are book conscious. Both have a readership in view and touch on the same motifs; the reliability of the author and his traditions (21:24; cf. Lk 1:2-3), the multiplicity of available traditions (21:24; cf. Lk 1:1-2), and the explicit awareness of producing one book among many others (21:25; Lk 1:1,3).⁶³²

Robin Fox adds,

Where Bacchic societies offered a myth of their God, Jews and Christians offered history; the pagan mysteries conveyed a secret experience, whereas the Jews and Christians offered a “revelation” based on texts.⁶³³

One of the fundamental contrasts between pagan cult and Christianity as this passage from oral culture of myth and conjecture to one based firmly on written texts.⁶³⁴

In the Greco-Roman Empire, literacy wasn't limited to the “educated classes.” Nicholas Horsfall points to such evidence as graffiti, public inscriptions, as well as reference to midwives and head shepherds in technical manuals, the education of slaves, and military correspondence.⁶³⁵ Literacy could be acquired through homeschooling rather than formal schooling, as a father apprenticed his sons to carry on the family business.⁶³⁶

For his part, Keith Hopkins draws attention to bipartite receipts, tax receipts, authenticators and signatories, temple libraries, village schools, guild guidelines and guild secretaries to illustrate the extent of literacy even among the Roman peasantry.⁶³⁷ He ends by observing that,

⁶³¹ *Books & Readers in the Early Church*, 141.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶³³ *Pagans & Christians*, 94.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶³⁵ “Statistics or states of mind?” *Literacy in the Roman World*, M. Beard et al., *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Supplement 3 (1991), 59-76.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶³⁷ “Conquest by book,” *ibid.*, 148-58.

As before, humble believers tried to communicate with god(s) via prayers, dreams, and petitions; that was ancient practice. For the first time in the 4C, God communicated with all believers in the Roman empire by means of a single book. The empire was hooked into a religious system, however diverse the interpretations of difference sects and churches. The radical and subversive message of primitive Christianity could not have become initially established across the whole empire without significant sub-elite literacy.⁶³⁸

If literacy was that widespread among gentile villagers, it would certainly be higher among Jewry, with their bookish piety, including the authors of the NT. And the habits of the synogogue carried over into the church. As Fox remarks:

Mothers and fathers could plainly be important, as they must have been for literate Jewish children; in 2 Tim 3:15 Timothy is said to have had knowledge of the scriptures since childhood...he presumably owed it to his mother, a Jewish woman (Acts 16:1).⁶³⁹

During the Great Persecution, the authorities ere told to hunt out texts of Christian scriptures and at Cirta in north Africa we have marvelous evidence of the results. Thirty-seven different codices are shown to have been “brought out” by various Christians and handed over for destruction, but in each case, the Christian is a lector, or Reader, in the Church’s hierarchy. Then, too, Readers were special people, but remarkably, among Christians, Readers might be little boys. As E. Peterson showed, their attested ages in epitaphs include examples from 5-18.⁶⁴⁰

As he also notes,

If we accept the ingenious reckoning of T. C. Skeat, a standard papyrus-roll of twenty sheets would cost about one-and-a-half drachmas in the 2C: “it follows that books in the ancient world were not very expensive, at least for the sort of people likely to need them.”⁶⁴¹

The gospels could have been written at any time, from contemporaneous reports. As one scholar has argued:

There is therefore a strong probability that Mark’s Aramaic source was written by one of the disciples who took part in Jesus’ final Passover meal. This is more likely to have happened sooner rather than later, as part of the felt need to

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 157-58. Cf. A. Bowman, “Literacy in the Roman empire: mass & mode,” *ibid.*, 119-32.

⁶³⁹ R. Fox, “Literacy & power in early Christianity,” *Literacy & Power*, A. Bowman & G. Woolf, eds. (Cambridge 1994), 142.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 143-44.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

explain how and why Jesus died. We may reasonably infer a date of c.27-40 CE for this source, depending on when we date the events narrated.⁶⁴²

We have found substantial and decisive evidence that parts of Mark's Gospel are literal translations of written Aramaic sources...We found it possible to account for the transition from lucid Aramaic to obscure Greek, not by a rotten translator or by the obtuse and destructive redactor who stalks the pages of NT scholarship, but precisely by means of a careful and accurate translator.⁶⁴³

One of the twelve must have been the original source for Mk 10:35-45, because only the twelve are said to have been there, and we saw reason to believe that the passage is an authentic account of real conversations. Equally, one of the twelve need not have written it personally, and we saw on the other hand reason to believe that Mk 14:12-26 was written by an eyewitness who was not a member of the twelve.⁶⁴⁴

The date of such material is likely to be very early indeed. There is no reason why the accounts from the ministry should not have been written down by eyewitnesses shortly after the events occurred...I do not see how such a source could have been written later than c. 40 CE, when the Gentile mission was such a great success that it would have to be taken note of. A date earlier than this is surely more probable.⁶⁴⁵

We must therefore reopen the question of the date of Mark itself. A date of c. 65 CE was more or less conventional for some time, and American scholars have recently tended to go for an even later date. The basis for these late dates was, however, always slim, and the portrayal of this document as flimsy post-70 fiction is the unsatisfactory consequence of reading it in the light of literary theory which has emerged from the study of modern fiction...We now have a purely critical argument for an early date than is conventional. If Mark wrote as late as 65, he would surely have altered these passages as much as he edited some others. We have seen how Matthew and Luke felt a need to do so. Once again, this basic observation does not give us a precise date. It does, however, mean that a date c. 40 CE must be regarded as highly probable.⁶⁴⁶

As another scholar has also observed:

Linguistic analysis and retranslation into Aramaic have demonstrated in a large number of such instances that an origin in a Palestinian Jewish setting is the most plausible scenario. Indeed the local social and political flavour of many

⁶⁴² M. Casey, *Aramaic sources of Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge 1998), 251.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 259-260. Cf. *An Aramaic Approach to Q* (Cambridge 2005), 186.

sayings suggest to some leading scholars the existence of written compilations at least as early as the 40s of the 1C.⁶⁴⁷

The means, motive, and opportunity existed to transcribe Jesus' words; to write an early account, and to disseminate that account widely and rapidly.

Moving on, much of chapter 13 is a rehash of arguments on loan from other contributors. It recycles the same equivocation over a "vision," the same comparisons with ufology, the same appeal to the clichés of crowd psychology, the same arguments from silence, the same ignorant claims about travel in the ancient world, the same unsubstantiated allegations about the orality, authorship, dating, and coherence of the dominical traditions, the same false dichotomy between advocacy and accuracy, the same claim of legendary embellishment. Since I've ready disposed of all these objections, they don't merit a separate reply. But I'll comment on a few details.

Even if the hallucination hypothesis could account for the Easter appearances, it is powerless to account for the empty tomb. So it is, at most, a bridge that suddenly ends halfway across the river, which is a bridge to nowhere.

And, at the risk of stating the obvious, the empty tomb and the Easter appearances go together. For if Jesus rose from the dead, then it's hardly surprising that the tomb is empty and he appeared in the flesh to his followers. However, an empty tomb without the Easter appearances, or Easter appearances without the empty tomb lack the same inner logic.

Whether 1 Cor 15 has reference to an objective sighting or a subjective vision doesn't turn on the import of the verb (*horao*). All of the recorded sightings of the risen Christ in the Gospels and Acts have reference to a public, external event. And since Paul is appealing to tradition, that's the point of reference.

As to ufology, the reason that most of us discount alien abductions and the like is that we have antecedent reasons for believing it is highly unlikely that ETs are visiting the earth—reasons such as:

i) What fraction of the planets are even habitable? What fraction are fine-tuned for life as we know it?

⁶⁴⁷ M. Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (IVP 1994), 19.

ii) On what fraction of habitable planets, assuming there are any, did life randomly evolve?

iii) On what fraction of habitable planets on which life did originate, assuming that occurred, did intelligent life randomly evolve?

iv) Why would an advanced alien species take a special interest in an evolutionary backwater like Earth?

v) How did they traverse so many light years to get here?

vi) Why do aliens and alien spacecraft bear a striking resemblance to low budget science fiction movies made in the 1950s?

vii) Why are they so elusive?

viii) How do they evade our surveillance equipment?

Now, a dedicated ufologist will have ingenious answers to all these objections. My point is not to get mired in this debate.⁶⁴⁸ Rather, the larger point is that skepticism with respect to ufology, or apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, has no direct basis in generic theories of mass hallucination, but on the particular nature and particular evidence for a particular claim in relation to the totality of the evidence we have for everything else we believe about the nature of the world we inhabit. And this isn't transferable from one type of case to another.

No amount of general evidence of the phenomenon of mass hallucination amounts to any evidence at all for the hallucinatory character of any particular encounter, in and of itself.

The only evidence that counts as evidence for a hallucination is twofold: (i) the evidence that such an encounter could not be veridical and (ii) the evidence of conditions conducive to a hallucination.

To revert to ufology, the reason to disbelieve in alien encounters is not because we have evidence that people are sometimes subject to hallucinations. Rather, the reason to disbelieve in alien encounters is, in the first instance, whatever preexisting evidence we have that such encounters are far more unlikely than not. Given that

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. H. Ross et al., *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men* (NavPress 2002).

specific defeater or undercutter, crowd psychology is then brought in to explain the illusory perception.

Even so, some of our beliefs are much more central and better attested than others. So there's a certain amount of give in our belief-system. And, of course, one's belief-system is person-variable.

i) To take his other example, Parsons simply assumes that apparitions of the Blessed Virgin are bogus, and further assumes that the reader will agree with him. He then mounts an argument from analogy to the Easter appearances of Christ.

But, of course, a Catholic reader might concede the argument from analogy, but draw a very different conclusion.

ii) From a Protestant perspective, what does it mean to say that we reject Marian sightings? This doesn't mean that we necessarily reject the "sightings" of an individual whom the witnesses report to be Mary.

Are we talking about the experience of the percipient or the external stimulus?

A "sighting" can either have reference to the subject of the sighting—the perception of the observer, or the object of the sighting—what was seen.

We might credit their subjective experience. We might admit that they saw something. What they saw is a matter of interpretation.

After all, how do they know what Mary looks like? Jesus was seen by his contemporaries.⁶⁴⁹

But no one today is a contemporary of the Virgin Mary. No one knows what she used to look like when she was walking the earth two thousand years ago.

⁶⁴⁹ If you ask how Paul identified Jesus, one answer given in all three accounts is that Jesus identified himself. In addition, it's quite likely that Paul already knew what Jesus looked like and sounded like. On a standard chronology of the NT they were probably in Jerusalem at the same time of year. They were contemporaries. Paul studied in Jerusalem. His sister lived there. Even if he wasn't residing there year round, he'd be in town for the all the major feast days. And that's when Jesus came to town. Jesus would visit the Temple. Paul would visit the Temple. Jesus would draw a crowd. So sooner or later it's almost inevitable that Paul would have seen and heard Jesus preach.

Any “recognition” of Mary would be based, not on a knowledge of the historical individual, but on Catholic art and iconography. Mary a la Raphael.

iii) Given the OT prohibitions against necromancy, why would we expect the Virgin Mary to be popping up all over the place? Why would Mary do what is forbidden in Scripture? Why would she entice the faithful to traffic with the dead? Seems out of character.

Since a Marian apparition would be a theological phenomenon, I judge such a claim by theological criteria, such as the OT prohibitions against necromancy, and the cessation of public revelation.

iv) As Robert Gundry points out:

Visions of the Virgin Mary...have not generated belief in her resurrection so much as the reverse: belief in her assumption to heaven (sometimes understood as entailing a resurrection) has generated visions of her.⁶⁵⁰

v) Apropos (iv), Catholicism is a religious tradition which fosters the expectation of Marian apparitions. But the apostles were not expecting to see the risen Lord. St. Paul was not expecting to see the risen Lord. You can only project what is already in the mind.

vi) This isn't simply a case of comparing Marian apparitions with Easter appearances.

We have more than the Easter appearances to go by. We also have everything that went before. Easter Sunday comes at the tail-end of the Gospels. It's the climax.

All of this additional biographical material gives us a chance to become acquainted with the apostolic witnesses to the Resurrection, as well as observing the way in which each Evangelist handles other incidents in the life of Christ. So by the time we arrive at the Resurrection, we know a good deal about the character and quality of the reporters.

This is not at all the same thing as comparing a reported sighting of Jesus with reported sighting of Mary, where you have two isolated reports without any supplementary background material to help us size up the reporters.

⁶⁵⁰ P. Copan & R. Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection* (IVP 2000), 108-109.

To compare the first Easter with Lourdes or Fatima or other suchlike is comparing the incomparable.

vi) Parsons oversimplifies the reportage, as if everyone present saw the same thing. What we in fact have are conflicting reports:

According to a number of reports, some of which came from professional journalists, a majority of those present said that they had seen the sun tremble and dance, and spoke of a variety of colors issuing from the sun and illuminating the crowd. Some, however, said that they had seen the face of the Virgin, and some that the sun whirled like “a giant Catherine wheel,” falling toward the earth as if to burn it up in its rays. Many also declared that the sun radiated a great deal of heat, so that by the time the sing had ended (by some accounts, about ten minutes later), everyone who had been soaked by the rain was dry).⁶⁵¹

His comparison with Elvis sightings is no better:

i) Elvis sightings are a national joke. They’re the stuff of late-night stand-up comedy routines.

ii) The tomb of Elvis is not an empty tomb. And if its occupancy were in doubt, it could always be disinterred, just as the Jewish authorities could easily have squashed the Easter “legend” if the story of the empty tomb were false.

iii) Elvis was just a man. He was conceived the old-fashioned way. He performed no miracles. He fulfilled no prophecy. So there’s no expectation of anything extraordinary attending the circumstances of his demise.

On the general resort to hallucinations to discredit the Easter appearances, Craig makes an obvious, but neglected point:

No one attempts to explain Bigfoot sightings by saying that people were having subjective visions of Bigfoot. Rather they saw a dark form moving in the distant bushes, or found large footprints in the snow or mud, or in other cases simply concocted a story.⁶⁵²

The resort to hallucinations is a classic example of special pleading, because a skeptic would not resort to that explanation in “parallel” cases.

⁶⁵¹ S. Swartz, *Encountering Mary* (Harper 1992), 82-83.

⁶⁵² *Jesus’ Resurrection*, 189-190.

As I say, appeal to crowd psychology is not a fundamental reason to deny testimony. Rather, we deny the testimony on other grounds, and then, if need be, account for how the witnesses could be self-deluded by appeal to crowd psychology.

The phenomenon of mass hysteria is not, itself, a reason for skepticism with respect to a specific claim. There is no general presumption that an event witnessed by a number of observers is unreliable. Rather, the generic appeal to crowd psychology is introduced in order to explain how they could be so self-deluded—after having established their self-delusion on other grounds.

Parsons classifies as hallucinatory the common phenomenon of survivors who sense the presence of their departed loved ones. But there are several problems with this move:

i) Parsons is appealing to one thing he doesn't believe in to justify something else he doesn't believe in. He doesn't believe in actual encounters with the dead.

But to designate the phenomenon—which is a cultural universal—as hallucinatory, is prejudicial and question-begging.⁶⁵³ Why should we peremptorily discount such a widely attested phenomenon as delusive?⁶⁵⁴

The reason that Parsons dismisses this as hallucinatory is presumably because he is a materialist. Since, for him, consciousness cannot survive brain death, there is nothing beyond the grave which a surviving friend or family member could objectively sense.

⁶⁵³ Necromancy is condemned in the OT. This doesn't mean that trafficking with the dead is impossible, merely forbidden (e.g. 1 Sam 28). I'd also draw a distinction between seeking contact with the dead and an unsought apparition. A séance is strictly prohibited, but whether the dead can ever initiate contact from their side of the grave is another question (cf. Mt 17:3).

⁶⁵⁴ E.g. G. Bennett, *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story & Discourse* (Utah State University Press 1999); S. Braude, *Immortal Remains* (Rowman & Littlefield 2003); K. Corcoran, ed., *Body, Soul, & Survival* (Cornell 2001); G. Doore, ed., *What Survives?* (Jeremy Tracher 1990); D. Fontana, *Is There An Afterlife?* (O Books 2005); A. Jaffé, *Apparitions* (Spring Publications 1979); R. Kastenbaum, ed., *Between Life & Death* (Springer 1979); D. Klass et al., eds., *Continuing Bonds* (Taylor & Grancis 1996); L. LaGrand, *After Death Communication* (Llewellyn 1997); B. Schoenberg et al., eds., *Bereavement* (Columbia 1975); L. Storm & M. Thalbourne, eds., *The Survival of Human Consciousness* (McFarland 2006); <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/afterlife/>; <http://www.beyondreligion.com>.

But if you don't share his secular presuppositions, then you won't be so dismissive of so many case studies. The stats are quite high.

ii) Parsons also fails to distinguish between hallucinations and pseudohallucinations:

The term pseudohallucination has been used to describe images as vivid and immediate as perception but not mistaken as such. Pseudohallucinations are more likely to be perceived in response to isolation or an intense emotional need.⁶⁵⁵

In terms of the psychological profile, the disciples would have been prey, not to hallucinations, but pseudohallucinations. But a distinguishing feature of a pseudohallucination is that awareness on the part of the subject that this impression is, indeed, illusory rather than delusive.⁶⁵⁶ By contrast, the disciples, as well as the women, took the appearances of Christ to be real.

This poses a dilemma for Parsons. The best he can say is that what they saw was illusory, and they knew it to be illusory. But, of course, this fails to explain why they reported the encounter as a real, tangible encounter—especially when they had nothing to gain and everything to lose by lying about their experience.

iii) In addition, hallucinations are often threatening whereas pseudohallucinations are often comforting.⁶⁵⁷ So, once more, if you were going to classify the Easter appearances as non-veridical, then they would fit the category of pseudohallucinations rather than hallucinations. But that, again, is at odds with the narrative.

iv) Survivors who believe that they are in contact with a departed loved-one don't typically believe that he rose up bodily from the grave. They believe that if you exhumed the coffin, it would contain a corpse. They think the dead are still dead. They believe that the soul survives the grave, not the body—consciousness, not corporality.

v) There is no real parallel between ghostly apparitions and the Easter appearances, for the Risen Lord is seen handling and consuming the same food as the disciples (Lk 24:30,41-43; Jn 21:9-13). Notice that this is not a visionary man consuming visionary food, but the very same food they themselves were eating.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford 1987), 299.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 648.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 300, 648.

Of course, a sceptic is free to dismiss these accounts, but, if so, why reinterpret them along visionary lines? If you don't believe them as they stand, why tinker with them at all?

vi) Another very basic problem with the hallucination theory is the abrupt cessation of dominical apparitions. As Adolf Schlatter observes:

The limitation of the Easter report can only be accounted for by the actual course of events. When there were no more appearances of the Risen One, they were no longer claimed or invented.⁶⁵⁸

The only reason the dominical apparitions commence on Easter and terminate on Pentecost is that Jesus did, indeed, rise from the dead on Easter Sunday and ascend to the Father on Pentecost, fifty days later.

vii) Even if, for the sake of argument, the Easter appearances were phenomenologically ambiguous, that's really beside the point inasmuch as Scripture has never regarded event-revelation as self-explanatory. Rather, what you have in the doctrine of divine revelation in an internal relation between word and sign, word-revelation and event-revelation—whereby God's words interpret his deeds.

Edwin Yamauchi discusses several difficulties with the hallucination hypothesis:

Hallucinations do play a major role in religious cultures, but they are induced either by drugs or by the extreme deprivation of food, drink, and sleep (cf. E. Bourguignon, "Hallucination and Trance: An Anthropologist's Perspective," in Keup, p. 188). These factors were not present in the various appearances of the risen Christ to his disciples.

The details of the varied epiphanies of Christ, which in several cases were to more than one individual and on one occasion to more than 500, are not typical of hallucinations. A visual hallucination is a private event; it is by definition the perception of objects or patterns of light that are not objectively present (ibid. p. 81). The variety of conditions under which Christ appeared also militate against hallucination. The appearances to Mary Magdalene, to Cleopas, to the disciples on the shore of Galilee, to Paul on the road to Damascus, all differ in their circumstances. C. S. Lewis suggests:

And any theory of hallucination breaks down on the fact (and if it is invention it is the oddest invention that ever entered the mind of man) that on three separate

⁶⁵⁸ *New Testament Theology* (Baker 1999), 1:376.

occasions this hallucination was not immediately recognized as Jesus (Luke xxiv. 13- 31; John xx. 15, xxi. 4) [*Miracles*, 1947, p. 151].⁶⁵⁹

Moving on:

A personal friend, Rebecca Long, president of the Georgia Skeptics, set up a telescope with a solar filter, and demonstrated—to anyone that cared to look—that the sun was not spinning or dancing.⁶⁶⁰

Notice Parsons' unquestioning assumption. Parsons assumes that the reader won't approach his own claim with the same radical skepticism with which he approaches the gospels. By his own standards, the reader should dismiss this anecdotal story as "oral tradition," a "hand-me-down" tale, and "undisguised propaganda." Why doesn't he apply the criteria of multiple attestation or dissimilarity to Rebecca Long's story about the telescope?

Indeed, notice how the business of a telescope dovetails just a little too neatly with the stock dramatic device of the "recognition scene." Then we have the "personal" asides—all too obviously another literary device to lend an air of authenticity to a forgery. Observe also how the story is cleverly situated in the Bible-belt, for that added touch of vraisemblance.

Clearly the true *sitz-im-leben* for this story is not Conyers, Georgia, but the University of Houston, where Parsons teaches philosophy. He needed a sermon illustration to go along with his secular kerygma, so he made up this delightfully droll little story about a backwoods visionary in Conyers, Georgia. But while literal-minded unbelievers who surf The Secular Web may well be naïve enough to be taken in by Parsons' quaint tale, Bible-believing Christians, tutored in the wise ways of higher criticism, can see right away that his apocryphal narrative fails to meet the criteria of authenticity.

He then cites a source reviewing hallucinations associated with Caesar, Drusus, Attila, Constantine, Muhammad, and Charlemagne.

So what? We must always sift through testimony to a particular event on a case-by-case basis. Some sources are more reliable than others. Some witnesses are more credible than others. Some reports are more plausible than others.

⁶⁵⁹ <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/yama.html>

⁶⁶⁰ ET, 436-437.

Moving on:

It is ⁶⁶¹very odd that the Gospels depict the disciples as skeptical of the Resurrection.

It is logically odd, but not psychologically odd. Obstinate unbelief in the face of the miraculous is a common theme of Scripture, from Genesis and Exodus through the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles.

Moving on:

This story [of Joseph of Arimathea] contradicts the tradition, preserved in Mark and Luke, of women going to the tomb on the Easter morning for the purposes of anointing the corpse. This story presupposes that the body had been dishonorably buried, i.e., without the proper rites and ceremonies...there would have been no reason for the women to undertake a dangerous task that could implicate them as followers of a seditious troublemaker.⁶⁶²

In reply:

i) Mark and Luke alike recount both the honorable burial accorded to Christ by Joseph as well as the plan of the women to anoint the body themselves. So Parsons' characterization of the record is misleading, as if one gospel recorded one tradition, and another gospel an opposing tradition.

ii) The burial was a rush-job, so the women wanted to add their own finishing touches, and pay their respects in their own way.

There has never been any particular logic to the way we honor the dead. Logically, you'd just dig a hole in the ground and deposit the body. End of story.

But, of course, grieving is a deeply personal affair, with personal ways of saying farewell that are strictly unnecessary.

iii) I don't know that the women were at risk. This assumes that the women enjoyed a certain sociopolitical status which their action would either put in jeopardy or jeopardize the establishment. But this was a man's world, remember. It is highly unlikely that in such a patriarchal culture, the power-brokers would have taken the

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 443.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 446.

women all that seriously or felt the least bit threatened by their sentimental ceremonies.⁶⁶³

iv) And even if there were an attendant risk, devout or devoted women are quite capable of braving social convention out of loyalty to a loved one.⁶⁶⁴ There is a quite unreal and inhuman quality to Parsons' petty objections.

Moving on:

In fact, we can watch the Joseph of Arimathea legend as it grows in the gospels.
In Mark...In Luke...In Matthew...in John.⁶⁶⁵

i) The conservative dating of the gospels goes something like this: on the basis of patristic testimony, John is generally dated to the 90s, although it's possible on the basis of internal evidence to date it to the 60s, assuming that Jn 21 was occasioned by the death of Peter. In addition, John reflects an accurate knowledge of pre-70 Jerusalem.

Acts is dated to the early 60s in part because it leaves the disposition of Paul's case up in the air. Also, the political climate in Acts fits well with a pre-Neronian situation. And, of course, Luke would antedate Acts.

Matthew is dated to before 70 AD in part because the fulfillment-formula is not applied to the Olivet Discourse, and because the relation between the church and the synagogue fits well with a pre-war situation.

Assuming Markan priority as a partial solution to the Synoptic problem, Mark antedates Matthew and Luke alike.

But if you happen to be a Matthean prioritist, then you reverse the sequence.

If, on the other hand, you date all four gospels to sometime after 70 AD, then you can still have Markan priority, but beyond that I don't see any further basis for working out a relative chronology of composition.

⁶⁶³ "It may have been less dangerous for the women than for the male disciples to be present at the cross: the men would more likely risk arrest as suspected insurrectionists," R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 293, n.94.

⁶⁶⁴ "For the women, faithfulness to loved ones through shame and death is a culturally expected role," *ibid.*, 293.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 446.

ii) Indeed, the conventional dating scheme, be it early or late, is inconsistent with Parsons' theory of legendary accretion. Assuming that Mark is the first gospel, and John the last, how can such a theory account for the fact that Mark is the most miraculous of the four, and John the very least?

Moving on:

Finally, there is no record that the earliest Christians honored the site of Jesus' tomb. If they had known the place where the Resurrection supposedly had occurred, surely they would have venerated the site.⁶⁶⁶

Several problems:

i) This assumes that the Jewish authorities would have allowed Christians to turn the tomb into a shrine. Not bloody likely!

ii) It also assumes that the apostolic Church of Jerusalem would have approved of such veneration.

iii) It further assumes that the Gospels furnish us with an accurate picture of pre-70 Jerusalem—an assumption which is deeply problematic for a liberal critic.

Moving on:

As for tales that would be incredible in any other context we need only mention the Gadarene swine, the withering of the fig tree, and the feeding of the 5000.⁶⁶⁷

There's a modicum of truth to this observation, although Parsons has overstated the case, and there's nothing especially damning about his observation.

i) There is nothing inherently irrational about calibrating your belief to the source of information. The fact that I might not believe in something strange reported in the National Inquirer doesn't make it arbitrary for me to believe the same thing if reported in the Wall Street Journal. We qualify our belief in relation to the quality of the evidence.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 447.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 450.

Likewise, a Christian may believe something simply because the Bible says it because he has good reason to believe in the Bible.

Some Scriptural events have an inherent credibility while others are credible because they're recorded in a reliable source.

ii) There is also a big difference between saying that we don't believe something and saying that we find it unbelievable. We may find something believable, but not believe it. That is to say, we may regard it as entirely possible, but without sufficient evidence to constrain our belief. I'm not speaking here of Scripture, but generally. Many things are untrue which could be true.

iii) Parsons sets up a rather artificial hiatus between Scripture and "any other context." Many Christians, including many Christian intellectuals, also believe in extra-Biblical miracles of one sort or another, such as a miraculous healing or providential deliverance. When they open the Bible they are not entering a world which is a world apart from their own experience. There are differences, to be sure, but they lie along a common continuum of experience.

iv) Not all beliefs have the same sense of intensity or immediacy. Knowledge by description doesn't necessarily carry the same conviction as knowledge by acquaintance.

There are many cases in which we merely take someone's word for it and defend it on that basis alone. It's more a case of intellectual loyalty or allegiance. We credit the claim and defend it because that is our duty, given the credibility and authority of the source, and not because we enjoy a direct apprehension of its veracity.

v) What we take to be believable or unbelievable is, indeed, context-dependent. You can see this both in conversion and deconversion.

Conversion or deconversion may either be incremental or sudden. If incremental, it may be the cumulative effect of an intellectual process. Even if sudden, it will then be bolstered by supporting arguments. In fact, the original reason may lose its original hold on us, but be supplanted by other, stronger reasons.

There are many different ports of entry into a state of belief, as well as points of egress. And once that transition occurs, there are many preexisting intellectual resources to reinforce either state.

Suppose some personal tragedy causes me to lose faith in God. Up until then, I found the Bible believable. Indeed, I firmly believed in Scripture.

Having, however, lost my faith, I now start to bone up on all the objections to the faith. I study Bible criticism. I read Hume on miracles. I immerse myself in evolutionary literature. I read Ayer on God-talk, Ryle on the philosophy of mind, Quine on nominalism, Freud, Feuerbach, and Durkheim on the sociology and psychology of faith.

Having thus nursed and nurtured my nascent unbelief, not only don't I believe the Bible, but I find it unbelievable. Indeed, I wonder how I could ever have believed in such a book.

But, of course, we can see the same process in reverse. Suppose some personal tragedy causes me to lose faith in humanism. Up until then, I didn't believe the Bible. Indeed, I found the Bible to be quite unbelievable.

Having, however, come to an existential faith in Christ, I bone up on all the reasons for faith. On Bible criticism I plow through Allis, Archer, Barnett, Blomberg, Bock, Bockhuehl, Bruce, Carson, Currid, Guthrie, Helm, Hemer, Hengel, Keener, Kitchen, Lightfoot, Robinson, Stonehouse, Twelftree, Warfield, Wiseman, Wright, Yamauchi, Young, Zahn, &c.

I read Earman on Hume; Behe, Dembski, Denton, and Wise on evolution; Barr, Byl, Foster, Lewis, Penrose, Smythies, and Taliaferro on dualism.

I devour everything written by Plantinga. I read...but you get the picture by now.

Having thus nursed and nurtured my nascent faith, not only don't I believe in humanism, but I find it unbelievable. Indeed, I wonder how I could have believed in such a creed.

So Parsons is quite correct in observing that belief is context-sensitive. And saying so does not condemn us to relativism, for the supporting arguments on either side are not equally compelling.

On a final note, Gary Habermas has summarized a number of obstacles in the way of the hallucination theory.⁶⁶⁸ Let us conclude with his overview of the issues:

⁶⁶⁸ http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_explainingaway/crj_explainingaway.htm

One of the central issues in this entire discussion concerns whether a group of people can witness the same hallucination. Most psychologists dispute the reality of such occurrences, as pointed out below. A rare attempt suggesting that collective hallucinations are possible, without any application to Jesus' resurrection, is made by Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones. They point to phenomena such as claimed sightings of the virgin Mary and other accompanying reports from groups of people. In cases like these, "expectation" and "emotional excitement" are "a prerequisite for collective hallucinations." In such groups we see the "emotional contagion that so often takes place in crowds moved by strong emotions."⁶⁶⁹

But favoring collective hallucinations is highly problematic, and on several grounds.

(1) To begin, the chief examples of "collective hallucinations" provided by Zusne and Jones were group religious experiences such as Marion apparitions. But these citations simply beg the question regarding whether such experiences could possibly be objective, or even supernatural, at least in some sense. In other words, why must a naturalistic, subjective explanation be assumed?⁶⁷⁰ This seems to rule them out in an a priori manner, before the data are considered.

(2) Further, the collective hallucination thesis is unfalsifiable. It could be applied to purely natural, group sightings, simply calling them group hallucinations, too. On this thesis, crucial epistemic criteria seem to be missing. How do we determine normal occurrences from group hallucinations?

(3) Even if it could be established that groups of people witnessed hallucinations, it is critical to note that it does not at all follow that these experiences were therefore collective. If, as most psychologists assert, hallucinations are private, individual events, then how could groups share exactly the same subjective visual perception? Rather, it is much more likely that the phenomena in question are either illusions—perceptual misinterpretations of actual realities⁶⁷¹—or individual hallucinations.

⁶⁶⁹ Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Extraordinary Phenomena of Behavior and Experience* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1982), 135–136.

⁶⁷⁰ For a number of critical observations and responses to such phenomena, see Elliot Miller and Kenneth Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), esp. Chapters 11-14 and Appendix A.

⁶⁷¹ Here Zusne and Jones repeatedly refer to collective hallucinations, even though they conclude, conversely, that these groups may be seeing actual phenomena. So the "final answer to these questions has not been obtained yet" (135-136)!

Moreover, the largest series of problems results from comparing this thesis to the New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances. And here, the explanatory power of this hypothesis is severely challenged, since much of the data not only differs from, but actually contradicts, the necessary conditions for "collective hallucinations." One of these issues will be mentioned here, with others following below.

(4) For instance, Zusne and Jones argue that "expectation" and "emotional excitement" are "prerequisites" before such group experiences will occur. In fact, expectation "plays the coordinating role."⁶⁷² But this scenario contradicts the emotional state of the early witnesses of Jesus' resurrection appearances. Even psychologically, the early believers were confronted face-to-face with the utter realism of the recent and unexpected death of their best friend, whom they had hoped would rescue Israel. As those recent events unfolded in a whirlwind of Jesus' physical beatings, crucifixion, and seeming abandonment, the normal response would be fear, disillusionment, and depression. To suppose that these believers would exhibit "expectation" and "emotional excitement" in the face of these stark circumstances would require of them responses that would scarcely be exhibited at a funeral! All indications are that Jesus' disciples would exhibit the very opposite emotions from what Zusne and Jones convey as the necessary requirement.

By comparison, the disciples' experience is totally unlike those in the other cases above where pilgrims expressly traveled long distances, exuberantly gathering with the explicit desire to see something special. There would seem to be very meager grounds of comparison here with Jesus' disciples.⁶⁷³

Many other crucial problems also plague the thesis of group hallucinations, and we will pursue several more below. But for now we will repeat that Zusne and Jones never attempt to apply their approach to Jesus' resurrection. Rather, they even rather incredibly close their examination with the admission that group hallucinations have a "dubious status" because it is not possible to ascertain whether these individuals were actually even hallucinating!⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷² Ibid., 135.

⁶⁷³ The rejoinder could be made that perhaps a few individuals hallucinated individually, thereby inducing excitement in the others, preparing them for hallucinations. From our critique below, a multi-faceted response could be fashioned. I would suggest especially critiques 4-5 in the next section regarding the two cases of Paul and James, which would be highly problematic for this view both because of the former skepticism and later conversions of these apostles, plus (to varying extents) critiques 2-8 in the "Additional Problems" section.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 136; cf. 134-135. For the more regular assessment against group hallucinations, see Phillip Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 210; J.P. Brady, "The Veridicality of Hypnotic, Visual Hallucinations," in *Origins and Mechanisms of Hallucinations*, Wolfram Keup, ed. (New York: Plenum, 1970), 181; Weston La Barre, "Anthropological Perspectives on Hallucinations and Hallucinogens," in R. K.

Kent has suggested that Paul experienced a conversion disorder, a psychological condition characterized by physical symptoms like blindness or paralysis in the absence of specific neurological or medical causes. Such was brought about by his inner turbulence, conflict, doubt, and guilt. Goulder agrees about Paul, but adds that Peter and others, say perhaps James, were also suffering from the same problem.

But again, we must align our hypotheses with the facts, and multiple problems oppose this interpretation, as well.

(1) Initially, only Paul is known to have manifested any such symptoms, so Goulder's inclusion of the others is not factually grounded.

(2) Simply a huge problem is that, from what we know about Paul and James in particular, there were no mitigating grounds to suppose such a disorder. We have no indication that there was the slightest inner conflict, doubt, or guilt concerning their previous rejection of Jesus' teachings. Critics agree that James was an unbeliever during Jesus' earthly ministry (John 7:5; cf. Mark 3:21). Paul's skepticism is even better known, since he persecuted early Christians (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23). But we do not know of any guilt on Paul's part, for he considered his actions to have been both zealous and faultless (Phil. 3:4-6). In short, there is no indication of any desire for conversion by either of these men. To suppose otherwise is groundless. In short, these men are exceptionally poor candidates for this disorder.

(3) Further, the psychological profile strongly opposes an application to any of these three apostles. Conversion disorder most frequently occurs to women (up to five times more often), adolescents and young adults, less-educated persons, those with low IQ's, low socioeconomic status, or combat personnel.⁶⁷⁵ Not a single characteristic applies to Peter, Paul, or James.

(4-5) Further, holding that victims of conversion disorder are strong candidates for both visual and auditory hallucinations is stretching the case a bit. These are uncommon characteristics.⁶⁷⁶ Not only are these apostles poor candidates for the disorder in the first place, but even apart from this malady, they were additionally not predisposed to experience hallucinations. And here we even have two separate critiques, due to very different sets of circumstances. There is no indication that either James or Paul, in particular, longed to see Jesus. Their un-

Siegel and L. J. West, eds., *Hallucinations: Behavior, Experience and Theory* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 9-10.

⁶⁷⁵ Harold Kaplan, Benjamin Sadock, and Jack Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, Seventh ed. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1994), 621.

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 621-622. I am also indebted to clinical psychologist Gary Sibcy, Ph.D., for these last two responses.

belief is a poor basis for producing hallucinations! James the skeptic and Paul the persecutor are exceptionally tough obstacles for the hallucination thesis! Once again, to say otherwise is mere conjecture apart from historical data.

(6) Neither does this hypothesis account for what would otherwise be considered delusions of grandeur—in this case the apostles’ belief that God had imparted to them a message for the entire world that others must accept. But it is unlikely that there are other delusions involved here, even occurring at precisely the same time, so the case is further weakened.

In sum, charging that these apostles were victims of conversion disorder simply does not fit the facts. It is clearly an over-reliance on a hypothesis apart from the data, a theory not anchored to reality. For all of the necessary factors to converge simultaneously is just highly improbable. And like the charge of mass hallucinations, it also falls prey to still other difficulties.

Many other issues remain regarding the hallucination hypothesis.

(1) Even individual hallucinations are questionable for any believers who felt despair at the unexpected death of Jesus just hours before. Their hopes and dreams had suddenly been dashed. Extreme grief, not exuberance, would be the normal response.

(2) The wide variety of times and places when Jesus appeared, along with the differing mindsets of the witnesses, is simply a huge obstacle. Men and women, hard-headed and soft-hearted alike, all believing that they saw Jesus, both indoors and outdoors, by itself provides an insurmountable barrier for hallucinations. The odds that each person would be in precisely the proper frame of mind to experience a hallucination, even individually, decrease exponentially.⁶⁷⁷

(3) Generally, hallucinations do not transform lives. Studies have argued that even those who hallucinate often (or perhaps usually) disavow the experiences when others present have not seen the same thing.⁶⁷⁸ Critics acknowledge that Jesus’ disciples were transformed even to the point of being quite willing to die for their faith. No early text reports that any of them ever recanted. To believe that this quality of conviction came about through false sensory perceptions without anyone rejecting it later is highly problematic.

(4) Of course, if the appearances were hallucinations, then Jesus’ body should have been located safely and securely in its grave just outside the city of Jerusa-

⁶⁷⁷ S. J. Segal, “Imagery and Reality: Can they be Distinguished?” in Keup, 103-113. Even if people hallucinated in groups, Zusne and Jones also note that not everyone would have these experiences (135).

⁶⁷⁸ Segal, 103; unpublished study of hallucinations by Shea Lambert, “Hallucinations and the Post Death Appearances of Jesus,” 20 September, 2000, 2-5, 8-9.

lem! That body would undoubtedly be a rather large disclaimer to the disciples' efforts to preach that Jesus was raised! But hallucinations do not even address this, so another naturalistic thesis is required.

Still other issues also impede the hallucination hypothesis. While these are perhaps not as weighty, they still count:

(5) Why did the hallucinations stop after 40 days? Why didn't they continue to spread to other believers, just as the others had?

(6) The resurrection was the disciples' central teaching, and we usually take extra care with what is closest to our hearts. This is what drove Paul to check out the nature of the gospel data with other key disciples on at least two occasions, to make sure he was preaching the truth (Gal. 1:18-19; 2:1-10). He found that they were also speaking of Jesus' appearances to them (1 Cor. 15:11).

(7) What about the natural human tendency to touch? Would no one ever discover, even in a single instance, that their best friend, seemingly standing perhaps just a few feet away, was not really there?

(8) The resurrection of an individual contradicted general Jewish theology, which held to a corporate event at the end of time. So Jesus' resurrection did not fit normal Jewish expectations. (9) Lastly, hallucinations of the extended sort required by this naturalistic theory are fairly rare phenomena, chiefly occurring in certain circumstances that militate against Jesus' disciples being the recipients.⁶⁷⁹

Clinical psychologist Gary Collins summarizes a few of the issues here:

Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly are not something which can be seen by a group of people...Since an hallucination exists only in this subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it.⁶⁸⁰

In fact, the problems with this thesis are so serious that these critics "would have to go against much of the current psychiatric and psychological data about the nature of hallucinations."⁶⁸¹ This would seem to place these approaches at odds with current scientific knowledge on this subject. We conclude that applying the hallucination and similar subjective theses to Jesus' resurrection appearances is severely mistaken across several disciplines and at many points.

⁶⁷⁹ For many details, see Wiebe, 199-200, 207-211. To repeat our earlier point, many of the objections throughout this section also apply to what I have termed the illumination theory.

⁶⁸⁰ Gary Collins, personal communication, 21 February, 1977.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 13

Chapter 14 is essentially a critical book review of Swinburne's *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*.

As such, this is not a critique of evidence for the Resurrection, per se, but one man's case for the Resurrection—a case which is conditioned by a number of philosophical and theological assumptions.

This is a telling exercise in a couple of respects:

- i) It reveals the extent to which any argument for or against the Resurrection is value-laden. At issue here is not merely the raw evidence, but the way in which that evidence is framed within a larger conceptual scheme.
- ii) For theological and polemical reasons, Swinburne's presentation illustrates a common apologetic strategy, by presenting a minimalist version of the Christian faith—on the theory that it is easier to defend less rather than more. That would seem to lower the burden of proof.

This is not entirely tactical on Swinburne's part, for his own belief-system represents a contraction of classical Christian theism. Swinburne denies divine foreknowledge, denies divine impassability, denies everlasting punishment, denies the necessity of penal substitution, affirms libertarian freewill—which he justifies by recourse to quantum indeterminism, and defends animal suffering by adapting a soul-building theodicy to the animal kingdom.

Ironically, I find myself agreeing with Martin much of the time, although I would often ground my criticisms rather differently, and I don't have problems with everything they have problem with.

I don't see that historical evidence can be quantified. For the most part, this has to do with psychological probabilities, not metaphysical probabilities. You can't assign numbers to human motives, but you don't need to since that we can all relate to that phenomenon at a human level.

The attempt to quantify historical evidence reflects a misguided effort to confer on historiography the precision and prestige of the natural and mathematical sciences. But that sort of statistical rigor is neither possible nor necessary.

As fellow members of the human race, we share certain generic traits in common. We can identify with the disciples because we understand human psychology from the inside out. We know what we would do in their situation. Pretentious efforts to chart this universal intuition by putting percentages on paper is an academic affectation which Christian apologetics would do well to decline.

iii) That said, Martin also appears to labor under the misimpression that the only way to mount a probabilistic case for the Christian faith is by using the formal methods of someone like Swinburne. In this he disregards the illative approach of Basil Mitchell.⁶⁸²

In addition, some Christian scholars favor a synthetic approach, such as a principled alliance between evidentialism and Reformed epistemology.⁶⁸³

With all due respect to William Rowe, I just can't get that worked up over the prospect of Bambi expiring in a forest fire.

i) For one thing, the whole notion of animal suffering courts the pathetic fallacy.

Men and women who survive animal attacks tell us that they felt nothing at the time: they went into an instantaneous state of shock.

To project our cringing imagination onto the animal because of how we would feel if we were eaten alive or burned alive or other suchlike has little basis in empirical fact.

It's all based on projecting a pet owner's puppy-love onto the animal kingdom. I'm reminded of folks who refuse to evacuate in the face of a hurricane because they'd have to leave Fido behind. Better to put their children at risk than leave the family dog behind.

This hyping of animal death as a theodicean problem is symptomatic of social decadence. There are real theodicean problems, but animal suffering is a pseudo-

⁶⁸² For a comparison and contrast between Mitchell and Swinburne, cf. R. Prevost, *Probability & Theistic Explanation* (Oxford 1990).

⁶⁸³

http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/wykstra_steve/not_done_in_a_corner.pdf

problem for morally cage-fat moderns who have lost all sight of their ethical priorities.

ii) Beyond that, forest fires and herbivores exist to keep the flora in check, while scavengers, predators, and parasites exist to keep the herbivores in check. These are natural checks and balances in a self-regulating ecosystem. This isn't gratuitous evil at all. The underlying teleology is plain enough.

What is evil about a deer dying in a forest fire? Is fire evil? Would a world without fire or electricity or electrical storms be a better world? On the face of it, fire and electricity and electrical storms are hardly gratuitous evils.

Is a forest fire evil? Doesn't a forest fire have a beneficial effect by thinning the overgrowth?

Even if a forest fire were evil, it would not be a gratuitous evil, but a side-effect of the natural good of having a world with fire and electricity.

Is pain evil? Isn't pain generally a good thing? A warning-signal? People who can't feel pain are at great risk.

Moreover, the capacity for physical pain is interrelated to the capacity for physical pleasure.

It's painful to burn to death, but that, again, is an incidental consequence of a natural good.

It is ironic how often the hardnosed naturalist turns squeamish at the sight of blood.

And the ecosystem exists for the benefit of man—unfashionable as that might sound. Animal suffering can pose no problem for theology when theology is what assigns to the animal kingdom its proper role in the great scheme of things (Ps 104).

iii) Related to this is the question of whether an animal can be wronged. If Bambi dies in a forest fire, was Bambi wronged by God? Was the fire an injustice to the fawn?

If no party was wronged, then how would the natural evil constitute an objection to the existence of God?⁶⁸⁴

Moving on:

God's moral perfection also conflicts with his all-knowingness, for, to be all-knowing, God would have to possess, for example, knowledge by acquaintance of the pleasure a sadist derives from torturing children. In order to be all good, however, God cannot have this knowledge.⁶⁸⁵

This is an assertion in search of an argument. On the face of it, Martin is confounding an object of knowledge with an incidental mode of knowledge. According to Scripture, God knows all truths. It is unclear what truth is internally annexed to knowledge by acquaintance.

Sensation has no truth-value. To be hot or cold, feel pleasure or pain, is without truth-value. It is either true or false to predicate pain or pleasure of something or someone, to say that something is pleasant or induces pleasure in the subject, but pleasure itself is neither true nor false, and so is not a proper object of knowledge. A proposition about a given sensation can be true or false, a proposition can be an object of knowledge, but not the sensation itself. We feel pain, and we form a belief about our pain, but belief and sensation are two different things.

Likewise, when I perceive a red apple, do I perceive the red property as it inheres in the apple, or do I perceive the red property-instance in my mind? The apple is a material object, but is my mental impression a material object? The apple occupies space, but my mental image does not. So the way in which I sense a red apple is indirect and immaterial. Although there is a physical and external object, as well as a physical process by which that stimulus is presented to the mind, the universal is not. Now, it is God who instantiates the universal in the first place.

Moving on:

Since [according to Swinburne] total theories [e.g. theism] include everything, there is no background theory for them to be compatible or incompatible with, hence the only relevant criterion is simplicity. However, Swinburne is mis-

⁶⁸⁴ Ironically, Stephen Wykstra has argued that Humean assumptions undercut the argument from evil. Cf.

http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/wykstra_steve/on_avoiding_the_evils_of_appearance.pdf

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 455.

taken. Theism is less probable than not, given commonsense and scientific theories that explain the empirical world.⁶⁸⁶

But there are several problems with this statement:

i) In fairness to Martin, he is arguing with Swinburne on his own grounds. What's so striking is that both men use Bayesian probability theory to generate opposing results.

ii) I differ with both men regarding their appeal to simplicity:

a) The principle of parsimony is an empty norm. We can all agree with it, but to say that nature favors the shortest route, or that we shouldn't multiply entities beyond necessity, is an otiose principle since you'd have to know what reality is in order to know if an explanation is more intricate than it needs to be.

So Occam's razor is often wielded in a prejudicial or question-begging manner. If, indeed, matter is all there is, then Occam's razor will rightly shave away a dualistic explanation. But if dualism is true, then it will cut into the flesh and bone.

Occam's razor can never tell you what reality is like. It can only be applied to competing explanations of the same putative reality, where one materialistic explanation is more economical than another, or one dualistic explanation is more economical than another.

Occam's razor can only apply within a given worldview. It cannot be used to choose between one worldview and another.

b) There is also a deceptive simplicity to materialism. A dualist will appeal to certain phenomena, such as abstract objects or mental properties.

A materialist will have to reinterpret this phenomenon consistent with materialism. He will try to internalize the phenomena by domesticating them.

But his explanation will be just as complicated as the dualist. Both sides have the same number of phenomena to account for.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 455-456.

A materialist will have to contrive a parallel explanation for the very same phenomena. So his alternative conceptual scheme will be just as intricate as dualism.

c) Simplicity comes in more than one color, and there's a tradeoff between one kind and another. As Alan Baker points out, we need to distinguish between:

Syntactic simplicity (roughly, the number and complexity of hypotheses), and ontological simplicity (roughly, the number and complexity of things postulated).

Here it is unclear whether 'postulation' refers to the entities being postulated, or the hypotheses which are doing the postulating, or both. The first reading corresponds to parsimony, the second to elegance. Examples of both sorts of simplicity principle can be found in the quotations given earlier in this section.

While these two facets of simplicity are frequently conflated, it is important to treat them as distinct. One reason for doing so is that considerations of parsimony and of elegance typically pull in different directions. Postulating extra entities may allow a theory to be formulated more simply, while reducing the ontology of a theory may only be possible at the price of making it syntactically more complex.⁶⁸⁷

Many outstanding thinkers have favored a more opulent ontology, in part because this simplifies their theorizing, viz. Butchvarov, Cantor, Hector Neri Castaneda, Findley, Gödel, Leibniz, David Lewis, Meinong, Terence Parsons, Penrose, Plantinga, Plato, Sylvan, Vallicella.

iii) But his own position isn't even coherent on its own grounds given the conflict between science and common sense. As Russell said:

Naïve realism leads to physics and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false.⁶⁸⁸

There's nothing common sensical about quantum mechanics or general and special relativity or naturalistic evolution or eliminative materialism.

Moving on:

FWD [the freewill defense] presupposes that human beings have contracausal freedom, that is, that human choice is not fully determined by the operation of

⁶⁸⁷ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/simplicity/>

⁶⁸⁸ B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning & Truth* (1940), 15.

the brain...is there any reason to suppose that the brain is not governed by normal laws of physics?⁶⁸⁹

Now, I'm no supporter of the FWD, but notice how Martin is conflating two distinct theses:

- i) That human choice is not predetermined by any set of prior conditions;
- ii) That the operation of the brain is not predetermined by any set of prior conditions.

FWD is neutral on the mind/body problem. In principle, a libertarian could admit that the brain is governed by the normal laws of physics without admitting that human agency is governed by the normal laws of physics. Martin is so blinded by his own commitment to physicalism that he can't see around it.

Moving on:

He also admits, however, that an all-good God could create a world without pain and suffering, that is heaven and, according to Christianity, has done so.⁶⁹⁰

True enough, but exceedingly misleading. Heaven presupposes redemption, which presupposes the Fall.

Moving on:

If God's honor is infinitely wounded by human sin, why could it not be appeased more effectively by the eternal punishment of Jesus?...It would have been a punishment more commensurate with human sin if Jesus had remained dead.⁶⁹¹

i) Demerit is a moral quality. As such, it cannot be quantified in this mechanical fashion. Martin is committing a category error.

ii) "Infinite" is a slippery word. I think it best not to "infinite" to categories of merit and demerit.

⁶⁸⁹ ET, 457.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 458.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 460.

Moving on:

One must wonder why it took God so long to offer atonement via the sacrifice of his Son. Humans had been sinning for tens of thousands of years before the Incarnation.

- i) Scripture does not endorse his evolutionary chronology.
- ii) The timing of the atonement is independent of the timing of its effectuation—just as you can get a cash advance of earnings you will accrue.
- iii) The atonement is not a discrete event, but one with a providential preparation in redemptive history.

Moving on:

He completely ignores what seems to me the hardest case to explain away of apparent moral imperfections: Jesus' tacit approval of slavery.⁶⁹²

- i) This assumes that an atheist is in a position to moralize. Jeff Lowder, a fellow atheist and co-contributor, rated Martin's case for secular ethics a failure.⁶⁹³ So did another atheist—Taner Edis.⁶⁹⁴ So did yet another atheist—Austin Cline.⁶⁹⁵
- ii) Not every form of slavery is immoral. For example, there are situations in which indentured service is licit.

There was also the challenge of what to do with POWs. If you repatriate them, they live to fight you another day. So do you slay them or enslave them?

These were practical problems in ancient warfare. There is no ouchless, painless answer. Martin never had to live in the shadow of the Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian empire, so he can afford to be glib.

⁶⁹² Ibid., 462.

⁶⁹³ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/martin_review.shtml
http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/martin-reply.shtml

⁶⁹⁴ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/taner_edis/review_of_martin.html

⁶⁹⁵ <http://atheism.about.com/od/bookreviews/fr/AtheismMorality.htm>

iii) The mission of Christ was not to challenge the social order, which, in some measure, presupposes the fall, but to reverse the fall. Christ is treating the root-cause of social ills, not the symptoms.

Moving on:

At times Jesus argues that one is saved by following a strict moral code and at other times he maintains that one is saved by making great sacrifice in following Jesus. These teachings are difficult to reconcile with the Atonement view.⁶⁹⁶

This fails to draw some elementary distinctions. We are saved by the grace of God. But those in a state of grace behave differently than do those in a graceless state.

We are justified by the sole and sufficient merit of Christ. And we are sanctified by the Spirit of God.

We do not save ourselves. And we can do nothing to solicit or earn God's favor.

But, of course, to be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ.

Moving on:

Jesus was completely wrong that he would return within the lifetime of the followers.⁶⁹⁷

A well-worn charge which I and others have repeatedly rebutted.⁶⁹⁸ I'd merely note in passing a few fundamental problems with this allegation:

i) Ordinarily, liberals or unbelievers deny that our gospels preserve the *ipsissima verba* of Christ. So, for Martin's charge to stick, he must admit that our Gospels do, in fact, accurately transcribe the speeches of Jesus.

ii) Ordinarily, liberals or unbelievers date the canonical gospels to sometime after 70 AD. But it's implausible to suppose that any Evangelist would preserve a

⁶⁹⁶ ET, 462.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 462.

⁶⁹⁸ F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings of Jesus* (1983), 225-30; R. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Eerdmans 2002), 497-505; B. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Eerdmans 2001), 348-349.

prophecy which had been falsified by subsequent events—much less put a false prophecy in the mouth of Christ.⁶⁹⁹

Moving on:

We lack independent confirmation of the Resurrection both from Jewish and pagan sources.⁷⁰⁰

i) We also lack independent confirmation for many things in Tacitus, Josephus, &c.

ii) The NT is a Jewish source!

iii) What is meant by “independent” confirmation of the Resurrection? To confirm the Resurrection, a writer would need to believe in the event in order to confirm it. So would that make him an independent source? Or a Christian? Note the implicit circularity in Martin’s appeal. The insinuation is that only evidence from hostile sources, not sympathetic sources, is reliable. But that’s a very rather subversive standard of evidence. As Warfield remarks:

Are we to lay it down as the primary canon of criticism that no sympathetic report of a master’s teaching is trustworthy; that only inimical reporters are credible reporters?

Absurd as it seems, this is the actual canon of critical reconstruction upon which our would-be guides, in recovering from the obscuring hands of the evangelists the real Jesus, would have us proceed.

Surely we do not need to pause to point out that the procedure we are here invited to adopt is a prescription for historical investigation which must always issue in reversing the portraiture of the historical characters to the records of whose lives it is applied...the result of its universal application would be, so to speak, the writing of all history backwards... with a series of portraits which would have this only to recommend them, that they represented every historical character as the exact contrast to what each was thought to be by all who knew and esteemed him.⁷⁰¹

Moving on:

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. M. Bockmuehl, *ibid.*, chapter 3.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁷⁰¹ *The Lord of Glory* (Guardian Press, n.d.), 159-161.

The genuine Pauline epistles, not to mention the earlier non-Pauline letters, provide no details about the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus.⁷⁰²

- i) Naturally, since they don't belong to the genre of historical narrative.
- ii) Even so, they do confirm the reality of the Resurrection.

While Martin scores some points against Swinburne, his review is conspicuous for its studied selectivity. Swinburne's chapters on "The Historical Sources" (4), "The Appearances of the Risen Jesus" (9), "The Empty Tomb and the Observance of Sunday" (10), as well as "Rival Theories of what Happened" (11), in which Swinburne sifts through the historical evidence and weighs the competing theories, are passed over in silence.

In addition, Swinburne has already responded to Martin, but Martin passes over his reply in silence.⁷⁰³ More recently, Timothy McGrew has come to Swinburne's defense.⁷⁰⁴

So, when all is said and done, Martin has said much and done little. Given the gaping lacunae in his treatment, Martin hasn't come close to refuting Swinburne's cumulative case for the Resurrection.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 462.

⁷⁰³ <http://www.tektonics.org/tomb/martinm11.html>

⁷⁰⁴ <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~mcgrew/plantinga.pdf>

Chapter 14

In chapter 15, Fales inveighs on what he takes to be the failure of Reformed and Roman Catholic epistemology and hermeneutics:

According to one view, understanding and evaluation of the Canon are properly mediated by the Church, its designated authorities, and the traditions it preserves. According to the other, these matters rest ultimately with individuals, guided (of course) by the literal content of the text but also by some special perceptivity supplied by God—a special grace or insight provided by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰⁵

In reply:

i) The way that Fales has queued up the alternatives assumes that the Reformed and Roman Catholic positions are simply two different means of achieving the same goal.

Now, Vatican I (session 3) does imply that the Catholic rule of faith is a sort of cement lacking in the Protestant rule of faith. If, therefore, the Catholic rule of faith does not constrain a consensus, then it falls short of its own claims.

ii) But unless the Protestant rule of faith targets the same goal, then it doesn't fail to hit a target which it was never aiming at, unless it was supposed to aim at the same target.

iii) The rationale for sola Scriptura is not, in the first place, that sola Scriptura does something which tradition or the magisterium cannot do; rather, the rationale is simply that sola Scriptura is the only rule of faith that God has given to the church. It's a factual claim, not a pragmatic claim.

iv) In addition, appeal to sola Scriptura does not imply that everyone who studies the Bible will agree on what it means. That is certainly not a standard by which Fales judges his own epistemology.

Fales is an empiricist. But he doesn't justify his appeal to sense experience on the grounds that this is a way of ensuring uniformity of belief. Rather, he justifies empiricism on the grounds that sense experience is the only source of knowledge.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 469.

Likewise, a Protestant isn't claiming that everyone who reads the Bible will come to a knowledge of the truth. Rather, he's claiming that the Bible is the only source of knowledge for certain truths.

Not everyone who reads it is right, but everyone who is right reads it. Sola Scriptura is a necessary condition of saving knowledge, not a sufficient condition.

v) Likewise, regeneration is a necessary condition of saving knowledge, not a sufficient condition. The witness of the Spirit is not a hermeneutical tool. Rather, it's a basis for the assurance of salvation.

Moving on:

The techniques developed by modern historiography were not themselves particularly controversial, except when applied to the sacred texts of the "home" religion...the debate focused on the Enlightenment demand that the historian cannot countenance special pleading on behalf of Christianity's foundational texts.⁷⁰⁶

This is a misrepresentation of the debate:

i) An Evangelical⁷⁰⁷ doesn't have one hermeneutical standard for Scripture, and another for extrascriptural literature. An Evangelical would reject the principles of methodological doubt and uniformitarianism for sacred and profane literature alike.

ii) An Evangelical treats Scripture differently, not because he's operating with a double-standard, but because Scripture lodges different claims than the average extra-Scriptural text.

A profane text does not claim to be inspired or prophetic. For that matter, neither do Hindu or Buddhist "scriptures" since they don't subscribe to a personal Absolute.

iii) Since the Bible does lodge that claim, the self-witness and self-understanding of Scripture is pertinent to our interpretation.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 470.

⁷⁰⁷ "Evangelical" is a slippery term. I'm using it to designate a conservative, Bible-believing Protestant.

iv) There is also a difference in the way we ascertain the meaning of a textual truth-claim, and the way we verify the textual truth-claim.

We have the same hermeneutic for ascertaining the import of Scriptural and extra-scriptural literature alike.

v) Assuming that we can verify the self-witness of Scripture, whose interpretation we arrive at by ordinary methods, then that does have some bearing on our overall interpretation of Scripture. We would not impute error to Scripture. We would not post-date prophetic books.

Moving on:

So far as the global issues go—the correct assessment of testimony for miracles, or the proper way to judge the revelatory claims of ancient texts—it would be more nearly fair to say that higher criticism grew out of (and its partisans were convinced by) (the arguments of Isaac la Peyrere, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Paine, and Kant. Surely such a compressed and popularizing characterization of this critical sensibility as Bultmann’s much-maligned comment that we moderns can no longer believe in miracles once we avail ourselves of the fruits of modern technology, is properly to be understood by situating it within this intellectual context.⁷⁰⁸

While this may be historically accurate, it goes no distance towards warranting the methodological assumptions of Troeltsch and other suchlike. As Iain Provan as observed with reference to OT studies:

How do we know that we claim to know about the reality of the past? It is a fundamental question, and yet often not articulated and itself debated by those writing about the history of Israel...Here is the game known as historical enquiry. Here are the rules of the game. This is how one must play. If it is objected that perhaps some of the rules do not make particular sense, or that some aspects of the game are not worth playing, then the response is often, not debate on these points, but naked re-assertion. We have always played the game this way; at least we have done so since proper historical scholarship began in the 19C. It is simply how modern scholarship is. If you do not like it, find a game of your own. In fact, if you do not like it, you are a fundamentalist, or some such undesirable. So the game is saved, to be enjoyed by all its participants; but it is saved by avoiding fundamental questions of his viability. The danger of adopting this strategy is, of course, that a detachment from reality may begin to set in. The game goes on; but does anyone know any longer whether it has any

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 475.

connection with the world outside itself? The rules are upheld; but are they rules that allow or prohibit us from seeing reality more broadly? Are they rules, in fact, that in the end simply leave us in epistemological darkness, beyond the reach of any evidence itself that might invade our comfort zone, unsettle our ideology, spoil the game?⁷⁰⁹

It is worth underlining here the intellectual incoherence of that modern approach to the past, reaching back at least as far as Hume, which claims to eschew dependence upon testimony, yet moves on to ground its beliefs about the past in “common human experience.” This latter can itself only ever (at best) be a construct dependent upon testimony (that which some others whom we happen to believe have claimed to be their experience), and appeal to it often seems in fact to represent nothing other than a smokescreen in which it is hoped that the very limited nature of the writer’s individual experience might be lost sight of. Real human experience (as opposed to the construct “common human experience”) is vast, undifferentiated and complex.⁷¹⁰

Yet whence, exactly, did the knowledge under consideration spring, in the light of which the Bible’s testimony is now to be assessed? Here, as when watching the accomplished magician, it is important to watch carefully for the slight of hand. For the reality is that this so-called knowledge is really faith in disguise. When Thompson says, “There is no more ‘ancient Israel’...This we do know,” he actually knows nothing of the kind, and we certainly do not. He simply believes it strongly, and “we” are drawn into the faith statement to offer some community of support for the faith expressed. What he “knows,” he “knows” because he has decided to invest faith in certain testimonies about the past rather than others, the most notable of the “others” being the testimony of the Hebrew Bible. The ground upon which this epistemological privileging of non-biblical testimony can be defended are, however, entirely unclear. The wisdom of it is equally unclear. For the delusion that one possesses knowledge when one is only exercising faith is ever prone to lean on to a refusal to exercise faith when there are good grounds for doing so. We claim that we already know, and on that basis we close ourselves off from testimony that challenges our already preconceived knowledge, “Knowledge” becomes a wall that we build around ourselves to protect ourselves from reality, whether individually or as a group...It is, when manifest in this way, an obstacle rather than a means to the apprehension of reality...It is one of the ultimate ironies, indeed, that when Enlightenment scholarship gets to this point, it is essentially no different from the fundamentalist religion that it so profoundly despises. It is closed in on itself, unable and unwilling to hear voices from the outside. It is an irrational approach to reality indeed.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ “In the Stable with the Dwarves,” *ibid.*, 164-165.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179-180, n.44.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

Continuing with Fales:

The evidence we have (the ordinary evidence, that is) is disarmingly thin on many matters of paramount religious importance.⁷¹²

And that's the point of divine revelation. It's a source of information where evidence is otherwise lacking.

Fales then cites some of the "findings" of historical criticism:

We know that the creation account given in the first three chapters of Genesis owes a large debt in style, imagery, and content to the creation myths of the Sumerians and other ANE pagan religions.⁷¹³

i) Gen 3 is not a creation account.

ii) Do we know this? Here is the view of the different scholars in the field of Semitics:

Enuma Elish and Gen 1-2 in fact share no direct relationship. Thus the word *te-hom/thm* is common to both Hebrew and Ugaritic (north Syria) and means nothing more than "deep abyss." It is not a deity, like *Ti'amat*, a goddess in Enuma Elish. In terms of theme, creation is the massively central concern of Gen 1-2, but is a mere tailpiece in Enuma Elish, which is dedicated to portraying the supremacy of the god Marduk of Babylon. The only clear comparisons between the two are the inevitable banalities: creation of earth and sky before the plants are put on the earth, and of plants before animals (that need to eat them), and humans; it could hardly have been otherwise! The creation of light before the luminaries is the only peculiarity that might indicate any link between the Hebrew and Enuma Elish narrative, but where did it earlier come from?⁷¹⁴ Not known, as yet. Thus most Assyriologists have long since rejected the idea of any direct link between Gen 1-11 and Enuma Elish [T. Jacobsen, Kinnier-Wilson; W. Lambert, A. Millard],⁷¹⁵ and noting else better can be found between Gen 1-11 and any other Mesopotamian fragments.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² ET, 476.

⁷¹³ Ibid., 476.

⁷¹⁴ Even this apparent parallel is specious. All we find is a passing reference to day and night (1:36), an ambiguous allusion to Apsu's halo (1:68), and a depiction of Marduk as a solar deity (1:102). These are not presented as creative fiats. And they follow no creative sequence.

⁷¹⁵ K. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans 2003), 591, n.7.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 424-425.

We must question, however, whether the position that the Bible demythologizes Mesopotamian legends takes into account all the critical data bearing on the issue. First of all, the common assumption that the Hebrew stories are simplified and purified accounts of Mesopotamian legends is fallacious, for in ANE literature simple accounts give rise to elaborate accounts, not vice versa. One can view this evolution from simple to complex in the many recensions of the Sumerian/Babylonian flood legends. Ironically, many scholars who accept the model of the complex to simple would then argue that the Pentateuch is the product of an evolutionary development from the simple to the complex. One cannot have it both ways.

Second, there are no examples from the ANE in which myth later develops into history. Epic simply never transfigures into historical narrative. And, clearly, the creation and flood accounts in Genesis are presented as direct history with no evidence of myth.

Third, the contrasts between the Mesopotamian and biblical accounts are so striking that they cannot be explained by a simple Hebrew cleansing...Let us consider, for example, four crucial distinctions between Genesis and the Enuma Elish...⁷¹⁷

As we have seen above, there is no piece of literature extant from Mesopotamia that presents itself as an account of creation. Therefore, there is nothing comparable to the creation account of Genesis in terms of literary genre. The similarities between the Enuma Elish are too few to think that the author of Genesis was in any way addressing the piece of literature we know as Enuma Elish.⁷¹⁸

We are terribly ill-informed regarding the history of either Mesopotamian or biblical creation accounts. This makes the argument based on chronological sequence null and void. We cannot say for certain that the traditions preserved by the Israelites are any less ancient than the traditions preserved by the Babylonians.⁷¹⁹

The only evidence that can be produced to support the case for Israelite borrowing is the similarities we have already identified. These are hardly convincing, in that most of the similarities occur in situations where cosmological choices are limited. For example, the belief in a primeval watery mass is perfectly logical and one of only a few possibilities. The fact that the Babylonians and Israelites use similar names, Tiamat and tehom, is no surprise, since their respective languages are cognates of one another.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁷ J. Currid, *Ancient Egypt & the Old Testament* (Baker 2001), 29.

⁷¹⁸ J. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*, 34.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

Likewise,

The paradise motif in the ANE is nearly nonexistent. Recent studies have shown that even those texts that have at times been considered paradisiacal are simply describing “an initially inchoate world” rather than an idyllic existence.⁷²¹

Continuing with Fales:

We have good reason to believe that the seven-headed dragon mentioned in Revelation is derived from a similar beast that inhabits the myth world of the Sumerians.⁷²²

i) The possible background for Rev 12:3 is a very intricate question. Different scholars trace it to numismatics,⁷²³ astrology,⁷²⁴ Greco-Roman and/or ANE mythology,⁷²⁵ world mythology,⁷²⁶ OT prehistory,⁷²⁷ or NT church history.⁷²⁸

ii) As one scholar puts it:

More recently there has been a tendency in folklore studies to abandon the quest for the chimerical prototypical version (Brunvand, *Folklore*, 15-16; cf. C. Lévi-Strauss’ view that a myth consists of all its versions.)⁷²⁹

Notice that Fales has also abandoned his own Straussian paradigm.

iii) The fact that the dragon in Rev 12:3 may have a mythopoetic background is irrelevant to the Gospels since these belong to two very different literary genres—historical narrative as opposed to apocalyptic, with the latter’s densely allusive symbolism.

⁷²¹ J. Walton, *Genesis* (Zondervan 2001), 181.

⁷²² ET, 476.

⁷²³ B. Witherington, *Revelation* (Cambridge 2003), 165-166.

⁷²⁴ B. Malina, *On the Genre & Message of Revelation* (Hendricksen 1995); E. Martin, *The Star That Astonished the World* (ASK 1991).

⁷²⁵ D. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (T. Nelson 1998), 667-686; R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark 1993), 185-198.

⁷²⁶ I. Benson, “Revelation 12 & the Dragon of Antiquity,” *Restoration Quarterly* 29 (1987): 97-102; L. Thompson, *Revelation* (Abingdon 1998), 133.

⁷²⁷ G. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans 1999), 624-635.

⁷²⁸ P. Barnett, “Revelation 12: An Apocalyptic ‘Church History’?” *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting*, P. Williams et al., eds., 292-300.

⁷²⁹ Aune, *ibid.*, 667.

Moving on:

There is a general consensus within HBC that the Gospels were composed later than the collapse of the Jewish revolt in 70 CE.⁷³⁰

This is a circular appeal. All it amounts to is the tautological observation that liberals generally favor a liberal dating scheme for the Gospels—and other books of the Bible. Fales has simply cherry-picked a liberal subset of Biblical scholarship.

Moving on:

There are multiple lines of evidence for this...⁷³¹

In general there are three lines of “evidence” for the late dating of the gospels:

- i) Prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem.
- ii) A form-critical theory of oral tradition preceding the composition of the gospels.
- iii) “Advanced” theology (e.g. “early Catholicism”).

In response:

- i) The a priori denial of predictive prophecy begs the question in favor of secularism.
- ii) This assumes that literate Messianic Jews waited 40-70 years to pen a written record of the Messiah’s advent. If there were literate Jews to pen the OT canon as well as the OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, not to mention Philo’s voluminous output, why posit a long oral state preceding the commitment of the Gospels to writing?
- iii) This assumes an evolutionary and immanent theory of the faith, as if it must progress by process of internal development alone.

Moving on:

Evans reverts narrowly to the familiar—and lame—argument that Acts (hence Luke, hence Mark) must have been written prior to 64 CE, as it ends abruptly prior to the martyrdom of Paul in Rome around that date...But there is another explanation: in fact, there are two. The first is that the rest of Acts has simply

⁷³⁰ ET, 477.

⁷³¹ Ibid., 477.

been lost...It would hardly be surprising if the Roman execution of Paul was such a severe embarrassment to the Church that the author of Acts felt it best to omit it.⁷³²

Several problems with this explanation:

i) His two explanations cannot both be right. So we don't really have two explanations, do we?

ii) Of course you can "say" the ending was lost. You can say that about any book. In the nature of the case that's a claim bereft of evidence.

iii) Even if the original ending were lost, what about the Western text, which contains a sorts of curious additions?

iv) Fales understates the argument for the early date. Sure, the argument is less than compelling, but arguments like these naturally turn on relative probabilities.

v) From a liberal perspective, Luke is not an accurate historian anyway: he makes up speeches and stories whole cloth; so, from a liberal perspective, what would prevent Luke from writing up a happy ending? Even if Paul was executed, Luke could just rewrite the ending and say that Paul was acquitted. The facts are only embarrassing if you care about the facts.

vi) For that matter, Luke also makes no mention of Peter's martyrdom—even though he does mention the martyrdom of Stephen and James.⁷³³

vii) The political situation in Acts, where Christianity is still a *religio licita*, seems quite anachronistic after the Neronian persecution, Jewish revolt, and fall of Jerusalem.

viii) Likewise, interfaith relations between church and synagogue also seem anachronistic after AD 70—when the Jews added an imprecation to the *Shemoneh Esreh*, cursing the Christians.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 477.

⁷³³ As Jason Engwer observes, "The concept that Christians would be ashamed of Paul's death is ridiculous. Luke records other martyrdoms, and the earliest church fathers (Clement of Rome, &c.) speak highly of Paul's martyrdom" (private email 12/26/05).

ix) But even if, for the sake of argument, we favor a post-70 AD date for Luke-Acts, that does not diminish its veracity. As Martin Hengel has stated,

Contrary to a widespread anti-Lukan scholasticism which is often relatively ignorant of ancient historiography, I regard Acts as a work that was composed soon after the Third Gospel by Luke “the beloved physician” (Col 4:14), who accompanied Paul on his travels from the journey with the collection to Jerusalem onwards. In other words, as at least in part an eyewitness account from the late period of the apostles...this is also true of Acts 16:11ff. up to Philippi and then again of 20:4ff. from Philippi. Here the detailed descriptions of journeys and the account of events in Jerusalem, Caesarea and on the voyage to Rome speak for themselves.⁷³⁴

Were Luke-Acts a later pseudepigraphy, it would certainly have been named after another author than the relatively unknown and insignificant Luke, say after Silvanus/Silas, Timothy, Aristarchus, Titus or Tychicus. The number of “better” authors’ names to choose from would have been considerable. In 150 years of “critical” research into Luke, so far no meaningful reason has been advanced for a later transference of this name to the Gospel.⁷³⁵

So Luke-Acts looks back on the destruction of Jerusalem, which is still relatively recent, and moreover is admirably well informed about Jewish circumstances in Palestine, in which respect comparable only to its contemporary Josephus. As Matthew and John attest, that was no longer the case around 15-25 years later; one need only compare the historical errors of the former Platonic philosopher Justin from Neapolis in Samaria, who was born around 100 CE.⁷³⁶

At the time Luke wrote, it was still well known who Peter, John, James, Stephen, Paul, Philip, Barnabas or even Mark had really been. Around 110 or 120 that was no longer the case in the same way. Unlike the later apocryphal Acts, Luke did not have to invent any figures.⁷³⁷

Moving on:

Both HBC and ANE archaeology widely concur that the Exodus story is a myth.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁴ *Paul: Between Damascus & Antioch*, 7.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 477.

Scholarly opinion is no substitute for scholarly argument. For a rebuttal from the world's leading Egyptologist on this particular period of Egyptian history, read chapter 6 (along with the footnotes), of Kenneth Kitchen's magnum opus,⁷³⁹ as well as Hoffmeier's monographs on the Exodus.⁷⁴⁰

Fales has a section on miracles which is a retread of old Humean objections. There is, of course, a vast literature on this subject.⁷⁴¹ I'll just content myself with the following observations:

i) Hume's objection to miracles shares a criterion in common with his objection to natural theology—namely, the principle of proportionality. An extraordinary report demands extraordinary evidence.

By defining a miracle as a “violation” or “transgression” of natural law, Hume makes it sound as if God were a squatter or house-burglar, whereas, from the Scriptural standpoint, God is the homeowner. The Creator doesn't “break into” his own house. Rather, the world was designed as a divine billboard. For a Christian, every “natural” event is an act of God.

ii) This is also why the definition of a miracle as an “improbable” event is question-begging. A miracle would be a work of personal agency. It is not a random event. It is not a throw of the dice. There are no odds either for or against the occurrence of a miracle. And even on statistical grounds, the evidentiary value of a word (prophecy) and sign (miracle) in tandem (Isa 35:5-6; Mt 11:4-5) is far higher than either in separation.

To judge the objection on its own grounds, Jesus is not an ordinary person doing extraordinary things, but an extraordinary person. So there's a natural match between the nature of the agent and the nature of the deed.

But to judge Scripture on Scriptural grounds, the reason why folks don't ordinarily rise from the dead is the same reason they die in the first place. It is not owing to natural causes, but God's judgment on Adam's sin. The impediment is not natural law, but moral law. So the claim that the Second Adam rose from the dead is per-

⁷³⁹ *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 241-312; 553-556.

⁷⁴⁰ J. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford 1996); *Ancient Israel in Sinai* (Oxford 2005).

⁷⁴¹ Among the more recent entries: cf. F. Beckwith, *David Hume's Argument Against Miracles* (U Press of America 1989); J. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure* (Oxford 2000); Levine, *Hume & the Problem of Miracles* (Kluwer 1989). Among the older literature, a good place to start is B. B. Warfield, “The Question of Miracles,” *SSW* 2:167-204.

fectly consistent with the ordinary state of affairs inasmuch as Christ reverses the curse and begins to restore the primordial norm. As Bishop Wright remarks,

The fact that dead people do not ordinarily rise is itself part of early Christian belief, not an objection to it. The early Christians insisted that what had happened to Jesus was precisely something new; was, indeed, the start of a whole new mode of existence, a new creation. The fact that Jesus' resurrection was, and remains, without analogy is not an objection to the early Christian claim. It is part of the claim itself.⁷⁴²

iii) And this brings us to another problem. Why assume that we must begin with a definition of the event rather than the very event itself? Definitions are ordinarily descriptive, not prescriptive. We begin with the phenomena and then set about to classify them. But Hume is using his grid as a fine-mesh filter to screen out miracles in advance of observation. Yet you could establish a miraculous event *qua* event before you establish a miraculous event *qua* miraculous. While a miracle assumes the prior existence of God, it doesn't assume a prior belief in God. That confounds the orders of being and knowing. If Hume were an Egyptian, would he say to himself, "I won't believe my own eyes unless I can attribute the plague of hail to freak atmospheric conditions!" Methinks he would stuff his scruples and dive for cover or run for dear life!

We don't have to classify an event to identify the occurrence of an event. We don't have to show that a miraculous event happened; you only have to show that an event which happens to be miraculous happened.

How we classify the event is a retrospective judgment logically independent of documenting the event itself.

All we must do is to show that a miraculous event *qua* event occurred, not a miraculous event *qua* miraculous. How you interpret the event is a separate question.

iv) If Hume is going to insist that we can never identify the occurrence of a miraculous event, then, logically, we can never identify the nonoccurrence of a miraculous event.

On that view, it is ill-conceived of James Randi to expose fraudulent faith-healers.

So Hume's argument either proves too much or too little

⁷⁴² *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 712.

v) It is also illogical to say that I need an unusual amount of evidence for an unusual event. How could there be more evidence for a rare event than for a commonplace event? One reason we believe that snow leopards are rare is the rarity of their sightings. It is unclear how Hume would establish any out-of-the ordinary event. Moreover, how many inductive instances do I need? The only evidence I need of a four-leaf clover is a four-leaf clover. One will do—no more, no less.

vi) Take the Resurrection. What evidence do you need to show that someone is dead? Extraordinary evidence? Or ordinary evidence?

What evidence do you need to show that someone is alive? Extraordinary evidence? Or ordinary evidence?

That someone who was once dead is alive again is no doubt miraculous, but how does that bear on the nature of the relevant evidence for each individual proposition?

The Resurrection generates an extraordinary relation between two ordinary events: life and death.

vii) The only evidence for the uniformity of nature would be testimonial evidence. Human observation, past and present.

Unfortunately for the opponent of miracles, the database for miracles is identical to the database for the uniformity of nature. Both share a common source in testimonial evidence.

As such, the unbeliever can never play one off against the other. For miraculous events and ordinary events, however they may differ in kind, derive from the same kind of evidence.

viii) In addition, miracles are not contrary to the uniformity of nature. For Christians do not, as a rule, limit miracles to the past. Belief in miracles does not, therefore, presuppose a radical discontinuity between the present and the past.

ix) Hume discounts the testimony to miraculous incidents on the grounds that the witness pool is recruited from the backward and barbarous peoples. One can't help but sense a suppressed circularity in this objection: Why don't you believe in miraculous reports? Because the reporters are ignorant and barbarous! How do you

know they are ignorant and barbarous? Because they believe in miracles! At most, all Hume's argument amounts to is that dumb people believe dumb things. But that is hardly an argument for the proposition that any particular witness is dumb.

x) In addition, the general character of a witness is not only irrelevant to a specific claim, but may be all the more impressive when out-of-character. Even liars only lie when they have a motive to lie, and not when it runs counter to their own interests. And it is not as if the Apostles and prophets were rewarded for their testimony with a tickertape parade.

xi) Hume tries to play off the miracles of one sect against another. However, most major religions don't stake their dogma on miraculous attestation. But even if they did, the Bible doesn't deny the power of witchcraft (e.g. Exod 7-8). And there is no reason why a living faith should have to duel a forgotten faith. Killing it once is quite sufficient. One hardly needs to disinter the remains and have another go at them. For if the "gods" of a long dead faith were unable to defend or resuscitate it (Judges 6:31; 1 Kgs 18:27), then does that not expose them as false gods?

xii) Without a doctrine of divine creation and providence, the unbeliever has no principled way of grounding induction or natural law.⁷⁴³

xiii) To say that pagan mythology is false is an ambiguous charge. Does it mean that that never happened, or that nothing like that ever happens? There is quite a difference. In a novel, none of the incidents may be historical, and yet they are true to life. So even if mythology were wholly fictitious, it might still be lifelike in certain key respects.

xiv) Finally, the objections of Hume, Bultmann, Fales et al. fail to distinguish between methodology and metaphysics. As John Warwick Montgomery points out:

But here a lamentable confusion is introduced between what may be termed formal or heuristic regularity and substantive regularity. To investigate anything of a factual nature, empirical method must be employed. It involves such formal or heuristic assumptions as the law of non-contradiction, the inferential operations of deduction and induction, and necessary commitments to the existence of the investigator and the external world. Empirical method is not "provable." The justification for its use is the fact that we cannot avoid it when we

⁷⁴³ Cf. <http://www.proginosko.com/docs/induction.html>
<http://personal.lse.ac.uk/cartwrig/Papers/NoGodNoLaws.pdf>
http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/2003Why.htm

investigate the world. (To prove that what we perceive with our senses is real, we would have to collect and analyse data in its behalf, but we would then already be using what we are trying to prove!) One cannot emphasise too strongly that this necessary methodology does not in any way commit one to a substantively regular universe: to a universe where events must always follow given patterns. Empirical method always investigates the world in the same way—by collecting and analysing data—but there is no prior commitment to what the data must turn out to be.

Thus a team of researchers could conceivably go down the rabbit hole with Alice and empirically study even Wonderland, where Alice cried, “Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night?” Even a world of maximal miracles—where predictability would approach zero—could be investigated by empirical method, for the consistent collection and analysis of data can occur even when the data are not themselves consistent and regular. In short, whereas irregularity in basic empirical methodology would eliminate the investigation of anything, the discovery of unique, nonanalogous events by empirical method in no way vitiates its operation or renders the investigator liable to the charge of irrationality.

Flew has elsewhere expressed a more potent variation on this same argument in the following terms: the defender of the miraculous is acting arbitrarily when he claims that “it is (psychologically) impossible that these particular witnesses were lying or misinformed and hence that we must accept the fact that on this occasion the (biologically) impossible occurred.” The criticism here is that the advocate of miracles must commit himself to certain aspects of substantive regularity in order to analyse the evidence for a historical miracle. He must, for example, assume that human motivations remain the same in order to argue (as I have) that neither the Romans, the Jewish religious leaders, nor the disciples would have stolen Jesus’ body in order to claim that Jesus was miraculously resurrected. But, we are told, such argumentation inconsistently uses regularity of experience where it serves a purpose and discards it at the point of the desired miracle, instead of there also insisting on a natural, ordinary explanation.

In reply we might begin by noting that this argument seems somewhat inappropriate for the rationalist to propose. Since he himself is committed to employ only “ordinary” explanations of phenomena—explanations arising from “common experience”—he is in a particularly poor position to suggest any abnormal explanations for any aspect of a miracle account, including the psychological motivations or responses of the persons involved. Presumably the rationalist would be the last one to appeal to a “miraculous” suspension of ordinary psychology so as to permit the Jewish religious leader (for example) to have stolen the body of Christ when they knew it to be against their own best interests.

However, the issue lies at a deeper level than this, and we may be able to arrive there by posing the question in the starkest terms. If we interpret or explain his-

torical events along ordinary lines (in accord with ordinary experience) where this does not contradict the events to be interpreted, are we therefore required to conclude that unique, nonanalogous events do not occur even when ordinary observational evidence exists in their behalf? Flew demands that we answer this question in the affirmative. To use common experience of regularities at all in historical interpretation, says he, precludes all possibility of discovering a miracle, even if the use of such common experience provides the very convergence of independent probabilities (as Newman would put it) for asserting that the event in question is a miracle.

Curiouser and curiouser, if we may again appeal to Alice! The fallacy in this reasoning arises from a lack of clear perception as to the proper interrelation of the general and the particular in historical investigation. In interpreting events, one's proper goal is to find the interpretation that best fits the facts. Ideally, then, one will set alternative explanations of an event against the facts themselves to make an intelligent choice. But which "facts" will our explanations be tested against—the immediate facts to be interpreted, or the entire, general range of human experience? Where particular experience and general experience are in accord, there is no problem; but where they conflict, the particular must be chosen over the general, for otherwise our "investigations" of historical particulars will be investigations in name only since the results will always reflect already accepted general experience. Unless we are willing to suspend "regular" explanations at the particular points where these explanations are inappropriate to the particular data, we in principle eliminate even the possibility of discovering anything new. In effect, we then limit all new (particular) knowledge to the sphere of already accepted (general) knowledge. The proper approach is just the opposite: the particular must triumph over the general, even when the general has given us immense help in understanding the particular.

How does a historian properly determine what has occurred and interpret it? Admittedly, he takes to a study of any particular event his fund of general, "usual" experience. He relies upon it wherever it serves a useful function and not because he has any eternal, metaphysical justification for doing so. But the moment the general runs into tension with the particular, the general must yield, since (1) the historian's knowledge of the general is never complete, so he can never be sure he ought to rule out an event or an interpretation simply because it is new to him, and (2) he must always guard against obliterating the uniqueness of individual historical events by forcing them into a Procrustean bed of regular, general patterns. Only the primary-source evidence for an event can ultimately determine whether it occurred or not, and only that same evidence will establish the proper interpretation of that event.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴⁴ <http://www.trinitysem.edu/journal/montgomerypap.html>

Cf. J. Montgomery, "Science, Theology, & the Miraculous," *Faith Founded on Fact* (T. Nelson 1978), 43-72.

In the polemical tradition of enumerating the “sins of Christianity,” Fales rehearses the following horror stories:

Calvin’s execution of Michael Servitus, Luther’s anathematization of Jews and Anabaptists, and the Synod of Dordt’s expulsion of Arminians—to say nothing of the Inquisition and the Thirty Years’ War.⁷⁴⁵

By way of reply:

i) Freedom of dissent is a modern idea. Traditionally, most cultures are authoritarian. The church was authoritarian because the state was authoritarian. To single out the Church is anachronistic.

ii) Secular humanism has a decidedly authoritarian streak as well, from totalitarian regimes to speech codes, hate crimes, hate speech, quotas, &c.

iii) The execution of heretics was standard operating procedure back then. Servitus was on the run from the Catholic authorities.

iv) It was a polemical age, of which Luther was, unfortunately, no exception.

v) The Anabaptists were viewed as a threat to the social order.

vi) The Arminians were viewed as collaborators with Spain.

vii) The Inquisition needs to be seen in light of the Reconquista.

viii) To my knowledge, the Thirty-Years War was orchestrated by monarchs bent on enforcing the *cuius regio, eius religio* policy—which was a recipe for civil war.

Simply put, religion was highly politicized due to the tradition of national churches. European monarchs had been fighting each other for centuries. Religion got caught up in the mix because everything was viewed through a political prism. Modern-day liberals suffer from the same myopic outlook.

Moving on:

As testimony is epistemically less fundamental than sense experience and induction, demand for a second-level justification of testimonial evidence that

⁷⁴⁵ ET., 482.

makes noncircular appeal to direct experience is entirely in order. Moreover, mystical experiences—and by parity appeals to the help of the Holy Spirit—are not epistemically on par with sense-experience, because they are not independently checkable.⁷⁴⁶

Many problems:

- i) Sense experience and direct experience are not interchangeable.
- ii) Sense experience is fine for sensory objects, but not all objects of knowledge are sensibles. What about abstracta?
- iii) Direct experience may be more fundamental than testimony, but to rely on personal observation affords a very inadequate database.
- iv) What is the noncircular argument for the primacy of sense experience?
- v) Many of my personal memories are not independently checkable. Moreover, sense experience is no better than my memory of sense experience.
- vi) Induction cannot capture the unrepeatability of the past.

Moving on:

It is telling that one can ask almost any lay Christian a few probing questions regarding the nature of the soul and reveal an almost complete conceptual whiteout.⁷⁴⁷

What's so "telling" about that? The average believer is not a professional metaphysician. Neither is the average unbeliever.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 484.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 485.

Chapter 15

Such are the prerogatives of an editor that chapter 12 is Price's third entry in the ET. It's a rambling, poison-penned affair. Price says pretty much the same thing in three different essays. He's a one-trick pony with a busted leg. Time to pull the trigger.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if somehow, so-called Scientific Creationism should come to dominate professional biology, anthropology, paleontology, and geology?⁷⁴⁸

This is meant to be a rhetorical question. Actually, I happen to think that science would be much improved if it were dominated by the likes of John Byl, Kurt Wise, Michael Denton, Stephen Barr, Bill Dembski, and Michael Behe.

Or take Dr. Walt Brown, with whom I've had some personal dealings. Brown has a doctorate in mechanical engineering from MIT. In his field, you have to quantify a theory, put some hard numbers down on paper, and make it all work. Dawkins and Gould would greatly benefit from that kind of pragmatic discipline. And unlike them, Brown is not afraid to defend his position in a public forum.

Price accuses Craig of harboring ulterior motives:

He is winning souls, not arguing ideas...One might call him a PR man for Bill Bright...One thing one cannot expect from party hacks and spin doctors is that they should in any whit vary from their party line. When is the last time you heard a pitchman for some product admit that it might not be the best on the market...He is not trying to do disinterested historical or exegetical research. He is trying to get folks saved...His incredible claim...reveals the whole exercise to be a sham.⁷⁴⁹

I'm not a big fan of Craig's religious epistemology or apologetic method, but this ad hominem attack is as silly as it is unscrupulous.

i) Craig has two earned doctorates. He's a big name in the Evangelical community. As such, he's been in a position to write his own ticket for years. As such, he's not taking his marching orders from Bill Bright. He doesn't need a paycheck from

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 411.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 414-417.

Campus Crusade to pay the electric bill. I assume that he teamed up with Campus Crusade because he is trying to reach college students.

ii) Price has his own agenda. His agenda is the flip-side of Craig's. Price is Craig's alter-ego. If Craig is trying to make Christians, Price is trying to make apostates. If Craig is trying to edify believers, Price is trying to tear them down.

iii) Price's objection flounders on a false antithesis. You can promote something precisely because you believe it's true. Because you are convinced, you try to convince others.

Moving on:

He draws a distinction between knowing Christianity is true and showing it is true...his enterprise is completely circular, since it is a subjectivity described arbitrarily in terms of Christian belief.⁷⁵⁰

Price misses the very point of the distinction. It would only be circular if Craig appealed to tacit (subjective) knowledge to prove tacit knowledge. Rather, he appeals to argument and evidence (showing) to verify what we tacitly know.

Moving on:

His is a position that exalts existential decision above rational deliberation, quite ironic in view of his damning Bultmann's supposedly nefarious existentialism.⁷⁵¹

This is a cute, sophisticated irony. When Craig says that "unbelief is at root a spiritual, not an intellectual problem," his "existential" concern with the psychology of unbelief is not at all the same thing as the philosophy of Existentialism (a la Heidegger), deployed as a hermeneutical grid and makeweight to fill the vacuum after the Bible has been demythologized. Price is equivocating like crazy.

Moving on:

Once one sees the circular character of Craig's enterprise, it begins to make a bit more sense that he would retreat to the old red herring of "naturalistic presuppositions" as a way of doing an end run around the most fundamental postulate of critical historiography...Does it take a blanket presupposition for a histo-

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 415-416.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 417.

rian to discount some miracle stories as legendary? ...Nor is “naturalism” the issue when the historian employs the principle of analogy. As F. H. Bradley showed in *The Presuppositions of Critical History*, no historical inference is possible unless the historian assumes a basic analogy of past experience with present...Historians don’t have creeds. They frame hypotheses.⁷⁵²

The problems with this claim are manifold:

i) How does the historian know in advance what is possible? Is history a descriptive discipline, based on observation and testimony, or a prescriptive discipline which dictates to reality what reality can allow to happen?

ii) If historians are operating with metahistorical postulates like the principle of analogy, then they are, indeed, operating with a creed. Nothing could be more prejudicial than methodological naturalism, as it proceeds with its presumptive antithesis between God and history.⁷⁵³

iii) Absent divine providence (e.g. Gen 8:22), why assume the continuity of the present with the past?

iv) Although there’s an element of inference in historical writing, such as the ascription of motives, piecing together a relative chronology of events, or teasing information out of nonliterary remains, much of historical writing chronicles the record of direct observational claims left by participants to the events in question, including reported miracles.

v) No, you don’t have to be a naturalist to discount some miracle stories. But if you are a naturalist, then you will automatically discount all miracle stories. This is precisely the position represented by the Jesus Seminar, the Secular Web, Prometheus Books, and the contributors to the ET.

vi) One could even accept the principle of analogy without ruling out the miraculous. For there is abundant testimony to miraculous events throughout the course of history, from the past up until the present. Hence, the supernatural character of Biblical history is not disanalogous with human experience in general.

⁷⁵² Ibid., 417-420.

⁷⁵³ Cf. “Adolf Schlatter on Method in New Testament Theology”; “Adolf Schlatter on Atheistic Methods in Theology,” W. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter* (Baker 1995), 169-225; <http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od181/methnat181.htm>

Moving on:

This is the most blatant kind of scurrilous mudslinging, no different from Creationist stump debater Duane Gish charging that “God-denying” evolutionists must want society to become a den of murderers and pornographers.”⁷⁵⁴

i) There is no doubt that Gish has his limitations. He was a pioneer in the field of creationism, and, as such, lacks the increasing sophistication of the up-and-coming generation.

However, Gish was at least prepared to publicly debate the merits of his position, unlike Gould, Dawkins, &c.

ii) In addition, his charge looks pretty plausible to me. By-and-large, the same bunch of people who compose the evolutionary establishment also support abortion on demand, infanticide, involuntary euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, &c. Murder by another name.

iii) And the same bunch of people support the ACLU when it rushes to the defense of pedophiles (e.g. NAMBLA) and child pornographers.

iv) Anyway, given Price’s penchant for guilt-by-association, who is he to squeal?

Moving on:

“Supernaturalism” is not at all the issue here. The issue is whether the historian is to abdicate his role as a sifter of evidence by accepting the dogma of inerrancy.⁷⁵⁵

i) I suppose you could classify inerrancy as a “dogma.” To say so in no way makes it a false dogma. It is not as if Christians simply stipulate the inerrancy of Scripture without benefit of argument.

ii) No one is forcing the “historian” to write one way or the other. Liberals like Price are free to deny the inerrancy of Scripture.

iii) But Price is insisting, very “dogmatically,” I’d add, on a dichotomy between inerrancy and the evidence.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 418.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 419.

iv) It is easy to belittle inerrancy. Needless to say, every assertion of Scripture does not enjoy the same intrinsic importance. But that's really not the point.

The inerrancy of Scripture follows from identity of the Bible with the word of God, which, in turn, follows from the God of the Bible—a God with certain attributes.

Suppose a woman found out that her fiancé had a habit of telling lies. So far she's only caught him telling little lies, innocuous lies. But the mere fact that he lies to her with a certain frequency means that she can't trust him since she never knows any more when he's telling her the truth. And if he's in the habit of telling little lies, what about big lies? Even if we put the trust-factor to one side, what does this say about his character? Does she want to make a life together with a man like that? Spend her whole life in his company? No. She breaks off the engagement.

What sort of God does a “moderate” believe in? What sort of God is responsible for the partial inspiration of Scripture? Is such a God able to secure inerrant revelation, but unwilling; or willing, but unable? Why would inspiration stop short of inerrancy?

Why would God be unwilling were he able to secure inerrant revelation? And if he's willing, but unable, how is he even able to partly inspire the Bible? How does that work, exactly?

I've never found the idea of a God who makes little mistakes more believable than a God who never makes a mistake. And if he makes little mistakes, what about big mistakes?

If I had an appointment with an oncologist who pulled the wrong file, consulted the wrong chart, confused me with another patient, misremembered my name and other details of my case history, none of his slips would be immediately life-threatening, yet you can be sure that my first appointment would be my last.

The only rational and consistent position is to either deny that Scripture is inspired at all, or affirm that all Scripture is inspired.

Metaphysically speaking, inerrancy is on a par with miracles. Just as there is no a priori reason to deny the miracles of Scripture unless you're an atheist or finite theist, there's no a priori reason to deny the inerrancy of Scripture unless you're an atheist or finite theist.

When critics like Price act as if the very idea of inerrancy is an utterly outlandish idea, beneath the pale of serious consideration and deserving of only scorn and ridicule, they merely advertise to the world their own incurable superficiality.

Anyone can make fun of Harold Lindsell—he's a soft target. But if you think that some of his historical reconstructions are silly, nothing is sillier than a moderate-to-liberal view of Scripture where every single critical scholar contradicts every other critical scholar.

In saying this I'm not indulging in hyperbole. When it comes to the composition of the Pentateuch or Isaiah, when it comes to the *sitz-im-leben* of the gospels or the authentic sayings of Jesus, every critical scholar has a different version of events. Every one of them—to a man.

Why is it more credible to put your faith in all these just-so stories spun by arm-chair critics writing two to three or more thousand years after the fact than to believe the Bible as it stands?

The case against the inerrancy of Scripture is exceptionally thin. Even scholars like LaSor, Marshall, and Beagle who set out to disprove the inerrancy of Scripture can only scrounge up a handful of flea-bitten candidates—easily disposed of. And they don't even agree with one another on what mistakes the Bible has made.

Lindsell may not have been the sharpest knife in the drawer, but he did the best with what he had. The lowest circle of hell is reserved for those who use their God-given gifts to undermine the faith of the simple (Mt 18:6).

Moving on:

After all, it will not greatly upset Craig any more than it upset Warfield to deny the historical accuracy of medieval reports of miracles wrought by the Virgin Mary or by the sacramental wafer, much less stories of miracles wrought by Gautama Buddha or Apollonius of Tyana.⁷⁵⁶

Notice the tactic. Jumble a whole lot of stuff together, in a single swift sentence, under the groundless assumption that this miscellany affords any basis of comparison.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.

Price is one of those high-pressure conmen who paces his sales-pitch at the elocutionary rate of an auctioneer so that you're swept up in the sheer momentum and never have the time to think about the price-tag.

i) What is the date of the source relative to the date of the alleged event?

ii) What is the quality of the source?

iii) Does Buddhism, with its secular outlook and discontinuous ontology, have the metaphysical machinery to ground miracles?

iv) Price simply disregards the critical literature (e.g., Hengel, Kee) on Apollonius.⁷⁵⁷

v) Notice the casual name-dropping as a substitute for producing any actual parallels. Is that because the "parallels" don't hold up under direct scrutiny?⁷⁵⁸

vi) On a more general note:

A. Fridrichsen too made an important contribution to our knowledge of the anti-magic apologetic of the gospel tradition...He isolated four major themes in an apologetic found in the gospels themselves and which live on in various Christian writers from the 2-3C. The four themes, shorn of the evidence which Fridrichsen adduces in their support, are: (1) The miracles of Jesus were not due to chance or magic, but were predicted by the OT prophets. (2) Jesus' healings, in contrast with those of pagan wonderworkers, had a lasting effect. (3) Jesus used no devices in effecting healings and exorcisms in contrast with pagan magical practice. (4) Jesus sought no personal profit or advantage from miracles, but rather acted solely for man's salvation.⁷⁵⁹

In addition:

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (Doubleday 1994), 2:576-581; 602-604.

⁷⁵⁸ Cf. D. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW II, Principat*, 223.2:1507-57; "Excursus Two: Jesus and Apollonius of Tyana," C. Evans, *Jesus & His Contemporaries*, 245-250; H. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle & Magic in New Testament Times; Miracle in the Early Christian World*; G. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Hendrickson 1993); *Jesus The Miracle Worker* (IVP 1999); J. Meier, *ibid.*, 2:535-616; E. Yamauchi, "Magic or Miracle?" D. Wenham & C. Blomberg, eds., *Gospel Perspectives 6: The Miracles of Jesus* (JSOT 1986), 89-183; "Magic in the Biblical World," *TynB* 14 (1983), 169-200.

⁷⁵⁹ D. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW II, Principat*, 223.2:1542.

Christianity was less syncretistic than most other Graeco-Roman cults, while Judaism was even less syncretistic than Christianity. Both Christianity and Judaism retained a sense of self-identity partially expressed in the separation of Judaism from Christianity and the distance which both cults felt from other Graeco-Roman religio-cultural traditions.⁷⁶⁰

Here we should draw an additional distinction between NT Christianity, which is a form of Second Temple Judaism, centered in Palestine, and the subapostolic church. As the disaffection between church and synagogue hardened over time, elements of syncretism did begin to creep into Christian theology, viz., the cult of Mary and the saints, a magical view of the sacraments. But it would be grossly anachronistic to read this back into the NT era itself.

As Donald Hagner notes:

In the earliest Christian church, which was of course entirely Jewish, Jewish believers in Jesus apparently encountered little significant hostility from their Jewish brethren...The actual 'parting of the ways,' however, did not take place until the generation following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.⁷⁶¹

Moving on:

One could as easily accept the historicity of Jack and the Beanstalk on the same basis, as long as one's sole criterion of historical probability is "anything goes!"⁷⁶²

A straw man argument. That is not a Christian criterion. Price is just talking to himself, now. There is no good faith effort to engage the opposing side.

Moving on:

Craig's own essay in the humbly titled online Truth Journal ...opens with the supposed predicament of "modern man," feeling all alone in a big bad universe.⁷⁶³

Price tries to make this sound like a childish phobia—the fear that a monster is lurking under the bed, or a bogeyman is hiding in the closet.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 1520.

⁷⁶¹ *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Zondervan 1984), 42.

⁷⁶² ET, 420.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 420.

Perhaps we need to briefly review what a secular worldview amounts to. Man is the only species on the planet—and perhaps the entire universe—to be cursed with the self-awareness of his own mortality, his own genetic determinism, his own consciousness of a world without consciousness, prevision, or purpose.

Love is simply an illusion, programmed into our genes to keep our species in business. We exist to perpetuate the life-cycle. The life-cycle has no *raison d'être* than to perpetuate itself.

We are born to reproduce and die. One generation follows another for no other reason than sheer succession and repetition—like a radio station that continues to play prerecorded music after everyone was wiped out by an epidemic.

We foresee our own senescence, senility, and death. We are at the mercy of a merciless world and a merciless neighbor.

It isn't just Christians who find this prospect unbearably bleak. This is the stuff of Kafka, Koestler and Camus, Ibsen, O'Neill, Genet, Brecht, Bergman, and Fassbinder, Heidegger, Schopenhauer, and Wittgenstein, to name a few.

Price is like a little dog who snares ever so bravely behind the security of his chain-link fence. He can face down the big bad universe only because he was blessed to be born in a country where the gospel has done much to soften the fall.

Actually, there's nothing more juvenile than Price. Having lost whatever faith he once had, he feels this childish need for a pat on the head from the secular grown-ups. Like an adolescent on Spring break, he revels in the freedom of unrestrained perversity. Like an arrested adolescent, he has authority issues, and spends all his time attacking the father-figure. Unable to face a godless existence on his own two feet, he encourages others to gouge out their eyes as well so that he'll have someone with whom to share his sightless vision.

Moving on:

Evangelical biblical scholarship, like evangelical theology, is just a massive effort to arrest modernity.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 421.

i) That's a half-truth. You might as well say that liberal Bible scholarship, like modern theology, is just a massive effort to arrest tradition. To idolize modernity is just as anti-intellectual as the idolization of tradition. Both modernity and tradition have much that is commendable and much that is condemnable. A true intellectual has the rational discernment to appropriate the best of each.

ii) In addition, evangelical scholarship, like evangelical theology, has far more staying power than its liberal counterparts. The mark-down rate for modern theology is precipitous. An Augustine, Owen, Edwards, or Warfield appreciates over time, commanding a far wider audience than when they were alive, while a modern theologian quickly depreciates over time. Just visit the local used bookstore and see the dusty shelves of yesterday's social prophets, who can't fetch 50¢ a piece.

Moving on:

There simply is no Creation Science. It is all just an effort to poke as many holes in evolutionary biology as they can.⁷⁶⁵

i) Price constantly trots out the creation/evolution debate. This is pretty irrelevant to a debate over the Resurrection, is it not? He simply does this as a guilt-by-association tactic. The insinuation is that Christians are anti-intellectual.

ii) There's some truth to his charge, but after a century and a half to make it work, with all the patronage of the education establishment, heavily subsidized by the state, why are there so many gaping holes in evolution? There's nothing wrong with poking holes in a theory that really is full of holes.

iii) It's an interesting question how much further along creation science might be with the same official sponsorship and financial resources.

iv) And maybe there's just a low ceiling on how far we can reconstruct the distant past. Maybe cosmology or paleontology is too much like trying to reconstruct a pig from pork links.

v) Price is assuming that the Christian has a lot of explaining to do. But scientific critics of the faith typically make a number of assumptions that the Bible doesn't make, while ignoring a number of assumptions which the Bible does make. Let's take some examples:

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 421.

a) We're often told that the Copernican revolution either falsifies the Bible or falsifies a literal reading of Scripture. But the danger here is to import extraneous debates into our reading of Scripture. Joshua never read Ptolemy, so why assume that Joshua was operating within a Ptolemaic framework? Both the Ptolemaic and the Copernican systems assume an extra-terrestrial viewpoint.

When Bible writers talk about the earth, the "earth" in view is not a stationary globe in relation to the other planets, but the surface of the earth. The "earth" is the land—seen at eye-level. An observation is not a theory of the solar system. The Bible lacks the theoretical interest of Greek astronomy. And Ptolemaic astronomy was a Hellenistic synthesis of Babylonian astrology with Greek mathematics.

The narrative viewpoint is explicitly local rather than global. The sun appeared at Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Aijalon. So the description represents the perspective of an earth-bound observer.

In addition, the author of Joshua is probably quoting verbatim from the book of Jashar. Scholars disagree on where the quotation begins and ends. Woudstra, for one, thinks it covers v12 to v15.⁷⁶⁶

The book of Jashar is generally thought to be a poetic and panegyric national epic.

The fact that the author of Joshua has lifted a direct quote this hortatory encomium in tribute to a military hero does not commit him to a cosmographical theory—any more than singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic commits the audience to a particular reconstruction of the Civil War, or singing Stan Roger's Northwest Passage commits one to a particular map of the Yukon. This is martial poesy, like the Iliad or the Song of Roland.

b) We're told that, when measured in light-years, the scale of the universe entails its multi-billion year age. But this inference rests on a number of assumptions, viz., the initial size of the universe, the speed of light as a cosmic constant, the relative rate of expansion, the ordinary emission and transmission of starlight from its point of origin to the earth, and so on.

Now, it should be clear that the creation account is silent on most of these assumptions. The proper question to ask is: what would the effect of creation ex nihilo re-

⁷⁶⁶ M. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Eerdmans 1981), 174.

semble? Since there is no process involved with creation ex nihilo, what would such a world look like? Would it look old? Young? Is there any way of telling?

The average scientist will date things on the basis of the rate of certain natural processes. Now, there's nothing unreasonable about that inference. But, at the same time, it's unprovable. All it does is to extrapolate from the present to the past on the assumption of uniformity.

Remember that these processes were never designed to be chronometers. They have a different natural function. We simply co-opt them to serve our own purposes.

And there's a vicious circularity to the whole procedure, for they are using one clock to clock another clock.

Suppose I walk into a clock shop. Suppose that every clock gives the same reading. Would that tell me what time it is? Not really. It would let me know that they had all been set to tell the same time. But it would not tell me whether they had been set to GMT, or EST, or Pacific time, or daylight-saving time.

Suppose that all the timepieces were electric clocks. And let us further suppose that the power had gone out and come back on. The clocks would all give the same time, but they would all be off by the duration of the power outage.

A scientist dates the world by running the clock backwards. But does that tell us when the clock was wound up, or when the clock was set?

To take another scenario, all the clocks give a rather different reading. Indeed, this is what I'd expect when I enter a clock shop.

Now, suppose I look at two different clocks. One has the time at 12:59 PM, and the other at 1:01 PM. Can I tell, by comparing the two clocks, if both are fast, or both are slow, or one is fast, or one is slow, or one is on time while the other is fast or slow? I don't think so.

What I really need, do I not, is not a lot of different clocks, even if they all give the same time, but a master clock. I need to know what they were set to.

Keep in mind, too, that in nature, all the clocks are faceless. There is no analogical or digital read-out.

And that's before we ever get to the question of whether an effect of creation ex nihilo is even datable. In the nature of the case, creation ex nihilo is instantaneous. It goes straight from nothing to something with no intervening process. Even if it were phased in through a series of discrete stages, the eventuation of each stage would be instantaneous.

c) Or consider how a Darwinist will argue for the differential power of natural selection. He will say, for example, that a certain adaptive strategy like camouflage confers a survival advantage. And he may well be right about that.

The problem, though, is that he is assuming the supernatural viewpoint of an external observer. A Darwinist can only discern the competitive value of camouflage because a Darwinist happens to be an intelligent observer. But natural selection cannot see what he can see. Natural selection is blind.

A Darwinist is like a man watching a game of chess between two invisible players. He doesn't see the players. He only sees the moves. From the moves and counter-moves of the various pieces as they mysteriously slide across the board without visible means of direction or propulsion, he infers an underlying strategy. He can perceive how a given move confers a tactical advantage.

Because the players are invisible, the Darwinist denies that there are any players. But he himself is assuming the viewpoint of a chess player to appreciate the difference between a winning move and a losing move. But if there are, in fact, no chess players moving the pieces across the board, if the pieces are moving themselves at random by some hidden, automated machine, then either he is wrong to resort to teleological explanations—at which point he must forfeit the mechanism of natural selection—or else he is right about teleology, but wrong to deny the existence of the invisible chess player.

d) The Darwinist also assumes that any evidence of natural variation disproves Genesis. But Genesis allows for natural variation. Genesis allows for racial diversity (Gen 10) and selective breeding (Gen30).

e) As to the flood, when critics pose various logistical difficulties, they often betray extra-Biblical assumptions, and then convict the Bible of inconsistency. For example, questions about how animals could cross mountains and oceans, fit into the ark, eat the same food, how fresh water fish could survive in brackish water, and so on, all make gratuitous assumptions about the identity of pre- and post diluvial

conditions regarding biogeography and biodiversity before and after the flood, the relative salinity of prediluvial seas, the gene pool, dietary restrictions and climatic adaptation, ecological zones, distribution of land masses and natural barriers, and so on. But I don't own a map of the prediluvial earth. Since the Bible says next to nothing about these issues, it amounts to a massive straw man argument to make the text of Scripture sink under the dead weight of so many extrinsic assumptions. Nothing has been proven one way or the other. Indeed, the argument hasn't budged an inch.

If we confine ourselves to the narrative assumptions, Genesis says that the earth began in a submerged state, and rose out of the primeval deep (1:2-10); so in order to flood the earth I imagine that God merely reversed the creative process (7:11; 8:2)—as Isaiah says: every valley shall be uplifted and every mountain and hill laid low (40:4). This is no great feat for a God who measures the seas in the hollow of his hand and numbers the mountains as fine dust in the balance (40:12). So the way to inundate or drain the earth would be to raise or lower the natural barriers to coastal flooding. That supplies both a flood mechanism and a drainage mechanism all-in-one.

There are also dangers of reading too much into the original. To take a couple of examples:

In 7:20 this phrase ["fifteen cubits above"] is difficult to decipher, largely because of the word that the NIV renders "depth" The Hebrew text says, "Fifteen cubits from above [milma'la] rose the waters, and the mountains were covered." It is therefore not at all clear that it is suggesting the waters rose fifteen cubits higher than the mountains...As an adverb modifying the verb 'rose,' it suggests that the water reached fifteen cubits upward from the plain, covering at least some part of the mountains.⁷⁶⁷

We must still consider whether 8:3-5 strikes us the way it does because we are thinking in terms of our understanding of the world. Would this text have meant something different if we could read it with an ANE mindset?⁷⁶⁸

This way of think yields a flood of the then-known world (with boundaries as described, for instance, in the Sargon Geography and in the list of Noah's descendants in Gen 10); it covered all the elevated places that were within eye-sight of the occupants of the ark. Though this would be a geographically limited

⁷⁶⁷ J. Walton, *Genesis*, 325-326.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

flood, it could still be anthropologically universal if people had not yet spread beyond this region.⁷⁶⁹

As to how the animals migrated to the far corners of the earth, and what they ate, one can only speculate. But the narrative invites a number of suggestions. The flood would leave an abundance of carrion and vegetable matter for animals to feed on. Because the descendents of Noah tarried in Mesopotamia until the confusion of tongues, many animals had a head-start, which may be why we find some animal remains buried beneath human remains. The descendants of Noah knew about shipbuilding, and where sailors go, animals go—as livestock, vermin and game. Transporting live animals by ship is attested elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., 1 Kg 10:22). Ancient circumnavigation is well-documented.⁷⁷⁰

f) The most fundamental assumption made by the scientific critic of Scripture is his presumption that we have independent access to the world, and can therefore trump revelation by direct appeal to the natural record. But this is philosophically naïve.

Just consider the science of sensation. Light bouncing off the sensible object encodes the secondary properties in the form of electromagnetic information, and when that strikes the eye, the data stream is reencoded as electrochemical information. What reaches consciousness is not a miniature image of the sensible object, but a cryptogram. It bears no more resemblance to the original than a music score is a facsimile of sound. In Berkeley's arresting image, we are, if left to our own devices, condemned to a clam's-eye view of the world.

As one writer states the conundrum,

The direct realist view is incredible because it suggests that we can have experience of objects out in the world directly, beyond the sensory surface, as if bypassing the chain of sensory processing. For example if light from this paper is transduced by your retina into a neural signal which is transmitted from your eye to your brain, then the very first aspect of the paper that you can possibly experience is the information at the retinal surface, or the perceptual representation that it stimulates in your brain. The physical paper itself lies beyond the sensory surface and therefore must be beyond your direct experience. But the perceptual experience of the page stubbornly appears out in the world itself instead of in your brain, in apparent violation of everything we know about the causal chain of vision.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 328.

⁷⁷⁰ C. Hapgood, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (Adventures Unlimited Press 1996); H. Moran & D. Kelley, *The Alphabet & the Ancient Calendar Signs* (Daily Press 1969).

The problem with the direct realist view is of an epistemological nature, and is therefore a more fundamental objection, for direct realism is nothing short of magical, that we can see the world out beyond the sensory surface.⁷⁷¹

Or, in Russell's more picturesque description:

Does the sun exist? Most people would say that the sun does come without our direct experience in a sense in which Napoleon does not, but in thinking this they would be mistaken. The sun is removed from us in space as Napoleon is removed from us in time. The sun, like Napoleon, is known to us only through its effects. People say they see the sun; but this only means that something has traveled through the intervening ninety-three million miles, and produced an effect upon the retina, the optic nerve, and the brain. This effect, which happens where we are, is certainly not identity with the sun as understood by astronomers.⁷⁷²

And again,

Whoever accepts the causal theory of perception is compelled to conclude that percepts are in our heads, for they come at the end of a causal chain of physical events leading, spatially, from the object to the brain of the percipient. We cannot suppose that, at the end of this process, the last effect suddenly jumps back to the starting-point, like a stretched rope when it snaps...What the physiologist sees when he examines a brain is in the physiologist, not in the brain he is examining.⁷⁷³

Even these descriptions are a bit misleading, for "sun," "eye," "retina," "optic nerve" and "brain" are merely placeholders for something otherwise inaccessible. All we have to go by are appearances. We use our senses to sense our senses.

From an empirical standpoint, our only source of knowledge comes from the excitation of our sensory surfaces by the bombardment of rays and particles. That highly filtered and fragmentary sampling is not much from which to extrapolate a roadmap of reality.

⁷⁷¹ <http://cns-alumni.bu.edu/%7Eeslehar/webstuff/consc1/consc1a.html>

⁷⁷² "Limitations of Scientific Method," *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (Simon & Schuster 1961), 621.

⁷⁷³ *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), 32.

And if you subscribe to evolution, our epistemic situation is even worse. Our brain wasn't engineered to discover the truth. And our senses co-opted and adapted from some originally insensible function.

Science is no better than your theory of science, which is no better than your theory of knowledge. Scientific realism is no better than direct realism. Secular science ends up cutting its own throat. For the only events we directly register are mental events, not external events. Apart from revelation, we can have no knowledge of the unprocessed object.

As the Creator of the world, God enjoys an intersubjectival knowledge of the world. And by virtue of revelation, we may tap into a God's-eye view of the world. For propositions, as abstract information, are identical at either end of the transmission process—unless they come out as gibberish (garbage in/garbage out). If you understand what you read, then it was not garbled in transmission. It still must be encoded in a sensible medium, but the readout is the same as the input. Otherwise, it would be unintelligible.

At the rock-bottom level of epistemology, science can never disprove the Bible because divine revelation is our only clear window onto the world. Otherwise, we perceive the world through the stained-glass solipsism of our inescapable subjectivity.

The question, then, would shift from the necessity of revelation to its identity, of which the contenders are surprisingly few—being limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition and heresies thereof.

Moving on:

[Craig] tries to coax from the text of 1 Corinthians what is not there...Craig would feel himself at a great loss if he had to cut loose all those juicy gospel resurrection stories to be left with the skimpy list of terse notes in 1 Corinthians 15.⁷⁷⁴

Price has a point here. There's a problem with this minimalist method, with trying to hang more and more on less and less.

Yet the limitation is not with the evidence for the Resurrection, but with an excessively concessive and deferential method. We shouldn't try to win over the unbe-

⁷⁷⁴ ET, 422,426-427.

liever at any cost. Trying to meet the unbeliever halfway is like trying to cross a river on the back of an alligator: you end up on the inside rather than the other side.

We should not accommodate the unbeliever when he is being evasive and unreasonable. We should challenge his irrational skepticism. And if he refuses to be responsible, then we've done our duty.

Moving on:

The same would be true if, as implied in Jn 19:42; 20:15... some held that Jesus had been but temporarily interred in Joseph's mausoleum for reburial elsewhere after the Sabbath was past.⁷⁷⁵

This statement is a calculated falsehood. Since John has the Magdalene directly addressing the Risen Christ, the account carries no implication that Jesus was really rotting in an unmarked grave.

Price is a Bible scholar by training. If he cannot make an honest case for his position, then his position must be indefensible.

Moving on:

The imagination of the apologist is essentially midrashic. It attempts to harmonize contradictions between texts by embellishing those texts...in this manner...Peter denies his lord not merely three but six, eight, or nine times.⁷⁷⁶

i) This is, of course, an allusion to Harold Lindsell's notorious harmonization, which liberals never tired of citing. But you only pick on a weak opponent if you have a weak argument. Lindsell was just a popularizer. He did the church a real service by exposing the liberal drift within Evangelicalism. But when it comes to synoptic harmonies, we would look, not to a Lindsell, but to a Carson or Bock or Blomberg or Köstenberger.

ii) There can, indeed, be a danger of rewriting the gospels in order to slice and edit a version of events which no gospel gives or authorizes. Here the unwary conservative is at risk of retailing his own brand of redaction criticism.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 423.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 423-424.

iii) At the same time, much of the impetus for this exercise is coming from unbelievers like Price. They raise conjectural objections which invite conjectural replies. They challenge believers to explain various “contradictions,” only to turn around and accuse the compliant believer of indulging in unbridled speculation when he rises to the challenge.

iv) It’s no mystery that if you have four reporters reporting the same event, they will vary in what information they include and how they arrange the material. But since neither the believer nor the unbeliever were on the scene, there’s a severe limit on how far we can fill in the gaps or reconstruct the original sequence of events.

Price is in no position to say that Matthew got it wrong, or Mark, or Luke or John. He wasn’t there. He has no advantage over you and me. The ignorance is mutual.

Moving on:

Charles Talbert has no trouble adducing abundant parallels from Hellenistic hero biographies in which the assumptions into heaven of Romulus, Hercules, Empedocles, Apollonius...⁷⁷⁷

i) We’ve seen all this before. Several contributors (Carrier, Price, Fales) refer to Talbert’s work. But if you actually read his work, what you find is not a verbatim anthology of primary sources, along with the historical context (e.g., time, place, genre) in which the reader is allowed to see the parallels for himself; what you have instead is a summary of a few primary sources, with a few snippets, and a lavish bibliography of tertiary sources.

Some years ago, Dave Aune wrote a long review of Talbert’s book. This is some of what he had to say about the quality of Talbert’s scholarship and methodology:

A third feature of Talbert’s book and one most disturbing to classicists, is the fact that the author roams the length and breadth of the Graeco-Roman literature, almost exclusively within the ambit of the Loeb Classical Library (numerous translations from which are used but rarely credited), and virtually unencumbered with the scholarly baggage of modern classical philology. Like Geza Vermes and Michael Grant on Jesus, Talbert has chosen not to familiarize himself with the secondary scholarly literature on the subjects treated in his book.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 424.

While this guarantees a “fresh” approach, it also conjures up our image of a blindfolded man staggering across a minefield.⁷⁷⁸

The general failure to draw on the achievements of modern classical philology is perhaps the main reason for the many false assumptions, misinterpretations and oversimplifications which permeate Talbert’s book.⁷⁷⁹

A fourth problem has to do with Talbert’s assumption that Bultmann’s views on the nature of the gospels continue to retain validity even though they were articulated more than 50 years ago, and a great many developments in NT scholarship have occurred since that time.⁷⁸⁰

Finally, when reading Talbert’s book I found myself harboring the suspicion that the ancient evidence was being molded in such a way that the final product (primarily the “myth of the immortals”), was predestined to bear an amazing resemblance to the pattern of Luke-Acts: after thinking about the issues raised in the book for the past two years, I am convinced that this is precisely what has occurred.⁷⁸¹

Talbert’s “myth of the immortals” is a serious oversimplification of the ancient views on how mortals could become divine.⁷⁸²

Prof. Talbert often glosses over the differences between various motifs with apparent parallels in the gospels in favor of focusing on the similarities. First, Talbert often reflects on how the “average Mediterranean man-on-the-street” (p39), would have understood the gospels. Apart from the question of whether such persons existed, the important issue is rather how did the evangelists intend their compositions to be understood? Second, the notion of deification is totally alien to the Synoptic Gospels. The ascension tradition of Luke-Acts, while it has external similarities with Graeco-Roman conceptions of *ascensio*, has two important material differences: (1) The ascension tradition, found only in Luke-Acts, does not change the status of Jesus, only his location and mode of presence. (2) The ascension tradition is intimately connected with the resurrection tradition, and it is through the latter that the status of Jesus is changed. Talbert’s silence on the subject of resurrection traditions is doubtless because no parallel to them is found in Graeco-Roman biography. Third, the absence of the material remains of Jesus in the empty tomb narratives and his various ap-

⁷⁷⁸ “The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C. H. Talbert’s *What is a Gospel?*” *Gospel Perspectives* 2:17.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 18.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

pearances to friends and disciples are not evidence of deification; rather, they function to corroborate the reality of the resurrection.⁷⁸³

So Price and his contributors lean heavily on a secondary source, which, in turn, leans on other secondary or tertiary sources of information for pagan parallels. We also see them salting the mine by using Christian categories to classify the parallels.

ii) In addition, this whole enterprise is terribly dated. It views the NT through the prism of Greco-Roman paganism rather than Second Temple, Palestinian Judaism. That whole orientation is a blind alley. As one scholar observes:

Whereas in the beginning of the last [19th] century scholars tended to postulate an archaic pattern of “dying and rising deities” such as Osiris, Tammuz (Dumzi: below), Adonis and Attis (among whom the more adventurous also included the death and resurrection of Christ), more recent scholars have reversed the pattern, claiming that the pagan cults adapted themselves to Christianity.⁷⁸⁴

Walter Burkert provided at least the beginning of an explanation for this turning of the scholarly tables, since his discussion of these gods clearly shows that the basis for the views of Frazer and his contemporaries has been completely undermined by the continuing publication and analysis of the materials of the ANE. For example, a 1951 tablet was discovered with the hitherto missing conclusion of the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi: instead of his expected resurrection Dumuzi is killed as a substitute for Inanna. Moreover, a steady trickle of new inscriptions, archeological monuments and artifacts has enabled scholars to construct a much more sophisticated view of Late Antiquity than was possible for their colleagues at the beginning of the last century.⁷⁸⁵

A Christian influence on the development of the Attis cult is thus more than likely. Smith also fails to discuss the problem of Christian influence on the cult of Mithras, although in the period of 150-200 AD at least two references to Mithraic details strongly point in that direction...It seems, then, that Christianity had inspired early Mithraism.⁷⁸⁶

Moving on:

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 47-48.

⁷⁸⁴ Bremer, 52-53. cf. C. Evans, “Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 3-36; T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 54.

Talbert (no God-hating atheist, by the way, but a Southern Baptist, if that makes any difference).⁷⁸⁷

As a matter of fact, that makes no difference at all. Price is betting on the ignorance of the reader—which, given the target audience for a book of this sort, is a fairly safe bet—but if you consult the publication date and know anything about the SBC, you also know that Talbert was writing at a time when the SBC was going liberal. Indeed, Talbert’s monograph of the genre of the gospels is a perfect illustration of that very infection.

Moving on:

There are many reasons, including the gross contradictions of detail between them (scarcely less serious than those between the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke).⁷⁸⁸

This is a regular refrain by contributors to the ET. Yet not a one of them ever actually lays out the “gross contradictions.”

The problem with trying to harmonize the Easter accounts is not that we have no way of sequencing the materials, but too many ways of sequencing the materials.

Combining the four accounts, we have the following people at the tomb and elsewhere at one time or another:

Jesus
2 angels
Peter
John
The Magdalene
Salome
Mary (mother of James & Joses)
Joanna
“Other women” (from Galilee)

That, right there, gives you ten independent variables (not counting the guards), which can be combined and recombined in literally a hundred different ways.

⁷⁸⁷ ET, 424-425.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 427.

There are, moreover, several different trips to the tomb—probably with some folks meeting each other coming and going. That adds a number of temporal variables to the mix.

Furthermore, you have appearances at three different locations—Jerusalem, Emmaus, Galilee. That adds a number of spatial variables to the mix. So there are dozens of possible harmonizations.

Moving on:

My problem comes when Craig starts trying to harmonize the flesh versus spirit contradiction between Lk 24:39 and 1 Cor 15:50.⁷⁸⁹

i) Since Craig is not a NT scholar, there is no particular reason why we would look to him rather than, say, Fee or Thiselton, to exegete 1 Cor 15:50.

ii) There is also no a priori reason to equate Lucan usage with Pauline usage.

Finally, in reading Price you have to wonder where all this hostility is coming from. Why is it so important to Price to tear down the Christian faith?

At one level, I suppose the answer is that Price is an apostate, and he feels the emotional need to justify his apostasy.

Still, why can't he stand the idea that anyone else is a Christian? Having ceased to be a Christian, why does he still spend all his time attacking his former faith? Shouldn't he move on? Get a life?

You could understand if Price felt that Christian faith was a dangerous illusion, like someone in denial over the symptoms of cancer. You could understand if he had something better to offer. But he doesn't.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the Christian faith is a beautiful illusion. Remember the movie *Life is Beautiful*? It was a movie about a Jewish father and his five-year old son in a concentration camp. To spare his son the horrors of the holocaust, the father pretends that this is all a game of make-believe.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 427.

But if Price were in his place, he'd have none of this. He'd tell his little boy: "You're going to die, I'm going to die, your Mom is going to die—we're all going to die here!"

Now, it makes sense to disillusion a person if there is something to gain. But what if reality is worse than the illusion?

What's so great about being an unbeliever, anyway? What do unbelievers get to do that believers don't get to do? Use Klingon cuss words? Copulate with dogs? Commit anal-rape on little boys? Kill babies and old folks who crimp our lifestyle? Raise a generation of suicidal, drug-addicted kids? Live under a militantly secular regime like Nazism or Maoism or Stalinism or the Khmer Rouge?

I can understand how someone might suppose that secularism is true. It is far harder to understand how someone might suppose that secularism is good. If you were living in a death camp, would you write books and articles celebrating life in the death camp?

Writing in ramp-up to WWII, George Orwell, a disillusioned Marxist, like Arthur Koestler, put it about as well as any:

Reading Mr Malcolm Muggeridge's brilliant and depressing book, *The Thirties*, I thought of a rather cruel trick I once played on a wasp. He was sucking jam on my plate, and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed œsophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to him. It is the same with modern man. The thing that has been cut away is his soul, and there was a period—twenty years, perhaps—during which he did not notice it.

It was absolutely necessary that the soul should be cut away. Religious belief, in the form in which we had known it, had to be abandoned. By the nineteenth century it was already in essence a lie, a semi-conscious device for keeping the rich rich and the poor poor. The poor were to be contented with their poverty, because it would all be made up to them in the world beyond the grave, usually pictured as something mid-way between Kew gardens and a jeweler's shop. Ten thousand a year for me, two pounds a week for you, but we are all the children of God. And through the whole fabric of capitalist society there ran a similar lie, which it was absolutely necessary to rip out.

Consequently there was a long period during which nearly every thinking man was in some sense a rebel, and usually a quite irresponsible rebel. Literature was largely the literature of revolt or of disintegration. Gibbon, Voltaire, Rous-

seau, Shelley, Byron, Dickens, Stendhal, Samuel Butler, Ibsen, Zola, Flaubert, Shaw, Joyce—in one way or another they are all of them destroyers, wreckers, saboteurs. For two hundred years we had sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we were sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake. The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all, it was a cesspool full of barbed wire.

It is as though in the space of ten years we had slid back into the Stone Age. Human types supposedly extinct for centuries, the dancing dervish, the robber chieftain, the Grand Inquisitor, have suddenly reappeared, not as inmates of lunatic asylums, but as the masters of the world. Mechanization and a collective economy seemingly aren't enough. By themselves they lead merely to the nightmare we are now enduring: endless war and endless underfeeding for the sake of war, slave populations toiling behind barbed wire, women dragged shrieking to the block, cork-lined cellars where the executioner blows your brains out from behind. So it appears that amputation of the soul isn't just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out. The wound has a tendency to go septic.

The gist of Mr Muggeridge's book is contained in two texts from Ecclesiastes: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity' and 'Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man'. It is a viewpoint that has gained a lot of ground lately, among people who would have laughed at it only a few years ago. We are living in a nightmare precisely because we have tried to set up an earthly paradise. We have believed in 'progress'. Trusted to human leadership, rendered unto Caesar the things that are God's—that approximately is the line of thought.

Unfortunately Mr Muggeridge shows no sign of believing in God himself. Or at least he seems to take it for granted that this belief is vanishing from the human mind. There is not much doubt that he is right there, and if one assumes that no sanction can ever be effective except the supernatural one, it is clear what follows. There is no wisdom except in the fear of God; but nobody fears God; therefore there is no wisdom. Man's history reduces itself to the rise and fall of material civilizations, one Tower of Babel after another. In that case we can be pretty certain what is ahead of us. Wars and yet more wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions, Hitlers and super-Hitlers—and so downwards into abysses which are horrible to contemplate, though I rather suspect Mr Muggeridge of enjoying the prospect.

It must be about thirty years since Mr Hilaire Belloc, in his book *The Servile State*, foretold with astonishing accuracy the things that are happening now.

Mr Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was a good caricature of the hedonistic Utopia, the kind of thing that seemed possible and even imminent before Hitler appeared, but it had no relation to the actual future. What we are moving to-

wards at this moment is something more like the Spanish Inquisition, and probably far worse, thanks to the radio and the secret police... It is this that leads innocent people like the Dean of Canterbury to imagine that they have discovered true Christianity in Soviet Russia. No doubt they are only the dupes of propaganda, but what makes them so willing to be deceived is their knowledge that the Kingdom of Heaven has somehow got to be brought on to the surface of the earth. We have not to be the children of God, even though the God of the Prayer Book no longer exists...Religion is the sigh of the soul in a soulless world.⁷⁹⁰

Why this moth-like flight into the fire? Here we see the essential asymmetry between belief and unbelief. Unbelief is transparent to belief, but unbelief is blind to belief and opaque to itself. Belief can account for unbelief, but unbelief cannot account for either belief or unbelief. “The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jn 1:5, KJV).

Fallen man is a rebel. As George Steiner observes:

The major mythologies constructed in the West since the early 19C are not only attempts to fill the emptiness left by the decay of Christian theology and Christian dogma. They are themselves a kind of substitute theology. They are system of belief and argument which may be savagely anti-religious, which may postulate a world without God and may deny an afterlife, but whose structure, whose aspirations, whose claims on the believer, are profoundly religious in strategy and in effect.⁷⁹¹

In its suicidal repudiation of the faith, in its counterfeit creed, in its protean embodiment of the Antichrist, unbelief bears witness to the truthfulness and the goodness of the very thing it defies and denies and derides. Compare, then, the Black Sabbath of unbelief with the dawning light of Easter morn:

This joyful Eastertide,
Away with sin and sorrow!
My love, the Crucified,
Has sprung to life this morrow.

Had Christ, that once was slain,
Ne'er burst his three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain.

⁷⁹⁰ http://orwell.ru/library/articles/notes/english/e_notew

⁷⁹¹ *Nostalgia for the Absolute* (Anansi Press 2004), 4.

But now has Christ arisen,
Arisen, arisen, arisen,
But now has Christ arisen!

My flesh in hope shall rest,
And for a season slumber,
Till trump from east to west
Shall wake the dead in number.

Death's flood hath lost his chill,
Since Jesus crossed the river;
Lover of souls, from ill,
My passing soul deliver.

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once he died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

I know that my Redeemer lives;
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;

He lives, my everlasting Head!

He lives, to bless me with his love;
He lives, to plead for me above;
He lives, my hungry soul to feed;
He lives, to help in time of need!

He lives, and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name;
He lives, my Savior, still the same;
What joy the best assurance gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath;
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers.
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.

Excursus I: The Pagan Polemic

The various contributors to the ET deny the Resurrection because it conflicts with their secular humanism. They then have to account for the NT witness to the Resurrection. This they do by resorting to comparative mythology.

They are, in effect, assuming a pagan point of view. How would NT Christianity look as seen through heathen eyes?

One of the problems with this approach is that not one of the contributors is a 1C Greco-Roman pagan. Instead, every one is a 21C atheistic materialist.

So what we end up with is Pagan Day, in which the contributors play pagan for a day, like day-trippers to 1C Rome or Athens.

In playing the role of “instant Pagan,” they created a synthetic paganism based on whatever they can cobble together to possibly parallel the Resurrection.

But this is a purely imaginary exercise. What reason is there to believe that their artificial construct corresponds in any exacting degree to how someone actually living in that place and time viewed the Christian faith from within its Greco-Roman milieu?

As a matter of fact, there are a number of real live pagans who did write about the early Christian faith. So, in terms of comparative mythology, would it not be sounder methodology to see what they had to say? To see what similarities and dissimilarities they saw between their indigenous outlook and the Christian faith?

Let’s examine four pagan critics of the Christian faith: Galen, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian. Let us see, in their own words, what analogies and disanalogies they saw between their indigenous worldview and the viewpoint of the Christian faith.

I. Galen (c. 129-199)

Galen was a prolific Greek physician of just renown. In the course of his voluminous writings he drops some comments about the Christians and Jews:

They compare those who practice medicine without scientific knowledge to Moses, who framed laws for the tribe of the Jews, since it is his method in his

books to write without offering proofs, saying: “God commanded, God spoke,”⁷⁹²

It is precisely this point in which our own opinion and that of Plato and of the other Greeks who follow the right method in natural science differs from the position taken up by Moses. For the latter it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God, even should he wish to make a bull or a horse out of ashes. We however do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.⁷⁹³

One might more easily teach novelties to the followers of Moses and Christ than to the physicians and philosophers who cling fast to their schools.⁷⁹⁴

One should not at the very beginning, as if one had come into the school of Moses and Christ, hear talk of undemonstrated laws, and that where it is least appropriate.⁷⁹⁵

If I had in mind people who taught their pupils in the same way as the followers of Moses and Christ teach theirs—for they order them to accept everything on faith—I should not have given you a definition.⁷⁹⁶

Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively: hence they need parables, and benefit from them...just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables [and miracles], and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize].⁷⁹⁷

So what are we to make of this?

i) Galen doesn't criticize any actual article of the Christian faith. Instead, he's critical of Judeo-Christian theological method.

He regards it as a species of fideism—of blind submission to authority.

ii) He doesn't derive Christian doctrine from pagan sources.

⁷⁹² R. Walzer, ed., *Galen On Jews & Christians* (Oxford 1949), 11.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

iii) It is important to keep in mind that Galen is operating with a rather specialized standard of proof. The objection is not to a lack of evidence, per se:

Although Galen everywhere contends that there cannot be a medical science at all, unless it is based on experience, he equally insists from his earliest known works onwards that experience and empiricism alone are insufficient without reason and logical clarity. His logic and epistemology are on true Aristotelian lines. The philosophical school of Moses and Christ is on the same level as Archigenes' undemonstrated, unmethodical, nay purely empirical knowledge.⁷⁹⁸

So this is not about faith, as such, but about a particular theory of knowledge. According to his own epistemology, historical evidence wouldn't rate as knowledge. Knowledge calls for formal argument. Induction, sense experience and the like fall short of knowledge in this technical sense.

As we shall see, the charge of fideism would become a stock feature in the anti-Christian pagan polemic.

II. Celsus (2C)

To judge by his literary remains, Celsus was a fairly well-read and rather eclectic Middle Platonist as well as pagan of sorts—although he doesn't take civil religion seriously except as a social adhesive and moral restraint.

Jesus himself was thought to work wonders by the use of magic and incantations.⁷⁹⁹

Here Celsus is picking up on the old Jewish charge, preserved in the Gospels and the Talmud, that Jesus was a sorcerer who worked wonders by commerce with the dark side.

This is a last-ditch effort to discredit Christ. It assumes that the miracles attributed to him are undeniable, so it admits to the authenticity of the miracles, but explains them away by saying that Jesus was possessed.

One problem with this tactic is that it imputes the known to the unknown. The miracles are demonstrable, but their demonic inspiration is not.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁹⁹ *Celsus On the True Doctrine*, R. Hoffmann, ed. (Oxford 1987), 53.

That Jesus was not a demoniac or in league with the dark side is clear from the gospels, and there is no other record. And the nature of his miracles is antithetical to the kingdom of darkness.

Moving along:

Just as the charlatans of the cults take advantage of a simpleton's lack of education to lead him around by the nose, so too with the Christian teachers: they do not want to give or receive reasons for what they believe. Their favorite expressions are "Do not ask questions, just believe!" and: "Your faith will save you!" "The wisdom of the world," they say, "is evil; to be simple is to be good."⁸⁰⁰

Like Galen, this is the charge of fideism. There may be a grain of truth to the allegation. The early church had a limited talent pool to draw upon. But Celsus' charge is greatly overstated:

i) Because Christians were a minority group in a hostile environment, the Christian faith always had an apologetical edge to it.

ii) One can tell, even from reading the NT, that the constituency for the faith wasn't limited to the lower classes.

Moving along:

Were we to read the literature of but one nation, we would conclude that there had been but one flood, one conflagration, one disruption of the created order. But in reality there have been many floods, many conflagrations—those floods in the time of Deucalion and the fire in the time of Phaeton being more recent than the rest.⁸⁰¹

It's hard to see the cogency of this comparison. The flood of Noah doesn't in any way preclude the possibility of local floods and other smaller-scale natural disasters.

Moving along:

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 55-56.

The Greeks of course thought these upheavals ancient since they did not possess records of earlier events, such records being destroyed in the course of floods and conflagrations. Moses heard of such beliefs.⁸⁰²

Here we have a vague allegation that Moses borrowed his materials from earlier writers and nations. Yet Celsus doesn't go on to document any parallel between, say, the Biblical flood account and some extra-Biblical source—unless he regards Deucalion as a possible source. But that, of course, is far later than Genesis.

He is also not denying the underlying event—not here, at least—but simply asserting literary dependence, for which, however, he offers no evidence.

Moving along:

For our part, we acknowledge the many: Mnemosyne, who gave birth to the Muses by Zeus; Themis, Mother of the Hours; and so on...It matters not a bit what one calls the supreme God—or whether one uses Greek names or Indian names or the names used formerly by the Egyptians. Further, for all their exclusiveness about the highest god, do not the Jews also worship angels, and are they not addicted to sorcery, as indeed their scripture shows Moses himself was?⁸⁰³

i) Here we have an incongruous mix of rationalism and superstition. On the one hand, he seems to credit Greek theogonies. On the other hand is the syncretistic and harmonistic device of saying that different religions are worshipping the same God under different names and guises.

ii) It is unclear where he's getting his information on Moses and Jewish angelology. It's possible that you had a cult of angels in Diaspora Judaism. But the OT prohibits the adoration of angels.

iii) As to Moses, it is, again, unclear if he's simply referring to the miracles of Moses, or whether he's claiming that Moses learned the dark arts from the Egyptian cult and court. As a Platonist, Celsus traces all wisdom to Egypt, where Plato once studied.

Moving along:

⁸⁰² Ibid., 56.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 56.

Let us imagine what a Jew—let alone a philosopher—might put to Jesus: “Is it not true, good sir, that you fabricated the story of your birth from a virgin to quiet rumours about the true and unsavory circumstances of your origins?...That she was pregnant by a Roman soldier named Panthera?...Is it not so that you hired yourself out as a workman in Egypt, learned magical crafts...⁸⁰⁴

This is the first record of the classic Jewish polemic against the virgin birth:

i) Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Jesus was conceived by ordinary means, it is unclear why this would call for a cover-story. In case of rape, there was no stigma attaching to rape victims in the Mosaic law. As to fornication, unlike adultery, this is not a capital offense in the Mosaic Law.⁸⁰⁵ Moreover, Mary and Joseph were already betrothed, which had the legal force of marriage, so that any “fornication” would be a mere technicality. Hence, there is no incentive to concoct a cover-story. And, as Celsus himself serves to illustrate, such a story would do nothing to quiet malicious gossip since those who circulated the rumors wouldn’t buy the cover-story anyway.

ii) Jesus must have been quite precocious to master the black arts during his brief, childhood stay in Egypt!

iii) The name of the soldier appears to be a pun, by reversing two letters (“r” and “n”): Panthera, parthenos.

Moving along:

Clearly the Christians have used the myths of the Danae and the Melanippe, or of the Auge and the Antiope in fabricating the story of Jesus’ virgin birth. A beautiful woman must his mother have been, that this Most High God should want to have intercourse with her!⁸⁰⁶

Unless I’m mistaken, this is the only occasion when a pagan writer tries to trace a Biblical event back to a pagan source.⁸⁰⁷ Celsus’ examples are hardly judicious. In

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁰⁵ The law is strikingly bland and businesslike on this offense. The penalty was a shotgun wedding and the payment of a dowry (Exod 22:16-17).

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁰⁷ On the Virgin Birth generally, cf. C. Cranfield, “Some Reflections on the Subject of the Virgin Birth,” *On Romans* (T & T Clark 1998), 151-165; J. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Baker 1977).

the case of Antiope, Zeus approaches her in the form of a satyr. What we have, then, is not a virgin birth. Rather, she is impregnated through sexual intercourse. Bestiality and virgin birth are hardly interchangeable.

The myth of Danae is a bit more oblique. To preserve her chastity, she's locked away in some inaccessible tower or dungeon. But Zeus is able to gain access by turning into a shower of gold.

The idea seems to be that liquid can go where solid objects cannot. But that is simply the form he assumes to gain access to her quarters, not the form he assumes to seduce her or rape her. Presumably he resumes his godlike form for purposes of copulation. Once again, the female is impregnated through sexual intercourse. No virgin birth. In both cases, a male divinity takes the place of a man as the sexual partner.

iv) If you're looking for parallels or precedents, the obvious place to look would be Jewish heroes like Isaac, Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist whose conception necessitated divine intervention.

This is about typology, not literary dependence. God uses a supernatural birth to signify an individual who is called apart and consecrated to perform a strategic role in redemptive history. In the case of Christ, the sign is more spectacular, as the climax of this motif, because the antitype is greater than the type. He is a greater person with a greater mission.

v) The role of the Holy Spirit in engendering this birth also represents the convergence and the culmination of OT themes:

The Spirit's coming upon Mary here is, rather, the eschatological coming of the Spirit by means of which the wilderness becomes a fruitful field (Isa 32:15). The activity of the Spirit here is viewed in line with that creative role attributed in Judaism to the Spirit from the original creation (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6), through the ongoing creation and sustaining of life (Job 27:3; 33:4; Ps 104:30) to the eschatological renewal of God's people (Isa 32:15; 44:3-4; Ezk 37:1-14).⁸⁰⁸

And again:

These parallel affirmations [Lk 1:35] do not suggest sexual activity, but do connote divine agency. The Holy Spirit is identified with God's power in a way

⁸⁰⁸ J. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (Word 1989), 45.

that anticipates Acts 1:8. The verb “to come upon” also anticipates Acts 1:8, and, then, the Pentecost event. The text may call to mind Isa 32:15, which anticipates the Spirit’s being poured out upon God’s people as a mark of the age of peace. The second phrase has connections with the transfiguration scene in 9:34, and more broadly with scriptural accounts of manifestations of the glory of God (e.g., Exod 40:35; Num 9:18,22).⁸⁰⁹

Moving along:

Are we to think that this high God would have fallen in love with a woman of no breeding?⁸¹⁰

Note the blatant appeal to the reader’s snobbery.

Moving along:

When you were an infant you had to be taken away to Egypt lest you should be murdered. I am disturbed by the news that you, though a god, should have been afraid of death.⁸¹¹

No effort is made here to grasp the nature of the Incarnation and atonement and our Lord’s identification with his people. Even though Celsus doesn’t believe in the Christ-Event, a more competent polemicist would take it seriously for the sake of argument.

Moving along:

After all, the old myths of the Greeks that attribute a divine birth to Perseus, Amphion, Aeacus and Minos are equally good evidence of their wondrous works on behalf of mankind.⁸¹²

i) Notice that he is not attempting to draw a specific parallel, in terms of literary dependence. Instead he resorts to the generic category of a “divine birth.”

ii) Are they equally good evidence? That turns on many questions such as the distance from the event, character of the witnesses, argument from prophecy, &c.

⁸⁰⁹ J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans 1997), 90.

⁸¹⁰ Celsus, 57-58.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

Moving along:

Are they then so different from the sorts of things done by sorcerers—who also claim to do wonderful miracles, having been taught their tricks by the Egyptians? The sorcerers at least, for a few pence, make their magic available to everyone in the marketplace...They make things move about, as if they were alive—an illusion to be sure, but quite appealing to the average imagination...Or ought we rather to say that they are the contrivances of evil men who are themselves possessed by demons?⁸¹³

i) According to Celsus, Jesus was a trickster or illusionist. But some miracles are easier to fake than others.

ii) Celsus is oblivious to the moral seriousness and emblematic import of the miracles performed by Christ.

iii) He performed his miracles in public as well, with witnesses present—including hostile witnesses.

iv) From the standpoint of Scripture, possession is a genuine phenomenon which does result in paranormal powers. Some “sorcerers” are charlatans, while others are the real deal.

Moving along:

We even hear of your eating habits. What? Does the body of a god need such nourishment?⁸¹⁴

Again, there’s no good-faith effort to grapple with the ramifications of a divine Incarnation. What Celsus is doing is classic sophistry: the reliance on ridicule. But playing to the galleries is not a reasoned refutation.

Moving along:

And we hear often of your unsuccessful attempts to win over others to your cause—the tricks evidently not being enough to hold their attention. One wonders why a god should need to resort to your kind of persuasion—even eating a fish after your resurrection.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹³ Ibid., 60.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

- i) The fact that the Gospels preserve a record of these “unsuccessful attempts” is a mark of their integrity and authenticity.
- ii) The advent of Christ was meant to be a divisive event—attracting the elect while repelling the reprobate (e.g., Mt 10:34-39; Lk 2:34; Jn 2:19-21; 6; 9-12).
- iii) Proving his physicality to the disciples after the Resurrection is a merciful condescension to their unbelief.

Moving along:

Would he have permitted himself to be arrested? Most of all: Would a god...be betrayed by the very men who had been taught by him and shared everything with him.⁸¹⁶

Celsus has no inkling of the atonement. Christ came to die so that his people would live. The arrest and betrayal are foreseen means of facilitating his mission.

Now, Celsus goes on to comment on:

The nonsensical idea that Jesus foresaw everything that was to happen to him.⁸¹⁷

Why this is nonsensical, he doesn't say.

Moving along:

And if he was at some point a dead man, how can he have been immortal? It seems to me that any god or demon—for that matter, any sensible man—who foreknew what was going to happen to him would try very hard to avoid such a fate.⁸¹⁸

Once again you have a total incomprehension of the Incarnation as well as the design of the atonement.

There are many more statements to the same effect:

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 61-62.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

Why does he cry: “Father, if only this cup could pass by me!” A fine God indeed who fears what he is supposed to conquer.⁸¹⁹

The man who sentenced him did not suffer the fate of a Pentheus by going mad or being torn to pieces; rather, Jesus permitted himself to be mocked and bedecked with a purple robe and crowned with thorns.⁸²⁰

Why did he refuse to deliver himself from shame—at least play the man and stand up for his own or for his fathers’ honor?⁸²¹

Or, better, he might have saved himself the trouble of getting buried and simply have disappeared from the cross.⁸²²

What accounts for this persistently obtuse objection? A couple of reasons come to mind:

i) Celsus has such contempt for the Christian faith that he doesn’t bother to really understand it. His antipathy is so prejudicial that it preempts understanding. So you have this viciously circular situation where he doesn’t understand it because he doesn’t think it’s true, doesn’t think it deserves to be taken seriously, and that, in turn, leaves him with no incentive to make the effort.

ii) To a 2C pagan, the Christian faith was just one more religious fad, catering to the rabble. Celsus is impervious to the magnitude of the threat which the new faith poses to the old order. Had he foreseen that the Christian faith was poised to become the state religion, I doubt he would have been so flippant and dismissive.

iii) Notice that in his appeal to the tale of Dionysus, what we have is a comparison for the sake of contrast: an argument from disanalogy rather than analogy. This is the very opposite of a pagan parallel.

Moving along:

Jesus himself spoke of rivals entering the contest with his followers, wicked men and magicians, who would perform just the same sort of wonders, only under the supervision of Satan. Even Jesus admitted there was nothing exclu-

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 63-64.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁸²¹ Ibid., 65.

⁸²² Ibid., 68.

sively “divine” about working these signs—that they could just as easily be done by wicked men.⁸²³

i) As I’ve said before, some miracles are easier to fake than others.

ii) The argument from miracle to accredit a divine emissary is a necessary rather than sufficient evidence of his divine mission. It narrows the field of contenders.

Moving along:

Let’s assume for the present that he foretold his resurrection. Are you ignorant of the multitudes who have invented similar tales to lead simple-minded hearers astray?⁸²⁴

Celsus then proceeds to run down a list of would-be parallels. This is his exercise in comparative mythology. But the exercise falls flat on several counts:

i) As one scholar has pointed out,

All Celsus’ instances are stock miracle-stories which often occur together in similar groups elsewhere, e.g., Plutarch, Romulus, 28 (Aristeas, Cleomedes); Pliny, N.H. vv,174-6 (Hermontimus, Aristeas, Epimeides, Heraclides’ lifeless woman—cf. II, 16, above); Clem. Al. Strom. I, 133, 2 (Abaris, Aristeas, Epimenides); Proclus, in Remp. II, 113, 23-5 (Aristeas, Hermodorus, Epimenides).⁸²⁵

Celsus reaches into the same bag of tricks on pp.71-72 and 112.

ii) So Celsus has done nothing at all to establish any specific genealogical parallels between the Resurrection and pagan precedents. All he’s done, rather, is to regurgitate some thirdhand compilation in which a lot of miscellaneous material is cobbled together without respect to time, place, date, genre, or category.

Now, Celsus is closer to the original sources than we are. So if this is the best he can do, it’s a pretty lame performance.

iii) Notice what happens as soon as you begin to draw these historical distinctions:

⁸²³ Ibid., 66.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁸²⁵ H. Chadwick, ed., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 2003), 149, n.1.

Coupled with this point is the point that in the period of two hundred years on each side of the life of the historical Jesus the number of miracle stories attached to any historical figure is astonishingly small. Werner Kahl concluded from his investigation of approximately 150 miracle stories from antiquity that we know of only one other case in the entire miracle story tradition before Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius* (written after AD 217) of an immanent bearer of numinous or preternatural power (and then in only a singular version of his miracles)—Melampous, according to Disodorus of Sicily (writing c. 60-31 BC). Other Jewish and pagan miracle workers of the period he categorizes as petitioners or mediators of numinous power.⁸²⁶

iv) Celsus jumbles together a number of distinct categories—to hell and back, apotheosis, translation—none of which is isomorphic with the Resurrection. To take a case in point:

The important thing to stress is that nobody in the ancient world took these stories as evidence of resurrection. It is in any case a category mistake to lump stories of apotheosis with the romantic Scheintod motif, as Kathleen Corley does; it is equally mistaken to suppose, as does Adela Yarbro Collins,⁸²⁷ that translation or apotheosis is equivalent to resurrection.⁸²⁸

Most of the translations involve the circumventing of death, with the individual being removed before they die. Vital to Paul's conception of the afterlife in 1 Cor 15 is the resurrection of the dead (hoi nekroi)—the defeat of death (thanatos), not its avoidance.⁸²⁹

Moving along:

Doubtless you will freely admit that these other stories are legends, even as they appear to me; but you will go on to say that your resurrection story...is believable and noble.⁸³⁰

True on both counts. Celsus is trying hard to impute a double standard to Christians. But there is no double standard. The same sort of criteria which leads us to deny Greco-Roman mythology leads us to affirm Bible history.

⁸²⁶ G. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* (IVP 1999), 247.

⁸²⁷ The same essay by Collins is cited by three different contributors (Carrier, Lowder, Fales) to the ET—a splendid specimen of incestuous and erroneous scholarship.

⁸²⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 77.

⁸²⁹ B. Rosner, "With What Kind of Body Do They Come?" *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting*, P. Williams et al., eds., 193.

⁸³⁰ Celsus, 67.

Moving along:

But who really saw this? A hysterical woman, as you admit and perhaps some other person—both deluded by his sorcery, or else so wrenched with grief at his failure that they hallucinated him risen from the dead by a sort of wishful thinking. This mistaking a fantasy for reality is not at all uncommon; indeed, it has happened to thousands. Just as possible, these deluded women wanted to impress the others—who had already the good sense to have abandoned him—by spreading their hallucinations about as “visions.”⁸³¹

i) Note the misogyny, which is a reason the Gospel writers wouldn't invent or reiterate a story of women as the first witnesses to the Resurrection.

ii) In asserting that Jesus bewitched the women, is he attributing genuine paranormal powers to Jesus? If so, why rule out the possibility of another supernatural event like the Resurrection?

iii) He presents the women both as self-deceived and deceivers. But this is psychologically incoherent, if they were self-deluded, then you can't attribute to them a conscious motive to impress others.

iv) Everyone wishes that a loved-one would return from the grave, but how many grieving survivors believe that their loved-one has returned from the grave? I assume that Galen and Celsus and Porphyry and Julian lost loved-ones. Did they hallucinate a resurrection?

v) There are many more witnesses to the Resurrection than a couple of “hysterical” women.

Moving along:

What god appears in turn only to those who already look for his reappearance, and is not even recognized by them?⁸³²

i) They did not expect him to reappear.

ii) Not all of them failed to recognize him.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 68.

⁸³² Ibid., 68-69.

iii) As a thirty-something living in a hot, dry climate, Jesus' face would have suffered a certain amount of wear-and-tear from the elements and the aging process. To go from this to an ageless and immortal body would involve some change in his countenance—a more adolescent look.

iv) In addition, the use of the divine passive in Lk 24:16 introduces another factor, the purpose of which is to heighten the shock of recognition. The delayed effect makes the impact all the more memorable—and needful when dealing with those that are slow to believe.

Moving along:

The Christians say yes, and cite the miracles of Jesus as proof of his identity. The Jews say that any sorcerer could put forward such proofs, and that the circumstances of Jesus' death prove him an imposter. I am slightly inclined to the latter view myself, since miracles and wonders have indeed occurred everywhere and in all times. Asclepius did mighty works and foretold the futures of cities that kept his cult.⁸³³

i) This reflects a persistent point of tension in Celsus' polemic. Was Jesus a mere conjurer and trickster, or a genuine wonder-worker and exorcist? If he did work signs and wonders, then we're moving into a worldview where a divine incarnation or resurrection is not impossible.

ii) Celsus does draw a broad parallel with Asclepius, but not in order to derive the thaumaturgical work of Christ from the thaumaturgical work of Asclepius. He doesn't claim, much less demonstrate, that the miracles of Christ were modeled on the "miracles" of Asclepius.

iii) The healings attributed to Asclepius involve the principle of possession whereby the god enters the patient as he sleeps in the temple of Asclepius. This is moving in a completely different thought-world than the Gospels. Jesus is not an incubus. Literary dependence is out of the question.

Moving along:

⁸³³ Ibid., 69.

Above all, they have concocted an absolutely offensive doctrine of everlasting punishment and rewards, exceeding anything the philosophers...could have imagined.⁸³⁴

i) Now is not the time and place to defend the doctrine of hell. But it is striking to see how early this objection enters the record.

ii) It is also striking that Celsus takes offense, not merely at the idea of everlasting torment, but everlasting bliss.

iii) Why he thinks that opinion of the philosophers is relevant is unclear. The detailed nature of the afterlife is not an argument from experience. The philosophers are in no position to draw a roadmap of the afterlife. If anything is dependent on revelation, this is.

Moving along:

The religion of the Christians is not directed at an idea but at the crucified Jesus, and this is surely not better than dog or goat worship at its worst.⁸³⁵

i) If this is goat-worship at its worst, I wonder what Celsus thinks is goat-worship at its best!

ii) Celsus is half right. As Tertullian said, Christianity is not about an idea, but an event. The philosophical orientation of Celsus, with his half-baked Platonism, is hostile to the very idea of historical revelation and redemption—of bodies and blood and all that grubby stuff.

Continuing, “But let them find some gullible wives.”⁸³⁶ Ever more misogyny.

Moving along:

And so they invite into membership those who by their own account are sinners; the dishonest, thieves, burglars, poisoners, blasphemers of all descriptions, grave-robbers. I mean—what other cult actually invites robbers to become members! Their excuse for all this is that their god was sent to call sinners: well, fair enough. But what about the righteous? How do they account for the fact that their appeal is to the lowest sort of person? Why was their Christ not

⁸³⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., Celsus, 71.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 72.

sent to those who had not sinned...but of course, the Christians postulate that everyone is a sinner...why on earth this preference for sinners?⁸³⁷

There's really not much one can say to this. It presents a perfect illustration of the scandal of the cross. The gospel isn't good news for him because he doesn't see his need. He isn't itching where the gospel is scratching. This is one stumbling block he can't get under or over or around because he pride fills all the available space.

Moving along:

The Christian God...keeps his purposes to himself for ages, and watches with indifference as wickedness triumphs over good. Is it only after such a long time that God has remembered to judge the life of men? Did he not care before?⁸³⁸

i) This is oblivious to the metanarrative of Scripture where, following upon the Fall, you have the protevangelion (Gen 3:15), which threads its way through the remnant of Noah's family, the calling and covenant of Abraham, the types and shadows of the Mosaic economy and the Davidic covenant, to end and begin anew in the Christ-Event.

ii) The damned meet their judge as soon as they die, although they also await the final judgment to come.

Moving along:

God is that which is beautiful and happy and exists within himself in the most perfect of all conceivable states. This means that God is changeless. A god who comes down to men undergoes change—change from good to bad; from beautiful to shameful; from happiness to misfortune; from what is perfect to what is wicked; Now what sort of a god would choose a change like that?...Accordingly, it cannot be the case that God came down to earth, since in so doing he would have undergone an alternation of his nature. To be blunt: Either God really does change as they suggest into a human being...or else makes those who see him think that he is only mortal, and so deceives them, and tells lies—which is not the nature of a god to do.⁸³⁹

This is an interesting objection, but badly off the mark in several essential respects:

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 77-78

i) Observe the highly aprioristic character of his theological method. Celsus doesn't make any effort to justify his preconception of God.

ii) Part of his objection lies in the Platonic distaste of matter.

iii) He either doesn't understand the Incarnation or has a very crude understanding thereof. The Incarnation does not entail a change in God. Assuming that God is timeless, then there was never a time when the Son of God was disincarnate, although the Incarnation is effected in time.

Moving along:

Such a god seems to delight in repenting of what he has created and—having lost control over it—in reducing it to rubble.⁸⁴⁰

As I've said before, this reflects both a failure to appreciate the idiomatic character of God-talk as well as the narrative strategy of the Bible, whereby what seem, at first glance, to be setbacks and reversals of fortune are later seen, in hindsight, to reflect the premeditated plan and providence of God. The Joseph cycle is a fine example.

Moving along:

And so they [the Jews] contrived for themselves a crude and fantastic story about man being formed by God and breathed on by God, and that a woman was then formed out of the man's right side, and that God gave them commands, and that a serpent came and proved himself superior to the wishes of God.

Now it is true that the more reasonable among the Jews and Christians are ashamed of this nonsense and try their best to allegorize it...How else are we to understand the story about creating woman from the man's rib...So too their fantastic story...concerning the flood and the building of an enormous ark, and the business about the message brought back to the survivors of the flood by a dove (or was it an old crow?). This is nothing more than a debased and nonsensical version of the myth of Deucalion.⁸⁴¹

They allot certain days to creation, before days existed. For when heaven had not been made, or the earth fixed or the sun set in the heavens, how could days exist? Isn't it absurd to think that the greatest God pieced out this work like a

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

bricklayer, saying “Today I shall do this, tomorrow that”...like a common workman, this God wears himself down and so needs a holiday after six days... Their absurd doctrines even contain reference to God walking about in the garden he created.⁸⁴²

There’s a lot to sort out here:

i) For the most part, Celsus doesn’t argue for his position, but merely expresses his feelings, which has all the intellectual authority of favoring Mexican food over Chinese.

ii) There’s a modern quality to his objections. Or perhaps we should say, many “modern” objections have been around since the get-go. Nowadays they’re dressed up in a bit of scientific verbiage, but the essential objections are prescientific.

iii) You can see how, in some cases, the allegorists were the liberals of their day—just as their modern-day counterparts continue to allegorize the parts of Scripture they can’t believe.

iv) The somewhat vague imagery of Gen 2 is suggestive of a potter shaping a clay doll. However, the narrative doesn’t make that explicit, so it may simply be a metaphor. To press the very oblique imagery overinterprets the passage.

v) I fail to see what is fantastic about saying that mankind began with a man and a woman—rather than a fish or monkey or something else inhuman. Seems pretty logical to me.

vi) I fail to see what is fantastic about saying that God cloned the woman from the man.

vii) As to God walking about in the garden, this is probably an angelophany—the Angel of the Lord. That’s only absurd if you don’t believe in angels.

viii) As to the anthropomorphic portrayal of God as a “bricklayer,” that’s only absurd if you fail to see the Sabbatarian typology. God is staging and pacing the inception of the world in diurnal phases as an archetype and prototype of the ordinary workweek and Sabbath rest. Why shouldn’t the Creator set up a natural analogy between his exemplary work and the vocation of man?

⁸⁴² Ibid., 102-103.

ix) As to the existence of a diurnal cycle from day one and onward, there are a couple of philological issues to consider:

a) According to one scholar:

The construction of the Hebrew sentence in v14 does not imply that God made the heavenly lights on the fourth day. It does not say “and God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse to divide between the day and the night.’” Rather, it says, “And God said, ‘let the lights in the expanse be for dividing between the day and night.’” You see the difference? The text does not say God created the lights in v14, but rather that God explains why he created the lights in the expanse—to divide between the day and night, etc.⁸⁴³

b) According to another scholar:

The Hebrew word translated ‘lights (me’rot) is not used frequently (19x) in its various forms). Most occurrences are in the Pentateuch (15x), with the remainder in Psalms (2x), Proverbs (once), and Ezekiel (once). The occurrences outside the Pentateuch speak either of the celestial bodies or metaphorically of the face or eyes that shine. What is intriguing is that the ten occurrences in the Pentateuch outside Gen 1 (Exod 25:6; 27:20; 35:8,14[2x],28; 39:37; Lev 24:2; Num 4:9,16) all refer to the light of the lampstand that lights up the tabernacle. The use of the word ‘lights’ may then be our first clue that there is another whole dimension to this text [1:14-19) that has often eluded us: the description of the cosmos as a temple or sanctuary of god. This will be further explored in the next chapter.⁸⁴⁴

What did God do on day four? In v16 the NIV translates, ‘god made two great lights.’ The Hebrew verb for ‘made’ here (‘sh) has a wide range of meanings. It is usually listed in the lexicons with the primary meaning of ‘to do or make,’ but that is only the tip of the iceberg. So, for instance, one current lexicon used in scholarly circles, the third edition of Koehler-Baumgartner (Hebrew- Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament), lists no fewer than sixteen meanings for the Qal form alone.⁸⁴⁵

“On the basis of these passages, there is good reason to conclude that the author of Genesis is using the term functionally. It is indefensible to claim that the use of ‘sh demands that the heavenly bodies are manufactured on day four. Usage in cosmological texts favors taking ‘sh in v16 as a summary of the setting up of functions for the heavenly bodies as reported in vv14-15.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴³ J. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbounded* (Multnomah 1996), 252, n.4.

⁸⁴⁴ J. Walton, *Genesis*, 123-24.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

c) There is a more fundamental issue in play. As one scholar explains:

The OT frequently uses a building motif to describe the universe. It figuratively represents the cosmos as a three-storied building...Architectural imagery is also found in the creation account of Gen 1. The world is divided into compartments or “rooms” for habitations by the various creatures. The sky is a canopy-like covering (“the firmament”) serving as a roof for the earth. Lights are installed in the roof in order to provide illumination.⁸⁴⁷

And beyond this are two additional motifs: cosmic symbolism in the ark and in the tabernacle.⁸⁴⁸ As another scholar explains:

The three stories of the ark correspond to the three stories of the world conceptualized as divided into the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the sphere under the earth, associated especially with the waters (cf. e.g., Exod 20:4; Deut 4:16ff.; Rom 1:23). Possibly the idea of three such zones is reinforced by the animal lists which classify the creatures in the ark as birds of the heaven, cattle and beasts of the earth, and the creeping things of the ground (Gen 6:7,20; 7:23; 8:17; cf. 7:14,21; 8:19). The third category, the creeping things, might have special reference here to burrowing creatures whose subterranean world would then have been substituted for the sphere of the waters under the earth as the lowest level of the ark-cosmos. Or does the narrative intend the correspondence of the first story of the ark to the waters under the earth to be suggested simply by the fact that this lowest part of the ark was actually submerged under the waters of the flood?

Clearly, the window of the ark is the counterpart to “the window of heaven,” referred to in this very narrative (7:11; 8:2). Appropriately, the window area is located along the top of the ark, as part of the upper (heavenly) story. One is naturally led then to compare the door of the ark with the door that shuts up the depths of the sea, holding back its proud waves. (For this cosmological imagery see Job 38:8-11.) Precisely such a restraining of the mighty surge of waters was the function of the door of the ark, once the Lord had secured it about the occupants of the ark at the outset of the deluge. Together, the window and door of the ark mirrored the two cosmic sources of the flood waters, the window of heaven, opened to unleash the torrents of the waters above the earth, and the door of the deep, unbarred to let the waters beneath the earth break loose.

⁸⁴⁷ J. Currid, *Ancient Egypt & the Old Testament* (Baker 1997), 43.

⁸⁴⁸ Cf. G. Beale, *The Temple & the Church's Mission*.

Another indication of the cosmic house symbolism of the ark is that it is God himself who reveals its design. Elsewhere when God provides an architectural plan it is for his sanctuary-house, whether tabernacle or temple (Exod 25ff.; 1 Chron 28:19; Heb 9:5; cf. Ezek 40ff.; Rev 21:10ff.). As the architect of the original creation, who alone comprehends its structure in all its vast dimensions (cf. Job 38), God alone can disclose the pattern for these microcosmic models. When we look at the revelation of the design of the ark in this light we perceive that the architect and builder of the eternal temple-city (Heb 11:10) is providing plans for a symbolic, prophetic copy of that heavenly sanctuary, the final objective of man's cultural history.⁸⁴⁹

Likewise:

There has been a great deal of scholarly attention paid to the correspondences between the creation accounts in Gen 1-4 and the tabernacle construction account in Exodus. With regard to Gen 1:1-2:3 the pattern of sevens is most significant (see Balentine, 138-41; Levenson, 78-90, and other literature cited there).

Finally, based on the above intertextual literary patterns within the Pentateuch and comparisons with cosmologies and temple-building texts of the ANE, J. Levenson has argued persuasively that to build a sanctuary was to create a "microcosm" a small, properly ordered world within the larger "cosmos" (Levenson, 53-127). A sanctuary is the cosmos in miniature, and the cosmos is a sanctuary, depending on which way you look at it...the cosmos and the Tabernacle were reflective of each other as the literary and thematic parallels between creation and the build of the tabernacle show.⁸⁵⁰

And again:

Since we have suggested in our treatment of Gen 1 that creation as a whole was understood in terms of a cosmic temple complex (see above, pp.147-52), it is logical to understand the garden as the antechamber for the Most Holy Place. As indicated in the Original Meaning section above, Eden is in effect the Most Holy Place, and the garden adjoins it as the antechamber. In this regard it is important to note that the objects kept in the antechamber of the OT sanctuary are images intended to evoke the garden. The menorah is a symbol of the tree of life, and the table for the bread of the Presence provided food for the priests.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁹ M. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Two Age Press 2000), 226-227.

⁸⁵⁰ T. Alexander & D. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (IVP 2003), 816-17.

⁸⁵¹ J. Walton, *Genesis*, 182.

What we then have in Gen 1 is implicit architectural imagery which is prepositioned to foreshadow the ark and the tabernacle. So when we ask what God was doing in Gen 1, I think we need to distinguish between direct and indirect action, and between literal and literary levels. When does the action denote a direct creative deed, and when does it depict the work of a carpenter? In the latter case, the account is picturing God as a cosmic carpenter—a godlike Noah. So when does the action apply directly to the creature, and when does it apply directly to the architectural metaphor, and indirectly—via the metaphor—to the creature? The answer would depend on the implicit presence or absence of architectural imagery.

Even a literary metaphor has a literal referent. But we must ask when the creative act is direct or indirect: does it fasten onto the literal referent or the figurative feature that represents the literal referent? Which level is in view?

Suppose we ask why there was light on day one, indeed, why there was a day one with a diurnal cycle before the sunlight on day four? The literary answer would be that a carpenter cannot install skylights until he has put a roof on the house. But there was sunlight before there were skylights.

If we ask what stands behind the metaphor, perhaps the imagery has reference to the divine dispersion of the rain clouds (e.g., Job 38:8-9), which would further link it to the flood account (Gen 1:14,20; 8:6-12; 9:12-17).

x) As to the identity of the snake, this is yet another intertextual and multilayered motif. In my opinion, just as Gen 1 is not to be read in isolation, but in relation to the Flood account and the tabernacle, the fall is meant to be read in relation to the Balaam cycle (Num 21-24).

The name of the Tempter is a pun: the word for “snake” (Heb.=nahas) in Gen 3:1 is from the same root word used by Balaam to put a hex (Heb.=nahas) on Israel (Num 23:23; 24:1).

As one scholar notes:

A more directly sinister nuance may be seen in Heb. Nahas if it is to be connected with the verb nahas, ‘to practice divination, observe signs’ (Gen 30:27; 44:5,15; Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10). This verb appears eleven times in the OT, always in the Piel. The related noun nahas means ‘divination’ (Num 23:23; 24:1).⁸⁵²

⁸⁵² V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Eerdmans 1994), 187.

The angel who opposes Balaam is named “Satan” (22:22). The same sword-drawn angel (22:23) recalls the cherubim who guard the Garden (Gen 3:24). The brazen snake (Num 21:9), as well as the “fiery serpents” (21:6,8) or “seraph-serpents” (another double entendre) recalls the Tempter (Gen 3:1) and the fiery cherubim (3:24). The talking donkey recalls the talking snake (3:1ff.). And an imprecatory theme is common to both accounts.

(In terms of other intertextual relations, the fiery angelology connects Gen 3:24 with the Angel of the Lord [Exod 3:2; 14:19], while the angelic sentinel connects Gen 3:24 with the tabernacle [Exod 25:18-20; 26:1,31; 36:8,35; 37:6-7]. And Ezk 28 picks up on all these motifs, viz., Eden, apostasy, guardian angel, stones of fire.)

To the modern western reader, the whole business of the talking snake may be the most unbelievable element of an unbelievable story. And this is because, as children of science, we think of a snake as a natural animal—nothing more and nothing less. And so, when we read about a snake in Gen 3, and what is attributed to this particular snake, we think of the snake as a natural animal—something we might buy at the local pet store—which intrudes an instant incongruity into the account. And that is because we’re judging the account by our own frame of reference.

But, of course, it was never meant to be understood in such mundane terms. And one problem with reading the account this way is that it fails to explain how Bible writers could go so quickly from a serpentine figure to a satanic figure.

What we need to keep in mind is that, in the ancient world, and in many parts of the world in our own day, a snake is more than a natural animal. In the ANE, a snake was not merely an animal. Rather, it was a figure redolent with numinous or occultic connotations. Indeed, a snake might not even be an animal, but rather, a deity in bestial form.⁸⁵³

You can see these connections in Exod 4:1-5 & 7:8-12, where a snake is an emblem of spiritual warfare. As one commentator explains:

It is a direct confrontation. In this activity of changing a staff into a serpent the Israelite leaders attack Pharaoh and his people at the very heart of their beliefs.

⁸⁵³ Cf. K. Jones, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield House 1974), 19-29.

In the first place, depicted on the front of the Kings crown was an enraged female cobra or serpent. This uraeus was thought by the Egyptians to be energized with divine sovereignty and potency. It was considered the emblem of Pharaoh's power. It symbolized his divinity and majesty. When Aaron flings down the rod-snake before Pharaoh, he is therefore directly assaulting that token of Pharaoh's sovereignty; the scene is one of polemical taunting.⁸⁵⁴

That's why it is such a short step in Scripture from the serpentine to the satanic. Genesis and Exodus share the same audience.

When the modern reader runs into the snake for the first time in Gen 3, he has no frame of reference except the pet store or the backyard. The appearance of the snake, with its paranormal powers, comes out of the blue.

But for an ancient Israelite audience, the snake needed no introduction. Both culture and canon prepared them for his appearance. Both ophiolatry and ophiomancy were fixtures of ANE culture.

The original readers (or hearers) of Gen 3 would have instantly understood that the "serpent" wasn't just another animal—assuming it ever was an animal.

The grammatical construction of Gen 3:1 could either be partitive or comparative. If the latter, he's classified with the beasts of the field; if the former, he's in a class apart. If the comparative sense were intended, we'd expect him to be classified with the creepy crawlers (e.g., reptiles) rather than the beasts of the field (cf. 1:24).

So the "serpent" is a cultural codeword for an occultic emblem or entity. It's easy for a modern reader to lose sight of this fact since what was common knowledge to an ancient audience is not common knowledge to a modern audience.

That's why modern scoffers unconsciously substitute a contemporary frame of reference which is not at all what the author had in mind.

When they think of a "snake," that triggers a completely different set of associations than it would for the original audience.

xi) The flood account contains several realistic details. The proportions of the ark are eminently seaworthy. And as one scholar has observed:

⁸⁵⁴ J. Currid, *Exodus* (Evangelical Press 2000), 161.

The use of birds which could be released for determining the presence and direction of land (Gen 8:6-12) is not a folkloristic invention, but reflects actual navigational practice...A cage full of homing pigeons is not a bad method of direction finding. If it sounds quaint, it is only because we have devised methods more to our liking, but not necessarily better in all circumstances even today.⁸⁵⁵

Since the Jews were not a sea-faring people, they could not have concocted such realistic details. Rather, this goes back to an authentic memory of a genuine event.

xii) The flood account is far older than the legend of Deucalion. As has been known since the days of Berossus, there is a roughly parallel record in Mesopotamian literature. That doesn't imply literary dependence. Rather, since Scripture tells us that the ark landed in upper Mesopotamia, you'd expect the Mesopotamian descendants of Noah to preserve an independent, albeit garbled, tradition of this momentous event.

Moving along, Celsus says:

There is also current among the Christians a variety of stories dealing with the begetting of children long after the parents are of child-bearing age...God appearing on earth in various disguises...women being turned into salt—and so on...It is no wonder that the reasonable among the Christians, embarrassed as they ought to be by such stories, take refuge in allegory...some of the allegories I have seen are even more ridiculous than the myths themselves, since they attempt to explain the fables by means of ideas that really do not fit into the context of the stories.⁸⁵⁶

i) His critique of the allegorical method, with respect to both its motivations and its artificiality, is not without merit.

ii) Nothing could be cruder or more primitive than his own worldview, which treats the created order as though it were an airtight, waterproof box into which nothing from the outside may intrude or escape.

iii) The fate of Lot's wife is not some gratuitous spectacle or curiosity to tickle the mythic imagination. Rather, it's of a piece with the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as they perished in a shower of burning sulfur, so Lot's wife, by hanging back, is overtaken by the sulfurous fallout—much like the citizens of Pompeii and Herculanium were petrified by volcanic ash.

⁸⁵⁵ C. Gordon, *Before Columbus* (Crown Publishers 1971), 77.

⁸⁵⁶ Celsus, 80-81.

In Scripture, salt is a sign of desolation, of which the Dead Sea, where the Sodomites once dwelt, is a cautionary reminder. Lot's wife lived and died as a loyal citizen of Sodom. Nothing could be more natural or fitting.

Moving along:

I turn now to consider the existence of evil...there is just so much evil, and in quantity it has remained the same. It is in the nature of the universe that this be the case...evils are not caused by god; rather, they are part of the nature of matter...things happen in cycles...God has no need of [what the Christians call] a new creation; God does not inflict correction on the world as if he were an unskilled laborer who is incapable of building something properly first time around; God has no need to purify what he has built by means of a flood or a conflagration (as they teach).⁸⁵⁷

Here we see why, at a presuppositional level, Celsus cannot accept the Christian faith. He has a cyclical view of history—probably a global version of the Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis. This is in stark contrast to the linear view of Scripture. He takes a Platonic view of matter as inherently evil. Hence, there is no distinction between natural and moral evils. This, again, stands in direct contrast to Scripture, where the sensible world is good because it is the handiwork of God, and evil is essentially personal rather than impersonal in character. Finally, he takes a deistic view of the universe, as a self-regulating machine. Again, the outlook is essentially impersonal.

Although his philosophy is dated, it has much in common with modern materialism and secularity.

Moving along:

I shall have to show that their stupidity really hinges on their doctrine of creation, since they hold that God made all things for the sake of men, whereas our philosophy maintains that the world was made as much for the benefit of the irrational animals as for men.⁸⁵⁸

Notice how much this has in common with Greenpeace, the Gaia Hypothesis, and the New Age movement.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 82.

Moving along:

Accordingly there is nothing wrong with a very ancient people like the Jews maintaining their laws; the fault is rather with those who have abandoned their own traditions in order to profess those of the Jews.⁸⁵⁹

Celsus has a twofold basis for this compromise:

- i) His pluralistic belief that the same God lies behind different religious expressions.
- ii) His utilitarian commitment to civil religion.

Moving along:

And what of their belief in a trinity of gods; is not even this central doctrine of theirs a gross misinterpretation of certain things Plato says in his letters?⁸⁶⁰

- i) Of course, Christians don't believe in a trinity of "gods."
- ii) The only thing resembling Platonism in the NT is a bit of Philonic terminology in Hebrews. And even that is given an eschatological redefinition.
- iii) The NT is a tapestry of OT quotes and themes and allusions. That supplies the background.
- iv) The NT doctrine of the Trinity is weaving into one theological fabric such OT differentia as God, the Spirit of God, Son of God, Word of God, wisdom of God, and Angel of the Lord.

This is all rather shadowy. If we had only the OT to go by, the data would be capable of either a weaker or stronger construction. Up to a point it would be consistent with modalism. Up to a point it would be consistent with personification. Yet even at this stage of progressive revelation, some of the data is resistant to that reductive interpretation. And all the data is open to a stronger interpretation.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 94.

In the NT, the Trinity emerges from the shade. And that's exactly what you'd expect. It is only in the noonday brightness of fulfillment that the players are clearly seen.

Christians are sometimes embarrassed by what they take to be the indistinct witness of the OT to the Trinity. But here we have a direct parallel with redemption, for the OT doctrine of redemption is just as shadowy. All the elements are present, but it's hard to tell, from the OT alone, if they point in the same direction, and what direction that would be.

Just as in the OT witness to the Trinity, you have God, the Spirit of God, Son of God, Word of God, wisdom of God, and Angel of the Lord, in the OT witness to atonement you have a Passover Lamb and Son of David and Son of man and seed of promise. In both cases, what is unclear is not the relation, but the relation. How are these elements to be coordinated?

And, as with the Trinity, the atonement only comes out of the shadows in the NT, in the actual event of redemption. That is only natural. Both actors and actions are best seen in action.

Moving along:

But the Christian notion that the Son of God accepted the punishments inflicted upon him by a devil is merely ludicrous.⁸⁶¹

i) This simply evinces his faulty grasp of the atonement. That's understandable given the underdeveloped state of Christian soteriology in the 2C. Not only did the subapostolic church have a very inadequate grasp of the atonement, but since Celsus regards the Christian faith as absurd, he draws no distinction between orthodox theology and the many heretical sects with which he's familiar—Gnostics, Ophites, Ebionites, Marcionites, Simonians, &c.

ii) In the classic doctrine of penal substitution, it is not the devil, but the Lord, who exacts justice on the sin-bearer.

Moving along:

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., 100.

It is even clear where they get their idea of a son of God. For in the old days men used to call this world of ours the child of God and personify it as a demigod, inasmuch as it originated from God.⁸⁶²

Actually, the sonship of Christ has its literary background in the divine adoption of Israel and David. Although this is originally a legal metaphor, it is already taking on metaphysical overtones in the OT Messianism, and that transition is complete by the NT, where Christ is the Son of God in an ontological sense.⁸⁶³

Moving along:

But if these are truly the Creator's works, how can it be that God should make what is evil?...how can he find fault with his own handiwork, or threaten to destroy his own offspring?⁸⁶⁴

i) There's nothing counterintuitive about parents finding fault with their own children. Happens every day.

ii) God doesn't create evil. He creates finite agents. Finite agents create evil.

iii) God creates what is good. But certain goods are second-order goods, contingent on the abuse of first-order goods. That's where the finite agents come in. They mean it for evil, but he means it for good (Gen 50:20).

Moving along:

And they say that God made man in his own image, failing to realize that God is not at all like a man, nor vice versa.⁸⁶⁵

i) All that Celsus is doing here is to assume that he's right and Christians are wrong. He takes for granted that his doctrine of God is correct, and that sets the standard of comparison. No supporting argument is offered.

ii) He also doesn't know what the *imago Dei* stands for in Scripture:

⁸⁶² Ibid., 100.

⁸⁶³ J. Collins, *The Scepter & the Star*; M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (Fortress 1983); L. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Fortress 1998).

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 103.

Humankind is God's representative upon earth, given the task of dominion over the nonhuman creation...humanity is his representative and agent here on earth...The meaning of the image, thus...[lies] in Israel's, or more precisely, the priestly tradition's understanding of representative kingship.⁸⁶⁶

Moving along:

It is easy for the Christians to use the books of the Jews to their advantage, since anyone can prove anything from so-called prophecy...there are countless in that region who will "prophecy" at the drop of a hat...they are nothing but frauds, and that they concocted their words to suit their audiences and deliberately made them obscure.⁸⁶⁷

This is a direct attack on the classic argument from prophecy. But Celsus is pedaling half-truths.

i) Yes, we're all familiar with charlatans of the dial-a-psychic variety who deal in riddles and truisms and double-entendres. But the existence of false prophets is no more a disproof of true prophets than the existence of a perjurious witness is disproof of a credible witness, or the existence of an erroneous news report is disproof of a reliable news report.

ii) There are criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophecy, in terms of specificity and improbability.⁸⁶⁸

iii) The OT prophets were anti-Establishment figures who were persecuted for their opposition to the status quo.

Moving along:

Yet we are to believe that his "son," this man from Nazareth, gives an opposing set of laws...Well, who is to be disbelieved—Moses or Jesus?⁸⁶⁹

This objection is colored by Celsus' familiarity with the Marcionites, who grossly oversimplified the content of Old and New Covenant alike and radically exaggerated their discontinuities at the expense of their continuities. I myself deny that the

⁸⁶⁶ *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 4:644-645.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁸⁶⁸ For an attempt to quantify the probabilities, cf. http://www.etsjets.org/jets/journal/46/46-1/46-1-pp079-110_JETS.pdf

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

New Covenant simply abrogates the Old. Among the more useful writers on this subject are Roger Beckwith, John Frame, Walter Kaiser, John Murray, Vern Poythress, O. P. Robertson, R. J. Rushdoony, Geerhardus Vos, and Greg Welty.

Moving along:

What do the Christians suppose happens after death?...it is not surprising to find them saying that we go to another earth, different and better than this one. The latter notion they derive from the ancients, who taught that there is a happy life for the blessed—variously called the Isles of the Blessed, the Elysian fields...where they are free from the evils of the world.⁸⁷⁰

Several things wrong here:

i) Celsus fails to distinguish between the intermediate state and the final state. NT writers get the idea of both from the OT. For the intermediate state you have such passages as Ps 16:10-11; 17:15; 49:15; 73:24-26; Prov 3:18; 15:24). For the final state, aside from the resurrection passages, are the golden age passages depicting the world to come as a new Eden (e.g. Isa 35; 65-66; Ezk 47; Amos 9:11-15). This, in turn, derives from the account of the Garden (Gen 2-3). So we have a direct line of literary dependence which is not derived from generic concepts of the afterlife.

ii) Even if there were certain ANE parallels, since Moses situates the garden of Eden in a Mesopotamian river valley (Gen 2:10-14), it wouldn't be surprising if the imagery resembled the local fauna and flora.

Moving along:

It seems that the Christians, in attempting to answer the question of how we shall know and see God, have misunderstood Plato's doctrine of reincarnation.⁸⁷¹

i) Here and elsewhere, Celsus is guilty of mirror-reading. Because he himself is a Platonist, he not only takes Plato as his point of reference, but assumes that everyone else takes Plato as his standard of reference as well, which is historically absurd.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 110.

ii) The NT doctrine of the resurrection has its background in the OT doctrine of the resurrection (cf. Exod 3:6; Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Job 19:25-27; Isa 26:19; Ezk 37:1-14; Dan 12:2; Hos 6:1-2).

Moving along:

For what sort of human soul is it that has any use for a rotted corpse of a body?⁸⁷²

If it is impossible that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, for it would have been impossible for God to have received back his spirit once it has been defiled by coming into contact with human flesh...Presumably, he could have made an appropriate body for this occasion as well, without needing to befoul himself and his spirit.⁸⁷³

They claim that Jesus' body was just like the next man's, or was little, ugly, and repugnant...one wonders why he sent this spirit of his only to some little back-water village of the Jews?⁸⁷⁴

To prove that god would suffer all sort of indignities is no truer just because some Christian claims it was foretold in prophecy...A god would not eat the flesh of sheep (at Passover); a god would not drink vinegar and gall; a god does not filthy himself as the Christians say their Christ did.⁸⁷⁵

This is Celsus' fundamental objection to the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. His basic objection isn't intellectual or even ethical, but emotional and esthetic and aristocratic: matter is evil, the body is evil: God would never soil himself by coming into direct contact with the sensible world, much less rub shoulders with the unwashed masses.

There isn't much to say by way of reply because it's more a matter of distaste than reasoned argument.

Finally,

⁸⁷² Ibid., 86.

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid., 107.

Being and becoming are, in turn, intelligible and visible. Truth is inherent in being; error inherent in becoming; knowledge has to do with truth, opinion with the other.⁸⁷⁶

This is why Celsus can never accept the Bible. His objection isn't limited to piecemeal criticisms of any particular teaching or "contradiction" or event. Rather, the very idea of historical revelation is unacceptable.

Celsus is a striking example of an individual who has barricaded every possible port of entry to the faith.

III. Porphyry (c. 232-305)

Porphyry was an erudite Neoplatonist and protégé of Plotinus. According to Byzantine historians, he was also an apostate.

According to Porphyry:

The evangelists were fiction writers—not observers or eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. Each of the four contradicts the other in writing his account of the events of his suffering and crucifixion.

Based on these contradictory and secondhand reports...it is clear that these ad-dled legends are lifted from accounts of several crucifixions or based on the words of someone who died twice...if these men were unable to be consistent with respect to the way he died, basing [their account] simply on hearsay, then they did not fare any better with the rest of their story.⁸⁷⁷

The charge of contradiction is, of course, a stock objection to the Gospels. It isn't clear if what we have here are two objections or one. Is he saying both that the Gospels are mutually contradictory and also secondhand reports, or secondhand reports because they're contradictory?

If there's no linkage, then he needs a separate argument for the charge of secondhand reportage. If there is a link, then the link is no better than the charge of contradiction.

Since I've already discussed this general allegation, I won't repeat myself here.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁷⁷ *Porphyry's Against the Christians*, R. Hoffmann, ed. (Prometheus 1994), 32-33.

Moving along:

There is another way to refute the false opinion concerning the resurrection of [Jesus], which is spoken of everywhere these days. Why did this Jesus [after his crucifixion and rising—as your story goes] not appear to Pilate...or to...Herod, or to the high priest [or] to people of renown among the Romans, both senators and others, whose testimony was reliable.

Instead he appeared to Mary Magdalene, a prostitute who came from some horrible little village and had been possessed by seven demons, and another Mary, equally unknown, probably a peasant woman, and others who were of no account.⁸⁷⁸

i) The reversal of fortunes is a major theme in Scripture. As expected, the divine irony of God’s redemptive designs is lost on Porphyry:

“The older shall serve the younger” (Gen 25:23).

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples” (Deut 7:7).

“I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel” (2 Sam 7:8).

“For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away” (Lk 1:48,51-53).

“And [the shepherds] went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger” (Lk 2:16).

“But god chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no man might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 2:27-29).

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., 34.

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (Jas 4:7,10).

ii) Porphyry also misses the obvious objection that if the Gospel writers were fabricating the Resurrection, they would, indeed, have made Jesus appear to the high and mighty, as is done in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter. But the gospel account is driven by the facts.

iii) Incidentally, the Magdalene was not a hooker. That’s a popular misidentification.

Moving along:

This silliness in the gospels ought to be taught to old women and not to reasonable people.⁸⁷⁹

Yet another example of Porphyry’s misogyny, and yet another reason why the Gospel writers had no motive to make up a story of Christ appearing to the women. They had, indeed, a powerful disincentive to invent that encounter.

Moving along:

When brought before the high priest and Roman governor, why didn’t Jesus say anything to suggest he was wise or divine?...unlike Apollonius who talked back to the emperor Domitian, vanished from the palace and soon was to be seen by many in the city of Dicaerchia, now called Puteoli.⁸⁸⁰

i) Does Porphyry actually believe in the miracles attributed to Apollonius, or is this an ad hominem argument? If he credits Apollonius with supernatural powers, why not Christ?⁸⁸¹

ii) As the editor points out, “the biography of Apollonius written by Philostratus around 220 was composed deliberately to emphasize its similarities with the gospels.”⁸⁸²

Moving along:

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁸¹ Apollonius will pop up again on p.73, to no greater effect.

⁸⁸² Ibid., 39, n.14.

At least he might have faced his suffering nobly and spoken words of power and wisdom to Pilate, his judge, instead of being made fun of like a peasant boy in the big city.⁸⁸³

i) Note the extent to which Porphyry's rejection of the faith is driven, not by intellectual objections, but social snobbery.

ii) Once again, he misses the very nature of the atonement, which entails a divine condescension (cf. Phil 2:6-11; Heb 5:8). The downward motion is an essential feature of the atonement.

Moving along:

When [Jesus] himself agonizes in expectation of his death, he prays that his suffering might be eliminated...Surely such sayings are not worthy of a son of God, nor even a wise man who hates death.⁸⁸⁴

Missing in all of this is any cognizance of what a divine incarnation entails, of death as a penal sanction for sin, of the wrath of God directed against the sinner. Porphyry lacks the critical sympathy and detachment needed to engage the argument on its own terms, to assume the viewpoint of Scripture for the sake of argument.

Moving along:

Even if [Moses] said it, nothing of what he wrote has been preserved; his writings are reported to have been destroyed along with the Temple. All the things attributed to Moses were really written eleven hundred years later by Ezra and his contemporaries...who [among the Jews] has ever spoken of a crucified Christ?⁸⁸⁵

In reply:

i) This is a frontal attack on the argument from prophecy.

ii) Porphyry's attack on the text of the Torah is pretty unsophisticated. One doesn't need the autographa to have accurate MSS.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 41.

iii) He was an early exponent of higher criticism. Over time this evolved into the Documentary Hypothesis, which has, in turn, come under sustained attack in commentaries,⁸⁸⁶ monographs,⁸⁸⁷ and OT introductions⁸⁸⁸ by scholars who range all along the theological spectrum.

iv) Regarding the OT expectation of a “crucified Christ,” you have:

- a) Prophecy regarding a Messiah who is violently rejected by his people (Ps 22; Isa 52-53; Zech 11-12).
- b) Typology regarding the sacrificial system.
- c) The author of Hebrews’ argument from the character of the OT priesthood.
- d) The Jewish theme, both in the OT and Intertestamental literature, of the righteous martyr who is vindicated by God.
- e) A startlingly precise prediction (Dan 9:24-27).⁸⁸⁹

Moving along:

If we turn our attention to [the Christian] account [Mt 8:31; par. Mk 5:1], it can be shown to be pure deceit and trickery...If the story is true and not a fable [as we hold it to be], what does it say about Christ, that he permitted the demons to continue to do harm by driving them out of one man and into some poor pigs?...A reasonable person, upon hearing such a tale, instinctively makes up his mind as to the truthfulness of the story.⁸⁹⁰

i) When critics complain about the fate of the pigs, I never know if they’re being serious or simply annoying. The objection is so morally frivolous that it’s hard to take seriously.

ii) The transference of the demons from the demoniac to the swine supplies dramatic proof of prior possession and the subsequent success of the exorcism.

⁸⁸⁶ Genesis (Aalders; Cassuto; Currid, Hamilton; Hartley, Kidner, Ross, Walton, Wenham); Exodus (Currid, Cassuto, Gispén, Motyer, Stuart); Leviticus (Currid, Harrison, Hartley, Wenham); Numbers (Ashley, Duguid, Harrison, Wenham); Deuteronomy (Craigie, Thompson).

⁸⁸⁷ E.g., Alexander, Allis, Alter, Beckwith, Cassuto, Garrett, Millard, Sailhamer, Wiseman.

⁸⁸⁸ E.g., Archer, Harrison, Keil, Young.

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. G. Archer, “Daniel,” EBC 7:114; R. Beckwith, *Calendar & Chronology* (Brill 1996), 260-75; O. Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (P&R 2004), 338-46.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-43.

iii) The narrative both presupposes and plays upon Jewish notions of ritual purity and impurity. The demons are unclean spirits. The pigs are unclean animals. The demoniac dwells in unclean tombs. In this interplay of the impurity motif, the exorcism of Christ is an emblematic (as well as real) act of purification as he drives the unclean spirits out of the unclean man and into the unclean swine, who destroy themselves, thereby completing the ritual of purification—like the scapegoat which was driven into the wilderness after the guilt of the sinner was symbolically transferred to the animal.

Commenting on another miracle story, Porphyry says:

Those who know the region well tell us that, in fact, there is no “sea” in the locality but only a tiny lake which springs from a river that flows through the hills of Galilee near Tiberias...[And the lake is too small] to have seen whitecaps caused by storm.⁸⁹¹

i) The designation of the lake as a “sea” is simply the traditional place-name.

ii) Beyond that semantic quibble, Porphyry doesn’t know what the heck he’s talking about:

The lake is 21 km. (13 mi.) long and about 13 km. (8 mi.) wide...The difference in temperature between the surface of the sea and the high surrounding mountains makes it liable to sudden and violent storms, as the cool air from the uplands sweeps down the gorges and upon the surface of the water.⁸⁹²

Moving along:

A famous saying of the Teacher is this one: “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have no life in yourselves” [Jn 6:54]. This saying is not only beastly and absurd; it is more than absurd than absurdity itself and more beastly than any beast...No one of sound mind has ever made such a dinner!⁸⁹³

Several problems:

i) Porphyry seems to be assuming a sacramental reading of Jn 6. For this he offers no argument.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁹² *ISBE* 2:392.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 49.

ii) Such a reading disregards the explicit manna-typology in this chapter. Is Jesus a piece of bread? What we have, rather, is an argument from analogy, not identity.

iii) This discourse was addressed to Jews prior to the institution of the Lord's Supper. Hence, their frame of reference would have to be retrospective, not prospective.

Moving along, Porphyry is critical of Mk 16:18. Since, however, the long ending of Mark is arguably spurious, his criticisms, even if otherwise valid, are moot.

Moving along, Porphyry says, with respect to the temptation (Mt 4:6-7), that:

The honest thing for Jesus to have done would be to demonstrate to those in the temple that he was God's son.⁸⁹⁴

Once again, his hostility to the faith blinds him from understanding the text on its own terms.

i) There is a reason why, in all three of his replies to the Tempter, our Lord quotes from Deuteronomy, for this book is a document of covenant renewal. The children of Israel had finally arrived at the border of the Promised Land after their wilderness wandering. They therefore required a reminder and admonition from the Lord to remain faithful before crossing over into the holy land.

ii) As is especially clear in Matthew, the Temptation is of a piece with the Exodus-typology which crisscrosses Mt 2-4. Christ recapitulates the history of the Exodus generation, but with a difference. Where Israel put the Lord to the test and succumbed to temptation in the wilderness, Jesus will stand firm in resisting temptation. To suggest that Jesus should have acceded to the devil's demand misses the whole point.

Moving along, he criticizes the apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter. But since this is an extra-canonical forgery, his criticisms, even if otherwise valid, are moot.

Moving along:

Whether one addresses these divine beings as gods or angels matters very little, since their nature remains the same.⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 64.

This objection is rather more penetrating than most of the others. His objection seems to be that angelology is just a disguised and syncretistic form of polytheism. By way of reply:

i) If God made a race of human creatures, there's no reason he would not make an order of angelic creatures. So Porphyry's theory is consistent with the nonexistence of angels, but it's also consistent with the existence of angels.

ii) There is, in Scripture, no theological evolution from polytheism to angelology. The adoration of angels is forbidden throughout. They are presented as creatures and servants of God. The only exception is the theophanic angel of the Lord, who is, admittedly, in a class by himself, and often regarded as a Christophany.

Of course, an unbeliever could claim that the evidence has been expurgated over time, but he has no documentary evidence for such censorship.

iii) If one were inclined to offer a naturalistic explanation, which, of course, I do not favor, it would not be that angels are downgraded gods, but upgraded men. That is to say, it is clear from, say, the Celestial Hierarchy of pseudo-Dionysius, that the angelic ranks are modeled upon the military. But while there's a trace of this in Scripture, there is nothing like a systematic and symmetrical mapping of the human social order onto the angelic company. And even if there were, if human society is hierarchical, there's no reason why angelic society may not be hierarchical as well.

iv) There is also a sense in Scripture in which angels are, indeed, "gods." For idolatry has its basis in demonology. What animates pagan idolatry are fallen angels.

Moving along:

The Christians seem to endorse this when they conceive of God as having fingers which he sometimes uses in order to write.⁸⁹⁶

Porphyry's crude literalism makes no allowance for the idiomatic usage of Scripture, where images and metaphors drawn from the natural world are applied to God. This includes inanimate and bestial as well as human imagery and figures of speech. If we don't take Scripture at face value when it describes man in bestial

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 85.

terms, why should we take Scripture at face value when it describes God in human terms? The metaphors and idioms are consistent throughout.

Moving along:

Even if someone among the Greeks were silly enough to think that gods dwelled in statues, his idea would be more sensible than that of the man who believes that the Divine Being entered into the womb of the virginal Mary to become her unborn son—and then was born, swaddled, [hauled off] to the place of blood and gall, and all the rest of it.⁸⁹⁷

The facile comparison between idolatry and the virgin birth is clever, but specious.

i) Does idolatry presuppose that a demon literally inhabits the idol?

ii) The reason idolatry is condemned in Scripture is not because it is false, but impious. There really are evil spirits. And congress with evil spirits is naturally forbidden.

iii) Porphyry says that the virgin birth and Incarnation are “silly,” but this is an assertion, not an argument.

iv) God’s relation to time and space is quite different from a demon’s, so the comparison is equivocal.

Moving along:

Returning to consider again the matter of the resurrection of the dead: For what purpose should God intervene in this way, completely and arbitrarily overturning a course of events that has always been held good—namely, the plan, ordained by him at the beginning, through which whole races are preserved and do not come to an end. The natural law established and approved by God, lasting through the ages, is by its very nature unchanging and thus not to be overturned by [the God] who fashioned it. Nor is it to be demolished as though it were a body of laws invented by a mere mortal to serve his own limited purposes.⁸⁹⁸

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 86-87.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 90.

This is the basic and classic objection to miracles: natural law, the world is a closed continuum of cause and effect. Here, Porphyry anticipates the position of Spinoza, Hume, Bultmann, and countless other unbelievers.

i) Porphyry claims that natural law is metaphysically necessary. This is an extremely strong thesis. He offers no argument for such an ambitious claim, just raw assertion.

ii) Porphyry reifies natural law as though it were a hidden engine over and above the regular course of nature itself. But from a Christian standpoint, natural law is descriptive, not proscriptive. It is, at most, a synonym for divine providence—for the way in which God ordinarily runs the world. In fact it is analogous to human laws. Creation, providence, and miracle all serve a limited purpose in the plan of God.

iii) A miracle isn't contrary to the plan of God. Every miracle is a preplanned event.

iv) There is nothing arbitrary about a miracle. It has its place in the plan of God.

v) To speak of God “overturning” the natural order is ill-conceived from the standpoint of Scripture. It is casting God in the role of a house-burglar, breaking into his own home. The world is not a box, but a theater or stage-set for God's morality play.

Moving along:

It is preposterous to think that when the whole [race] is destroyed there follows a resurrection; that [God] raises with a wave of his hand a man who died three years before the resurrection [of Jesus]...Just to think of this silly teaching makes me light-headed. Many have perished at sea; their bodies have been eaten by scavenging fish. Hunters have been eaten by their prey, the wild animals, and birds. How will their bodies rise up? How will the body of the shipwrecked man be reassembled, considering it has been absorbed by other bodies of various kinds? Or take a body that has been consumed by fire or a body that has been food for the worms; how can those bodies be restored to the essence of what they were originally?⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 90-91.

The problem with this objection is that Porphyry is assuming a very specific model of the general resurrection, more specific than you can find in Scripture, and then attacking that particular model.

But there's no reason to assume that the doctrine of the general resurrection entails a point-by-point correspondence between the mortal and immortal body. The relation between the mortal and immortal body ranges along a continuum. At one end is where nothing remains of the original body. At the other end are those who will still be alive at the Parousia. Their living bodies will be glorified. Then you have the case of Christ. His body was still intact, not having undergone corruption. So you have living bodies, dead bodies, and nonexistent bodies.

A cloned body would not be numerically identical with the original, but numerical identity is not a necessary condition for the general resurrection, that I can see.

Moving along:

Ah! You say: "All things are possible with God." But this is not true. Not all things are possible for him. [God] cannot make it happen that Homer should not have been a poet. God cannot bring it about that Troy should not fall. He cannot make $2 \times 2 = 100$ rather than 4.⁹⁰⁰

i) There is some truth to this. Of course, Christian theology was very underdeveloped at the time Porphyry was writing.

ii) But this is irrelevant to a more nuanced model of the general resurrection.

iii) Porphyry fails to draw some basic distinctions. God cannot change the past. But God was free to will an alternative past. The necessity of the past is a case of accidental necessity, not metaphysical necessity.

iv) Again, God cannot violate his own decree, but he can decree otherwise, had he so desired.

Moving along:

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 91.

Yet you say, “He will raise up the rotten and stinking corpses of men,” some of them, no doubt, belonging to worthy men, but others having no grace or merit prior to death.⁹⁰¹

i) Even for purposes of critique, Porphyry has no grasp of Christian theology. The general resurrection has nothing to do with merit. Even the resurrection of the just has nothing to do with merit.

ii) The general resurrection does have something to do with demerit. The lost are raised up in order to be punished in the body for sins committed in the body.

Moving along:

And even if God should refashion the dead bodies...there is still this: it would be impossible for the earth to accommodate all those who have died from the beginning of the world if they should be raised from the dead.⁹⁰²

This is an interesting objection, but it turns on a number of gratuitous assumptions about the sum-total of human beings at the Parousia, the amount of habitable land on the new earth, and the location of hell.

There is an implicit upper limit to the number of the redeemed who could inhabit the new earth, but no reason to suppose that we’re anywhere near the threshold. For that matter, it’s a big universe. There may be other habitable planets. Perhaps the redeemed will engage in terraforming.

Porphyry was the most astute and erudite of the pagan critics of the faith. It says something that this is the best he could muster, especially at a time when Christian theology and apologetics was not especially sophisticated—and in that respect presented a soft target.

Notice that nowhere does Porphyry derive Christian doctrine from pagan mythology, either by way of comparison or contrast. As a man immersed and tutored in the Greco-Roman cult and culture, he was certainly in a prime position to highlight whatever parallels existed between Christianity and paganism. Yet nowhere does he accuse the Christians of plagiarizing pagan mythology.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁰² Ibid., 91-92.

IV. Julian (331/332-363)

Julian the Apostate was a nephew of Constantine and cousin of Constantius. Although reared as an Orthodox Christian, he was a pagan Neoplatonist. So how does he proceed to attack the faith?

Of course, the Greeks concocted their stories about the gods, those incredible and terrible fables. They held, for instance, that Kronos swallowed his children and then vomited them out. They told tales of illicit couplings, Zeus bedding his own mother...There is a story about how Dionysus was torn in two and his body reassembled again. And this is the sort of thing we get from the myths of the Greeks.

Compare with this the Jewish teaching: A garden was planted by God, and Adam was made, and afterward, for the sake of Adam, woman was created. God said, It is not good for a man to be alone; let us then make a helper resembling him. And yet, she was no help at all. She deceived him and caused the fall from a life of pleasure in the garden.

This is complete fable. Is it likely that God would not know that a creature designed to be a helper would be a curse rather than a blessing to the one who accepted her? And then—what language would the serpent have used when speaking to Eve? Was it the language spoken by human beings? Furthermore, how do fables of this sort differ from the myths made up by the Greeks?⁹⁰³

i) Here we do have what Julian takes to be an exercise in comparative mythology. Notice, though, the level at which the comparison operates. He doesn't cite any direct parallel between Gen 2-3 and Greek mythology. He doesn't derive the Biblical account from a pagan exemplar.

ii) Rather, his argument seems to be that a story like Gen 2-3 moves within the same worldview as Greek mythology. You have a talking snake. Yahweh is a shortsighted deity.

There's precious little actual argument here. Indeed, it appears to be a suppressed tautology: he doesn't believe it because it's unbelievable.

iii) On the face of it, there's quite a difference between the story of the fall and the story of Kronos swallowing his children or Zeus committing incest with his mother or the reassembly and resuscitation of Dionysus.

⁹⁰³ *Julian's Against the Galileans*, R. Hoffmann, ed. (Prometheus 2004).

iv) So is his objection to the preternatural element common to both? Why does he find the story of a talking snake incredible? Because, I suppose, he never encountered a talking animal in his own experience. But, of course, Moses never ran into a talking animal either. Real live talking animals were no more commonplace in ancient times than modern times. So, just to chalk it up to primitive superstition doesn't explain anything.

In the only other instance of a talking animal in Scripture, we're told that "the Lord opened its mouth" (Num 22:28). So it's not just modern readers who regard the idea of a talking animal as unnatural. Moses considered the idea of a talking animal unnatural as well. It was a miracle. All other things being equal, a talking animal would be just as incredible to an ancient Jew as it would to a modern reader.

v) As I said before, those who find Gen 2-3 unbelievable do so, not for any especially scientific or philosophical reasons, but simply because that sort of thing is alien to their personal experience.

For them, the world of the Bible is a world apart from the world they see out the window or on the TV screen. Things happen in Scripture that just don't happen in the "real" world.

But there are, of course, other folks with a very different experience. To take one example, I have a friend who unwittingly bought a haunted house. Living in that house exposed him to classic poltergeist phenomenon—voices, footsteps, freak accidents, spectral apparitions, flying furniture, &c.

BTW, my friend is a very credible witness. He has a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University. And in subsequent contact with earlier owners of the house, they reported the same phenomena.

Now, if you've had that sort of experience, then the world of the Bible is continuous with the "real" world. It's the same world.

Mind you, I'm not saying that faith in Scripture ought to be contingent on a personal brush with the dark side or other paranormal phenomena. But the argument from experience cuts both ways. Many events in Scripture are only unbelievable to the unbeliever because the unbeliever has never had anything analogous happen in his own life.

vi) But what about Julian's charge of inconsistency? Why believe the Bible and not believe in Greek mythology?

a) There are two factors that figure in the credibility of a reported event: the reporter and the event. There is nothing inconsistent about believing a report from a reliable source and disbelieving a similar report from an unreliable source.

b) There is also a difference between saying that I don't believe that happened, and saying that I don't believe anything like that ever happens. The fact that I don't believe that Daphne turned into a laurel tree doesn't mean I don't believe in the possibility or reality of metamorphosis.

c) Biblical miracles are not merely paranormal events: rather, they're purposeful paranormal events—generally with a specific symbolic import.

vii) And what about Julian's charge that Yahweh is shortsighted? It is true that some verses of Scripture, taken in isolation, depict God as ignorant of future events. But, of course, they were never meant to be taken in isolation. The Hexateuch is a narrative unit.

To take Julian's example, what he fails to observe, among other things, is the land-motif. God is the Landlord of Eden. The first man (Heb=adam) is a serf. He was created from the dust of the ground (Heb=adama). His job is to tend and keep the garden. When he sins, he is banished from the land of Eden. Cain pollutes the land with bloodguilt, and is cursed to be a nomad.

When God makes a covenant with Abraham, this includes a promise of land. The Promised Land is the New Eden. And this, in turn, is a paradigm for the Atonement.⁹⁰⁴

So viewed in the light of thematic progression and narrative theology, the Fall is not a divine oversight. Gen 3 cannot be read apart from the patriarchal narratives, the Egyptian bondage, Exodus, and Conquest. Or the NT antitype.

⁹⁰⁴ For more on this theme, cf. T. Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land*, chapter 10; "Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land," P. Johnston & P. Walker, eds., *The Land of Promises* (Apollos 2000), 35-50; O. Robertson, *The Israel of God* (P&R 2000), chapter 1.

Moving along, Julian says that Gen 1 does not give us a doctrine of creation ex nihilo. It doesn't describe the making of matter or the origin of angels. As the editor explains:

Julian's point is that the Hebrew myth incorporates an older mythology, in which preexistent matter is shaped by the demiurge.⁹⁰⁵

There are several problems with this analysis:

i) The Ancients had a very inadequate grasp of ancient chronology. The idea that Gen 1 is dependent on Plato is, of course, absurd.

ii) It is arguable that Gen 1:1 is a theme sentence which covers all six days, while 1:2 falls within the creative diurnal framework of day 1. Cf. Exod 20:11; 31:17. Hence, the items in v2 are not preexistent.

iii) Julian fails to make allowance for progressive revelation. The creation account is naturally androcentric. Given the susceptibility of the ancient Israelites to idolatry and polytheism, we would not expect a developed angelology at this stage of redemptive history. For a more explicit statement, both of creation ex nihilo and the origin of angels, you need to look to later revelation (cf. Col 1:15-17).

Moving along:

And you Galileans insist that we ought to believe this account while you refuse to believe Homer's story of the Aloadae...But say, if you credit the story of Moses, why in the name of the gods do you reject Homer's myth?⁹⁰⁶

According to the editor,

Julian attempts a connection between the Greek myth and the legend of the nephilim in Gen 6:1-4 and the legend of the beginnings of technology in Gen 11:1-9.⁹⁰⁷

By way of reply:

i) I've already addressed the question of a double-standard.

⁹⁰⁵ *Julian's Against the Galileans*. 97.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 104, n.313.

ii) Actually, the origin of technology is given in Gen 4:22. Since, as a matter of fact, technology did have a point of origin, there is nothing legendary about Genesis recording the event.

iii) The interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 is varied:

a) The “sons of God” represent the ungodly line of Cain in relation to the godly line of Seth, represented by the “daughters of men”.

b) The “sons of God” are oriental despots.

c) The “sons of God” are fallen angels who cohabited with women and thereby sired a race of supermen.

d) The “sons of God” are demoniacs. This is a mediating position, as between (b) and (c).

Each interpretation has competent commentators in its favor. (a)-(b) are naturalistic while (c)-(d) are supernaturalistic. If you deny the supernatural, then, by definition, you will reject the possibility of (c)-(d).

For the modern reader (c) has the most “mythical” flavor. It presupposes that angels are able to materialize and assume human form.⁹⁰⁸ Angels are naturally incorporeal. They are, however, able to interface with the sensible world (cf. Gen 18:8; 19:10).

This assumes a capacity for metamorphosis. But many miracles are a species of metamorphosis, so the possibility cannot be excluded without excluding the possibility of miracles generally.

A secularist won’t have much more sympathy with (d). However, possession is a well-attested phenomenon.

To some extent this comes down to a question of method. A Christian begins with the phenomena and frames his theory accordingly, whereas an unbeliever begins with a theory of what is possible and uses that as a filter to screen out unwelcome evidence to the contrary.

⁹⁰⁸ This faculty distinguishes an angel from a ghost.

Moving along:

Surely it would be better to believe as we do: for we recognize the God of All though with due regard also for the God of Moses.⁹⁰⁹

This was a classic harmonistic device for pagans like Julian. You postulate one true universal God who is over and above the national gods of various religious traditions, through which he is partially revealed.

The same tactic is employed by a modern-day pluralist or universalist like John Hick or Paul Knitter. But this position is intellectually contemptible:

i) The pluralist will say that every faith has an element of truth, although no faith has a corner on the truth. But in order for the pluralist to be in a position to say this, he must have a corner on the truth in order to judge that every faith has an element of the truth. Thus, he affirms for himself what he denies to others. He must assume a God's-eye view to deny a God's-eye view to anyone else.

ii) For Julian, this was a political compromise necessitated by the degree of religious diversity in the Roman Empire. Likewise, the modern-day pluralist lobbies for pluralism for ethical rather than epistemic reasons. He lobbies for pluralism, not because it is true, or could be true, but because he thinks that religious exclusivity is a source of violence. Hence, his position is admittedly pragmatic.

Moving along:

Now if a man is jealous or covetous you consider him immoral, but if it is God—you call the attribute divine.⁹¹⁰

In reply:

i) This evinces a rather wooden literalism. The Bible is written in idiomatic language. It doesn't have one set of nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives for man and another set for God. Rather, it has a standard vocabulary and warehouse of stock imagery originally used to describe human affairs which is transferred to God. Human emotive language and emotive organs are unself-consciously applied to God.

⁹⁰⁹ *Julian's Against the Galileans*, 109.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

ii) At the same time, Bible writers also ascribe certain properties to God that set him apart from man and the mundane world. Julian is making no reasonable allowance for idiomatic usage.

iii) As a matter of fact, jealousy is not always a vice even in human relations.

iv) Making allowance for anthropopathic expressions, God is figuratively jealous, but literally possessive. On the one hand, God, as Creator, sustainer, redeemer, and judge, has absolute claims on humanity in general and the elect in particular. On the other hand, we have an absolute duty to the truth—including the true God.

Julian goes on to illustrate his point by the case of Num 25. He attributes the death of “600,000” victims to an “angry, spiteful, petulant, oath-bound, or fickle” God.⁹¹¹

i) His causality figure is off by four orders of magnitude—600, not 600,000!

ii) This chapter involves a case of potential national apostasy on the part of Israelites who had been redeemed by God from their Egyptian bondage according to his covenant with Abraham. Their guilt could hardly be more aggravated.

Moving along:

It is also to be marked that God does not in later times show concern only for the Hebrews...Consider the example of the Egyptians, who manage to count a few wise men among their ranks, claiming proudly the successors of Hermes...The Chaldeans and Assyrians take pride in the successors of Oannes and Belos, while the Greeks boast of the many successors of Cheiron.⁹¹²

Here we touch upon a basic point of tension in Julian. On the one hand, he speaks of Greek mythology, and classifies OT history with Greek mythology. On the other hand, he is a pious pagan who evidently believes in the actual existence of Hermes Trismegistus, the fish-god Oannes, and a centaur. So you have, in Julian, an unstable oscillation between popular superstition and philosophical skepticism or rationalism.

Moving along:

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 110-111.

⁹¹² Ibid., 112.

But has God commissioned you to start a new science or philosophical movement?⁹¹³

Here he faults the Christian faith for its lack of antiquity. There are two problems with this charge:

- i) There is no internal relation between truth and antiquity.
- ii) Christianity is rooted in OT Judaism. So Julian's objection fails on its own grounds.

Moving along:

Further, we must remember the omens of the shield that fell from the sky and the head which manifested itself on a hill...⁹¹⁴

Another illustration of his unstable position: skeptical of the Bible, but gullible with respect to pagan legends.

Moving along:

We say, "Asclepius heals our bodies"...With God my witness, I know that when I have been ill, Asclepius has cured me by proffering remedies.⁹¹⁵

Here he's trying to establish epistemic parity between the miracle cures of Christ and the miracle cures of Asclepius. But this appeal raises more questions than it answers:

- i) How does he identify Asclepius as the agent of healing?
- ii) What was the nature of the illness?
- iii) His comparison, whether sincere or ad hominem, assumes the authenticity of the miracle cures attributed to Jesus.

⁹¹³ Ibid., 112.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

iv) Assuming, for the sake of argument, a miracle cure wrought in the name of Asclepius, yet in Scripture, supernatural powers aren't limited to God and his emissaries. Up-to-a-point, the dark side has paranormal powers as well (e.g., Exod 7-8).

Moving along:

“They live among the tombs and in the caves for the sake of dream visions.” Here you will see that this practice of sorcery was established long ago by the Jews, who are said to dwell among the tombs in order to receive dream visions. And it is certain that after the master's death your own apostles did this very thing...These no doubt were able to conjure and work miracles with greater deftness than you do nowadays.⁹¹⁶

i) Julian begins with a quote of Isa 65:4 from the LXX. In context, this is a denunciation of necromancy, as practiced by pagans or apostate Jews.

ii) To apply it to pious Jews like Jesus and the Apostles is antecedently improbable. Julian's assumption is that the dominical and apostolic miracles are undeniable. Hence, if you can't deny the miracle, you can reassign the source. Here, Julian is apparently picking up on the standard anti-Christian Jewish polemic.

iii) There is, of course, no trace of necromancy in the gospels.

Moving along:

[Abraham] shared with us Greeks the custom of telling the future from shooting stars. And for significant things he learned to augur from the flight of birds, hiring a servant in his house who was expert in the reading of signs.⁹¹⁷

This fanciful interpretation is based on a couple of anachronisms:

i) Julian equates Abraham with Chaldean Magi.

ii) Julian retrojects astrology back into the 2-3rd millennium BC, when, in fact, astrology arose during the Hellenistic era as a syncretistic amalgam of Greek mathematics and Babylonian astromancy.

Moving along:

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 140.

Furthermore, Jesus—a “god”—requires the comfort of an angel as he prays, using language that would be humiliating even for a beggar who bemoans his adversity.⁹¹⁸

i) This criticism betrays his lack of critical sympathy for the nature of the Incarnation and atonement.

ii) To the extent that this episode is embarrassing, that’s a sign of authenticity.

Moving along:

And who had told this Luke the story of the angel if, indeed, it ever happened, for no one was there to see the angel as he prayed, since the men had fallen asleep.⁹¹⁹

This is a speculative objection which can only invite a speculative answer. It’s a bit wooden to suppose that all three disciples were sound asleep the whole time. More plausible to suppose that they were nodding off at different times. Other explanations are also possible, such as a post-Resurrection wrap-up.

Moving along:

What was written of Israel the writer Matthew transferred to Christ.⁹²⁰

This is simply one example of several of the Exodus-typology which permeates Mt 2-4.

Julian was a gifted man, tutored in the Bible, heir to the Jewish and pagan polemic against the faith, and having all the intellectual resources of a Roman emperor at his disposal. Even so, this is the best he could come up with.

Reading the early pagan critics of the faith, one becomes aware of how old-fashioned most “modern” objections to the faith really are.

We’ve now reviewed the four major pagan critics of the faith. Of these, Celsus is the only one who indulges in any degree of comparative mythology. His compari-

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁹²⁰ Ibid., 145.

sons are stereotypical and second-hand at best. And more often than not he stresses the contrast between Christianity and Greco-Roman mythology.

For the most part, the objections raised by these critics are rationalistic objections that have nothing to do with mythology one way or another. If the NT writers were poaching on their hunting grounds, they'd be the first to spot it and call them on it.

Excursus II: Comparative Mythology

I. Is the Bible a Myth?

Liberal critics and outright sceptics often identify the Bible, in whole or in part, as a mythical document. Even men of more moderate persuasion sometimes have recourse to this classification (e.g. C.S. Lewis). One of the complications facing our evaluation of such a characterization is that “myth” is a rather loose category which different writers use in different ways. There appear to be at least four senses of the term in common parlance.

II. Definition

(i) *Evolutionary*: a fantastic literary genre that reflects a primitive state of cultural development (e.g. Bultmann)⁹²¹

(ii) *Mystical*: a metaphorical model of an otherwise ineffable and numinous dimension of existence or experience (e.g. Cassier, Jaspers, Plato)⁹²²

(iii) *Psychodynamic*: an archetypal theme in world literature (e.g. Campbell, Eliade, Frye, Jung, Lévi-Strauss, Ricoeur)⁹²³

(iv) *Etiological*: the backstory to a preexisting belief or custom (e.g. Mowinckel; Malinowski)⁹²⁴

III. Evaluation

Going back through these definitions in order, how, if at all, are they applicable to the outlook and/or genre of the Bible?

(i) *Evolutionary*:

⁹²¹ E.g. *Kerygma and Myth* (Harper & Row 1961).

⁹²² E.g. E. Cassier, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven 1957); Jaspers, *Myth and Christianity* (Noonday 1964); Plato, *Phaedrus*; *Timaeus*.

⁹²³ E.g. J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton 1972); M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New 1963); *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (U of Nebraska Pr 1996); N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Penguin 1990); C. Jung, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton 1969); *Man and his Symbols* (Dell 1971); C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Modern Library 1997); P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969).

⁹²⁴ E.g. B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (NT 1926); S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Abingdon 1967).

This definition typically presents an evolutionary scheme of religious enlightenment and emancipation—progressing from animism to polytheism to monotheism to humanism. Primitive men personify the forces of nature, but over time this gives way to the scientific worldview, in which impersonal agencies supersede personal agents.

(a) The Bible has its own analysis of mythology. It identifies mythology with idolatry. Fallen man is a rebel. His strategy is to suppress and supplant the knowledge of God with surrogate gods and proxy piety (e.g. Jn 3:20-21; Rom 1:18ff.). The Bible also treats the various expressions of heathen religiosity as aliases of a diabolical agent (Rev 13:11-18). So the Bible can account for the prevalence of superstition on its own assumptions. It presents an alternative explanation.

(b) The evolutionary framework is too schematic to chart the empirical phenomenology of religion. What we have, instead, is an *a priori* framework imposed on the data. Bultmann et al. have a secular agenda that they proceed to map onto the Bible. The “scientific” analysis is really a cloaked confession of their reflex infidelity.

(c) The Bible itself doesn’t reflect a progression from animism to polytheism to monotheism. So the mythical rubric doesn’t fit the documentary evidence.

(d) The popularity of ufology, the occult and sci-fi genre demonstrates that science does not supplant the mythic impulse. Mythology appeals to a different and deeper yearning—which is, at least in part, nostalgia for paradise lost and a longing for paradise regained. This is a groundmotive for the quest genre.

(e) Even on naturalistic grounds, the rise and fall of civilization is complex and somewhat mysterious. Cultural development owes at least as much to geography as it does to chronology.

(f) All that this definition comes down to is an expression of sheer unbelief. An unbeliever classifies the Bible as mythical because he doesn’t think that such things exist or occur (e.g. God, angels, demons, miracles). He doesn’t believe them because he finds them incredible. He finds them incredible because he doesn’t believe that such things exist or occur. The justification is essentially circular. Why doesn’t he believe it? Because it’s unbelievable! Why is it unbelievable? Because he can’t believe it! This tells us more about the critic than the Bible. Autobiography is disguised as literary criticism.

(g) Apropos (f), this classification doesn't distinguish between a mythic *consciousness* and a mythic *self-consciousness*. Although it is legitimate to identify a mythical genre in ancient lore and literature, that is not how a primitive storyteller would have identified his own tale. Even if he operated with a mythical mindset, he was not drawing a self-conscious distinction between myth and reality. That's a distinction drawn from *outside* the text by the modern reader. It presupposes a degree of *distance* between author and reader. But the first job of a literary critic or commentator is to project himself into the story so that he looks out at the world through the eyes of the storyteller. A modern creative writer knows that he's writing fiction, and his audience accepts his work at that level.

Moreover, the genre of myth is itself a literary construct, and one can't blithely assign Scripture to this genre before giving attention to the self-understanding of Scripture. Is the mythical classification a conclusion that the critic *derives* from the text or *brings* to it? Isn't it really a prejudicial impression based on the conviction that any report which comes into conflict with the scientific establishment cannot be credited? Having capitulated to the worldview of secular science, the critic has no room in his conceptual scheme for the paranormal.

(ii) *Mystical*:

This definition is generally indexed to a Neoplatonic or Kantian epistemology. According to Neoplatonism, we don't know what God is, but only what God is not. All God-talk is figurative.

(a) A good case can be made for the proposition that human discourse is pervasively and incurably metaphorical.⁹²⁵ So even if God-talk were figurative, that limitation would not be distinctive to religious discourse. Rather, it would apply with equal force to ordinary language as well as technical terminology—which is abstracted from concrete usage.

(b) Apropos (a), our knowledge of the sensible world is analogical. And that is because the human mind does not enjoy direct access to the sensible world. Sense-data is a highly processed form of information that has undergone encoding and re-encoding in order to reach our consciousness.

(c) I would say that the *via negativa* has the relation exactly backwards. The natural world is a material manifestation and finite form of God's impalpable plan and

⁹²⁵ Cf. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago 1981).

properties (cf. Ps 19:1-7; Acts 14:17; Rom 1:18ff.; Eph 3:9-10). So God-talk is the only kind of talk there is. Human language is, indeed, metaphorical inasmuch as nature is a divine metaphor. Strictly speaking, then, God is the only object of literal predication whereas all mundane phenomena are objects of analogical predication.⁹²⁶

According to Kantian epistemology, God is not an object of knowledge because he belongs to the noumenal category.

(a) Even if we bought into Kantian assumptions, the narrative history of God's creative, redemptive and retributive deeds operates at the phenomenal rather than noumenal level. The Exodus would be a spatiotemporal event.

(b) Kant believes that the ontological argument is the core argument for God's existence. And his core objection to the ontological argument derives from his epistemology. The object of knowledge can never be the thing-in-itself since our mind reconceptualizes the data of experience in terms of its spatiotemporal categories; conversely, *a priori* reasoning cannot yield true knowledge since it amounts to an abstract classification scheme devoid of concrete content. Form without content is vacuous, while content without form is chaotic.

But even if we accepted his epistemology, it doesn't offer a cogent objection to the ontological argument. And that is because his theory of *knowledge* is a theory of *perception*. Anselm, however, is not trying to reason from the sensible to the intelligible, but from a mental intelligible (our idea of God) to an extramental intelligible (God himself). Moreover, Kant's epistemology doesn't even rule out the *a posteriori* arguments, for the (cosmological) origin and (teleological) order of our spatiotemporal categories must still be accounted for by a principle outside themselves.

(c) Kant also claims that the category of causation has no sense or standard beyond the sensible world.⁹²⁷ But this is assertion instead of argument. Abstract reason can propose thought-experiments that—by definition—take us beyond the actual state of affairs and which nevertheless have a concrete application. Kant acts as if man were a stimulus-response organism devoid of imagination. The human mind is not bound by real time and space. Philosophers, scientists and sci-fi writers are con-

⁹²⁶ Here I take my stand with the Medieval exemplarist tradition, according to which our abstract universals and natural categories are grounded in God's nature as imitable.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

stantly toying with alternative scenarios. We can conceive of negation as well as being, the future as well as the present, the optative and subjunctive as well as the indicative; the possible, impossible, conditional and counterfactual as well as the actual and necessary.

(d) A more general objection to Kant's proposed antinomies is that his conclusion would only be compelling if each antinomial pairing were compelling. And this assumes that each thesis and antithesis is individually intelligible and coherent, but mutually incoherent when paired off. Yet the satisfaction of that condition undermines his contention. For what are the antinomies *about* unless they have reference to an objective state of affairs? For unless they enjoy some intentional or constative force, they will fail to affirm or deny anything, either taken separately or together. So the whole exercise is self-defeating.

(e) A more specific objection to Kant's religious epistemology is that he never makes a serious effort to address the opposing position on its own grounds. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that there really were a God, he would not be a mere mental projection. How, then, does Kant's objection come to grips with the nature of the claim he is attacking? His argument is only cogent under the prior, unargued assumption that such a God doesn't in fact exist. So when the dust settles, Kant's case amounts to proof by stipulation.

(iii) *Psychodynamic:*

According to this definition, specific expressions of mythology go back to a hard-wired mythical mentality. Appeal is made to the cultural universality of key motives in world literature and mythology. Hence, it's unnecessary to document precise parallels.

(a) Since real life has a cyclical character, the stereotypical character of many literary motives doesn't require any special explanation. Art imitates life. Their cultural universality derives from the universality of human experience. God made humankind a race—with natural needs and a normal life-cycle. The reason we find so many stock themes in world literature and world religion is because they are modeled on the reality of the human condition. Literature is a secondary reflection on this primary fact of existence. Because life itself exhibits a perennial pattern, it generates a perennial repertoire of people and plots.

(b) Since Genesis records the historical origin of many archetypal institutions, mythical and literary parallels cast no prejudice on its facticity. In the nature of the

case, certain formative events in Genesis and Exodus will play the role of Ur-motives. Genesis is not a myth of origins but the origin of myth.

(c) Apropos (b), their cultural diffusion is more easily explained if they radiated out from a common point of origin—as the sons of Noah repopulate the earth, both by sea and on foot.

(d) There is also the issue of racial memory. Although this isn't a popular category in modern science, the phenomenon of national character and the proverbial "shock of recognition" when someone rediscovers his ethnic heritage suggests to me a tacit reminiscence of certain typical events that is encoded and transmitted down through the generations. But this, again, is grounded in real life.

(e) We live in a sacramental universe. As Bishop Berkeley rightly contended, the sensible world is a form of divine sign-language, pointing back to God. We uncover universal analogies between the visible and invisible, outward and inward, sacred and mundane (e.g. ascent/descent; bondage/ release; light/dark; death/rebirth; straight/crooked; lost/found) because God has established a conventional parallel between the moral and material, sensible and spiritual realms. And Biblical typology exploits these instinctive associations.

(f) At the same time, there is also a subversive element in the typology in Scripture that breaks with conventional expectations and associations. Images of descent carry a classically negative connotation. Yet Yahweh's descent on Mt. Sinai, the Spirit's descent at Pentecost and the Baptism of Christ, as well as the descent of the New Jerusalem all reverse the ordinary pattern.

(g) Another point of discontinuity is to be found in the absence in Scripture of a number of stock themes in world mythology, viz. apocatastasis, apotheosis, primordial chaos, primeval caverns, ritual masquerades, the *descendus ad inferos*, magic circles (e.g. labyrinth, mandala, wheel of karma), or transmigration.⁹²⁸

(h) We must make allowance for the role of dead metaphors. Based on bare etymology, it could be inferred that Ash Wednesday, Maundy-Thursdays, Good Friday and Holy Saturday are pagan rather than Christian holidays. But the allusions to Wodin, Thor, Freya, and Saturn are purely conventional. Likewise, I can identify a chemical substance as "spirits of turpentine" without endorsing the alchemical

⁹²⁸ I realize that there are critics who would detect some of these themes in Scripture. But that is when they interpret Scripture within a framework supplied by mythology.

background behind that traditional designation, just as I can fumigate a house without triggering the necromantic associations.

(i) Sometimes mythopoetic imagery is used for decorative effect. In Ps 104, the Lord is introduced in the regalia of a storm-god, yet this isn't to be taken any more literally than the personification of the waters (v.7).

(j) At other times mythopoetic imagery may be employed for ironic or polemic effect, as in the triumph of Yahweh over Rahab or Leviathan.

(k) Some giant animals have become extinct in historic times (e.g. the Irish Elk), so we should not rule out the possibility that such references memorialize a real creature. The dragon-motif is quite widespread in comparative mythology. What animal in distant experience gave rise to this stylized motif?⁹²⁹

(l) Literary scholars often conflate figure and myth as if these were interchangeable ideas. This commits a category mistake. On the one hand, there is nothing inherently symbolic about mythology. Greek mythology—however evocative—does not symbolize anything. I wonder if the modern reader isn't guilty of overinterpreting mythology. To us, Greek myths like Sisyphus, Prometheus, Midas, Narcissus, Psyche, Phaeton, Pygmalion, and Tantalus are charged with psychological significance. But did the ancient Greek bard intend for his audience to register these stories as emblematic of cosmic conundra? Or was it just a good yarn? In the nature of the case, it is hard to say at this distance. On the one hand, Freud's Oedipus-complex is a blatant case of overinterpretation. On the other hand, the motif of an abandoned child returning to wreak vengeance may reflect a subliminal guilt over the Greek practice of exposing newborns. Conversely, a national mascot (e.g. the Russian bear) can serve a symbolic function without attributing a mythical status to the creature in question. To automatically classify the tannin/Leviathan imagery in Scripture (e.g. Ps 87:4; Isa 27:1; 30:7) as "mythopoetic" confounds distinct universes of discourse.

(m) To classify common literary motives as mythical only pushes the question back a step since it fails to account for the origin of the mythic category itself. So there is a danger of substituting a disguised description for an explanation.

(n) The fact that stock themes turn up in mythology doesn't reduce them to mythological themes, for they can be common to the mythical genre without being dis-

⁹²⁹ Cf. "Dragons," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade, ed. (Macmillan 1987), 4:431b-436b.

tinctive to that genre. One can find them in non-fiction as well. There are patterns to history. There are patterns to biography. Great men often exemplify trials and traits of the epic hero (e.g. quest, ordeal, rites of passage). There is nothing fantastic about these parallels.

(o) Spatial categories may carry a symbolic import. Consider the moral and metaphorical dimension of spatial altitude and attitude. In world literature, images of ascent and descent function as archetypal emblems of our moral and spiritual condition. The mountainous motif is an obvious example, both in Scripture (e.g. Eden [Ezk 28:13-14]; Zion; Moriah; Carmel; Sinai, Olivet; the mount of Transfiguration) and mystical literature. Dante's *Commedia* exploits this symbolic landscape. Conversely is the obverse image. The meteoric motif is a classic case in point (e.g. Isa 14:12; Lk 10:18; Rev 8:8-10; 9:1; 12:4,7).

This imagery recurs in the fine arts as well as drama and literature. In his *Descent from the Cross*, Rubens trades on the deadweight of Christ, with its downward pull, to convey the mood. Gravity takes on an affective force. Conversely, soaring gothic arches and Byzantine domes symbolize and inspire heavenly-mindedness.

Why does spatial orientation carry this connotation? How would the Darwinist explain this? It doesn't confer any selective value. On evolutionary grounds, our instinct for self-preservation and propagation should select for river valleys over mountaintops.

A rising or falling action is an essentially visual cue. Yet it also has a musical parallel. The opening bars of Dido's farewell aria,⁹³⁰ the alto aria, "*Können Tränen*,"⁹³¹ as well as the closing bars of Vivaldi's "Et misericordia" movement,⁹³² with their cascading cadence, conjure up a triste or tragic mood, while the rising line of "Waft her angels"⁹³³ seconds the soul's ascent. In the chorus "He saw the lovely youth,"⁹³⁴ the falling accents of the first movement, followed by the rising accents of the second, perfectly match the textual contrast. Christian composers have not been slow to take advantage of this musical/visual analogy in their settings of the Mass. Since the "Crucifixus/sepultus" and "Et resurrexit/ascendit" articles come back-to-back, composers like Bach (B Minor Mass) and Beethoven (*Missa Solemnis*) make the

⁹³⁰ "When I am laid in earth," Purcell's Dido and Aeneas.

⁹³¹ Bach, St. Matthew Passion

⁹³² Magnificat, RV 610/611

⁹³³ Handel, Jephtha.

⁹³⁴ Handel, Theodora.

melodic line track the movement of the imagery. Another obvious example is the upward arc when Handel gets to the words, “For now is Christ risen.”⁹³⁵

Yet there is no natural way of accounting for this feat of musical mimesis. On the face of it, spatial orientation is morally neutral. Moreover, its sensory character is primarily or literally visual rather than auditory. The fact that we register a figurative analogue in sound defies pragmatic analysis. The further fact that it also presents a moral mirror-image is even more resistant to mundane categories of analysis.

Just consider what all this amounts to. What we are dealing with here is an innate second-order synesthetic symbol in sound. It is a second-order symbol because the rising/falling motif is primarily visual in origin and import. What naturalistic explanation could possibly be offered for this phenomenon? The impression is intuitive and instinctual, yet it serves no practical purpose. We invest it with moral significance, even though there’s no obvious inner correspondence between form and norm. Moreover, we transfer this moral metaphor from its proper modality (visual) to a different sensory mode (audio)—although there is, again, no intrinsic correlation. For the listener, this all operates at a subconscious level.

These external relations can only have a conventional significance, and yet we cannot attribute that significance to social convention. Their tacit character and universal pattern are hardwired. The secular worldview is altogether too simplistic and reductionistic to either accommodate or account for anything as involuted and intangible as subliminal second-order symbolic synesthesia.

If, however, the world we live in is a moral order; if it is—indeed—a sacramental universe, then we can account for this very subtle and complex coordination of material metaphors by invoking the wisdom and workmanship of God. God has so choreographed the world that certain spatial and melodic movements pantomime moral and spiritual movements. If we found the combination for a new safe locked away in the safe, we’d conclude that the manufacturer left it there. And the synesthetic match-up demands the same inference.

(iv) *Etiological*:

⁹³⁵ “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” Handel’s Messiah.

On this definition, a mythology is trumped up to rationalize a preexisting practice (e.g. Passover, circumcision, metallurgy), place-name (e.g. Bethel, Babel), striking phenomenon (e.g. pillar of salt), &c.

(a) We don't observe such a process at work in Scripture. Although the critics point to certain Bible stories as *ex post facto* justifications, this doesn't lie on the face of the stories in question. Absent evidence independent of the very stories at issue, there is no reason not to take their explanation at face-value. All we have here is another symptom of the critic's knee-jerk scepticism.

(b) The historical narrative of Scripture is perfectly natural as it stands. To take just one example, God makes a covenant with Abraham. In time the tribe of Abraham is enslaved. God delivers the tribe of Abraham in fidelity to his prior covenant. God relocates the tribe. God reveals a law code to govern the political and socio-economic life of the nation state. With the shift from a nomadic lifestyle to urban centers (e.g. Jerusalem)—complete with an international court (Solomon)—Israel develops a liturgical literature (the Psalter) and sapiential literature (Job; Proverbs; Canticles; Ecclesiastes). When Israel begins to backslide, the Lord sends out prophets to prosecute the covenant lawsuit, and so on. All this unfolds with a seamless logical causality.

(c) An obvious difficulty with backdating an existing custom is that contemporaries are in a position to know better. Either they already know or think they know the true background of the rite, or else its origins are shrouded in obscurity. To suddenly come up with a backstory would be implausible. Why do modern scholars assume that they have a monopoly on scepticism? Ancient peoples were suspicious too (cf. Jn 6:41-42; 8:57; 9:29).

(d) In consistency, the critic would also have us believe that OT redactors fabricated embarrassing tales of national defeat and apostasy. What would motivate a redactor to heap humiliation on his own people? Why portray their national heroes with feet of clay? Is this characteristic of patriotic literature? Wouldn't we expect a trumpet-tone of triumphalism instead?

(e) Although some of the prophets also belonged to the priesthood (e.g. Jeremiah, Ezekiel), many prophets were not directly involved with the cultus. They have no incentive to backdate the *status quo*. Indeed, they were often at odds with the *status quo*.

IV. Paradigm-cases

So far I've addressed the comparison at a fairly high level of abstraction. But we should also consider a few paradigm-cases.

(iii) *The Mystery Religions:*

A final example is the claim that NT Christology has input from Hellenistic magic or mystery religions or Gnosticism. This attribution is based on slipshod methodology:

(i) It is guilty of overgeneralization by conflating sources without regard to time and place until it produces an abstract religious construct that doesn't answer to any local living religious phenomenon.

(ii) It is guilty of overspecification by attributing to provincial sources a given practice (e.g. lustrations; communal meals) that is but a variant of a cultural universal.

What is more, it often misrepresents the actual content of the primary source material, imputing nonexistent parallels to the supporting data.

For a clearer illustration of the external controls which need to be in place to do comparative mythology in anything resembling a rigorous fashion, consider some of the criteria presented by Bruce Metzger in his classic article on "Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Christianity"⁹³⁶:

II. The nature and amount of the evidence of the Mysteries create certain methodological problems. Partly because of a vow of secrecy imposed upon the initiates, relatively little information concerning the teaching imparted in the Mysteries has been preserved. Furthermore, since a large part of the scanty evidence regarding the Mysteries dates from the third, fourth, and fifth Christian centuries, it must not be assumed that beliefs and practices current at that time existed in substantially the same form during the pre-Christian era. In fact, that pagan doctrines would differ somewhat from place to place and from century to century is not only what one should have expected, but also what the sources reveal to be a fact. For example, the grades of Mithraic initiation in the West apparently included that of "Cryphius"; in the East (in its stead?) was that of "Nymphus."⁹³⁷ Again, over the years the efficacy of the rite of the taurobolium

⁹³⁶ In *Historical & Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, & Christian* (Eerdmans 1968), 1-24.

⁹³⁷ See pp. 26ff. below.

differed in what was promised to the initiate.⁹³⁸ Methodologically, therefore, it is extremely hazardous to assume, as has sometimes been done, that a pagan rite or belief which a Christian author cites must have existed in the same form in pre-Christian days.

III. Another methodological consideration, often overlooked by scholars who are better acquainted with Hellenistic culture than with Jewish, is involved in the circumstance that the early Palestinian Church was composed of Christians from a Jewish background, whose generally strict monotheism and traditional intolerance of syncretism must have militated against wholesale borrowing from pagan cults.⁹³⁹ Psychologically it is quite inconceivable that the Judaizers, who attacked Paul with unmeasured ferocity for what they considered his liberalism concerning the relation of Gentile converts to the Mosaic law, should nevertheless have acquiesced in what some have described as Paul's thoroughgoing contamination of the central doctrines and sacraments of the Christian religion. Furthermore, with regard to Paul himself, scholars are coming once again to acknowledge that the Apostle's prevailing set of mind was rabbinically oriented, and that his newly-found Christian faith ran in molds previously formed at the feet of Gamaliel.⁹⁴⁰

IV. In estimating the degree of opportunity afforded the early Palestinian Church of being influenced by the Mysteries, it is certainly a significant fact

⁹³⁸ According to epigraphical evidence, the taurobolium was efficacious for twenty years (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vi, 504, of A.D. 376, and 152, of A.D. 390), for eternity (*CIL*, vi. 510, of A.D. 376), and, possibly, for twenty-eight years (so an inscription discussed by Cumont in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions*, 1923, pp. 253ff.). See Clifford H. Moore, "The Duration of the Efficacy of the Taurobolium," *Classical Philology*, XIX (1924), 363-365. For convenient lists of inscriptions commemorating the taurobolium (a) "pro salute imperatoris" and (b) for private individuals, see H. Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle, mère des dieux* (Paris, 1912), pp. 159ff. and 167ff.

⁹³⁹ For a balanced essay on the general immunity of Jews from influences of the Mysteries, see S. H. Hooke's chapter, "Christianity and the Mystery Religions," in the symposium, *Judaism and Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Age of Transition*, ed. by W. O. E. Oesterley (London, 1937), pp. 235-250. Despite its useful contribution in the assembly of widely scattered materials, E. R. Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 12 vols. (New York, 1953-65) falls short of proving that pre-Christian, Palestinian Judaism had been influenced by the Mysteries *per se*; see trenchant critiques by Morton Smith in *Anglican Theological Review*, xxxvi (1954), 218-220, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Lxxxvi (1967), 53-68, and by R. M. Grant in *Gnomon*, xxxviii (1966), 423f.

⁹⁴⁰ Noteworthy examples of this change of emphasis in Pauline studies are found in W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London, 1948; 2nd ed., 1955), and H. J. Schoeps, *Paul, the Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia, 1961). On the question of Paul's early training in Jerusalem, see the careful exegesis of Acts 22.3 by W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: the City of Paul's Youth?* trans. by G. Ogg (London, 1962).

that, unlike other countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, Palestine has been extremely barren in yielding archaeological remains of the paraphernalia and places of worship connected with the Mysteries.⁹⁴¹

V. That there *are* parallels between the Mysteries and Christianity has been observed since the early centuries of the Church, when both Christian⁹⁴² and non-Christian⁹⁴³ alike commented upon certain similarities. In evaluating the significance of alleged parallels in certain crucial matters (i.e., the sacraments and the motif of a dying and rising savior-god), consideration must be given to the following.

(A) Some of the supposed parallels are the result of the modern scholar's amalgamation of quite heterogeneous elements drawn from various sources. As Schweitzer pointed out, "Almost all the popular writings fall into this kind of inaccuracy. They manufacture out of the various fragments of information a kind of universal Mystery religion which never actually existed, least of all in Paul's day."⁹⁴⁴

⁹⁴¹ According to the map prepared by Nicola Turchi (in his *Le religioni misteriosofiche del mondo antico* [Rome, 1923]), showing the diffusion of the Mysteries of Cybele, dea Syria, Isis, Mithra, Orpheus-Dionysius, and Samothrace in the Roman Empire, the only cult which penetrated Palestine proper was the Isiac cult. Evidence (is it merely numismatic?) for this cult was found at Aelia Capitolina. i.e., subsequent to Hadrian's rebuilding of Jerusalem c. AD. 135. By this time the fundamental doctrines and sacraments of the Church had been fixed. Similar maps for the cults of Isis, Mithra, and Cybele, which Herbert Preisker includes in his *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin, 1937), likewise indicate no archaeological remains of these cults within Palestine during the first century. It is significant that in an early second century invocation to Isis (P. Oxy. 1380) containing a detailed list of places at which Isis was worshipped (67 places in Egypt, and 55 outside Egypt) the only place within Palestine that is mentioned (lines 94f.) is Strata's Tower, the site on the Palestinian coast just south of Syria chosen by Herod the Great for the building of Caesarea, the capital of Roman Palestine.

Jerome provides literary evidence that at Bethlehem the cult of Adonis found a foothold as a result of Hadrian's attempt to paganize Jerusalem and its environs; *Epistola lviii ad Paulinum*, 3, "Bethleem, nunc nostram et augustissimum orbis locuni, ... lucus inumbrabat Thamuz, id est Adonidis, et in specu, ubi quondam Christus paruulus uagiit, Ueneris amasius plagebatur" (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, LIV, 532, 4-8 Hilberg). See also Wolf Wilhelm von Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun* (Leipzig, 1911), p. 83 and p. 522, note 5.

⁹⁴² E.g., Justin Martyr, *Apol.* I, lxvi, 4 and Dial., lxx. I; and Tertullian, *de Corona*, xv (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, LXX, 186-188 Kroymann) and *de Praescript.*, xl (ib., 51f.).

⁹⁴³ E.g., apparently Celsus. *ap.* Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vi, 22 (*Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller*, Orig., II, 91-93 Klostermann) and, no doubt with exaggeration. Flavius Vopiscus, *Firmus*, viii (quoted above, p. 4, note II).

⁹⁴⁴ A. Schweitzer. *Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung* (Tubingen, 1911), pp. 151f. (Eng. trans., *Paul and his Interpreters* [London, 1912], pp. 192f.). In a similar vein F. C. Conybeare refers to "the untrained explorers [who] discover on almost every page connections in their sub-

Even reputable scholars have succumbed to the temptation to be more precise than the existing state of information will permit. Commenting on this temptation, Edwyn R. Bevan says caustically: "Of course if one writes an imaginary description of the Orphic mysteries, as Loisy, for instance, does, filling in the large gaps in the picture left by our data from the Christian eucharist, one produces something very impressive. On this plan, you first put in the Christian elements, and then are staggered to find them there."⁹⁴⁵

It goes without saying that alleged parallels which are discovered by pursuing such methodology evaporate when they are confronted with the original texts. In a word, one must beware of what have been called "parallels made plausible by selective description."

(B) Even when the parallels are actual and not imaginary, their significance for purposes of comparison will depend upon whether they are genealogical and not merely analogical parallels.⁹⁴⁶ That is to say, one must inquire whether the similarities have arisen from more or less equal religious experience, due to equality of what may be called psychic pitch and equality of outward conditions, or whether they are due to borrowing one from the other. Interesting as the parallels are which Sir James G. Frazer collected from the four corners of the earth in his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*, by no means all of them are to be regarded as the result of demonstrable borrowing. In seeking connections it is not enough (as F. C. Conybeare pointed out) "for one agent or institution or belief merely to remind us of another. Before we assert literary or traditional connection between similar elements in story and myth, we must satisfy ourselves that such communication was possible."⁹⁴⁷

It is a fact that in various spheres close similarities even in phraseology have been discovered which are related to each other by nothing more direct than analogy. For example, in a letter published in *The (London) Times* at the end of July, 1938, the late Professor Harold Temperley pointed out two quite remarkable parallels between speeches made by Canning in 1823 and 1826 and their

ject matter where there are and can be none, and as regularly miss connections where they exist" (*The Historical Christ* [London, 1914], p. vii). For a critique of the supposed influence of the Iranian Primeval-Man and Redeemer mythology on Johannine theology, see Carsten Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Lxxviii; Cöttingen, 1961)*.

⁹⁴⁵ Edwyn R. Bevan, in the symposium, *The History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (Glasgow, 1929), p. 105; reprinted by Thomas S. Kepler, *Contemporary Thinking about Paul, An Anthology* (New York, [1940]). p. 43.

⁹⁴⁶ For this distinction, see Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, 4te Aufl. (Tübingen, 1923), pp. 226ff. (Eng. trans., *Light from the Ancient East* [New York, 1927]. pp. 265ff.).

⁹⁴⁷ Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

modern counterparts in Neville Chamberlain's utterances on July 26, 1938. In a subsequent letter, the Prime Minister disclaimed having previously read either of Canning's speeches, and concluded that the parallels "indicate simply the continuity of English thought in somewhat similar circumstances, even after an interval of more than a hundred years."⁹⁴⁸ Or, to take an example from ancient times, a close parallel to the docetism expressed in the apocryphal Acts of John has been discovered in *Ovid's Fasti*.⁹⁴⁹ It would be vain, however, to imagine that Greek Christian writers were indebted to Ovid for their docetic interpretation of Christ's sufferings. So too, as Toynbee points out in his *Study of History*,⁹⁵⁰ the uniformity of human nature sometimes produces strikingly similar results in similar situations where there can be no suspicion of any historical bridge by which the tradition could have been mediated from one culture to the other.⁹⁵¹

(C) Even when parallels are genealogical, it must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases the influence moved in the opposite direction. In what T. R. Glover aptly called "the conflict of religions in the Early Roman Empire," it was to be expected that the hierophants of cults which were begin-

⁹⁴⁸ The text of the two letters is given by E. G. Selwyn in the introduction of his commentary on *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London, 1949), pp. 8f.

⁹⁴⁹ The parallel is discussed by R. L. P. Milburn in *Journal of Theological Studies*, XLVI (1945), 68f.

⁹⁵⁰ Arnold J. Toynbee. *A Study of History*, vi (Oxford, 1939), 276ff., and 376-539. On anthropological and cultural parallels in general, see M. P. Nilsson in Gercke-Norden's *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft*, 4te Aufl., ii, iv (Leipzig, 1933), 58ff.; H. J. Rose, *Concerning Parallels (Frazer Lecture, 1934)* (Oxford, 1934); and A. D. Nock in *Gnomon*, xv (1939), 18f., and in *American Journal of Philology*, LXV (1944), 99ff. In a celebrated Inaugural Lecture at Oxford Prof. R. C. Zaehner reminded his hearers of the considerable difference in substance there may be in religious teachings (like the doctrines of release or incarnation in various religions) which may appear superficially very similar (*Foolishness to the Greeks* [Oxford, 1953], pp. 14ff.). For a needed warning against extravagant and exaggerated deductions from literary parallels, see Samuel Sandmel's comments entitled "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXI (1962), 1-13. For several most curious historical parallels between St. John Colombini, the founder of the Order of the Jesuits, and Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, see Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), pp. 223f.

⁹⁵¹ The two facts that all human beings eat and that most of them seek companionship with one another and with their god account for a large percentage of similarities among the examples from around the world gathered by Fritz Bammel in his interesting study of *Das heilige Mahl im Glauben der Völker. Eine religionsphänomenologische Untersuchung* (Gütersloh, 1950). For a discussion of certain parallels between the Osiris cult and Christianity, where "any theory of borrowing on the part of Christianity from the older faith is not to be entertained, for not only can it not be substantiated on the extant evidence, but it is also intrinsically most improbable." see S. G. F. Brandon. "The Ritual Perpetuation of the Past," *Numen*, vi (1959), 122-129 (quotation is from p. 128).

ning to lose devotees to the growing Church should take steps to stem the tide. One of the surest ways would be to imitate the teaching of the Church by offering benefits comparable with those held out by Christianity. Thus, for example, one must doubtless interpret the change in the efficacy attributed to the rite of the taurobolium. In competing with Christianity, which promised eternal life to its adherents, the cult of Cybele officially or unofficially raised the efficacy of the blood bath from twenty years to eternity.⁹⁵²

(B) In the nature of the case a most profound difference between Christianity and the Mysteries was involved in the historical basis of the former and the mythological character of the latter. Unlike the deities of the Mysteries, who were nebulous figures of an imaginary past, the Divine Being whom the Christian worshipped as Lord was known as a real Person on earth only a short time before the earliest documents of the New Testament were written. From the earliest times the Christian creed included the affirmation that Jesus “was crucified under Pontius Pilate.” On the other hand, Plutarch thinks it necessary to warn the priestess Clea against believing that “any of these tales [concerning Isis and Osiris] actually happened in the manner in which they are related.”⁹⁵³

(C) Unlike the secretiveness of those who guarded the Mysteries, the Christians made their sacred books freely available to all.⁹⁵⁴ Even when the *disciplina arcani* was being elaborated in the fourth and fifth centuries (whether as a diplomatic and paedagogic technique and/or as a Christian borrowing from the Mys-

⁹⁵² So, e.g., Hugo Hepding, *Attis. seine Mythen und sein Kult* (Giessen. 1903), p. 200, note 7, and Rahner, *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, xi (1944), 397f.; cf. also P. Lambrechts, *Aspecten van het onsterfelijkheidsgeloof in de Oudheid, in Handelingen der Zuidnederlands Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterhunde en Geschiedenis*, x (1956), 13-49. On the other hand, Moore thinks that “*in aeternam renatus* represents rather the enthusiastic hopes of the devotee than any dogma” (*op. cit.*, p. 363), and Nilsson regards the phrase as reflecting “a heightening which was easy to make in an age when so many spoke of eternity” (*Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, ii [Munich, 1950], 626; 2te Aufl. [1961], p. 653); but they have apparently forgotten that Augustine tells of having known a priest of Cybele who kept saying, “*Et ipse Pilleatus christianus est*” (“and even the god with the Phrygian cap [i.e. Attis] is a Christian”), *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus*, vii, i, 6 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, xxxv, 1440). The imitation of the Church is plain in the pagan reforms attempted by the Emperor Julian, a devoted adherent to the cult of Cybele.

⁹⁵³ Plutarch, *de Iside et Osiride*, xi (*Loeb Classical Library*, p. 29); see also lviii, “We must not treat legend as if it were history” (*op. cit.*, p. 139). On other differences between Christianity and the Mysteries, see E. O. James, *In the Fulness of Time* (London, 1935), pp. 87f.

⁹⁵⁴ Apuleius refers to “*quosdam libros litteris ignorabilibus praenotatos, partim figuris cuiusmodi animalium concepti serinonis compendiosa verba suggerentes, partim nodosis et in modum rotae tortuosis capreolatimque condensis apicibus a curiosa profanorum lectione munita*,” *Metamorphoses*, xi, 22. On the contrary, Christians not only made available the Greek Scriptures, but prepared versions in the principal vernaculars as well. On the contrast in general, see Harnack, *Bible Reading in the Early Church* (London, 1912), pp. 28f. and 146f.

teries, need not be determined now),⁹⁵⁵ it was still possible to contrast the simplicity and openness of Christian rites with the secrecy of pagan Mysteries.⁹⁵⁶

(E) The motif of a dying and rising savior-god has been frequently supposed to be related to the account of the saving efficacy of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The formal resemblance between the two, however, must not be allowed to obscure the great differences in content.

(1) In all the Mysteries which tell of a dying deity, the god dies by compulsion and not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in a self-giving love. But according to the New Testament, God's purpose of redeeming-love was the free divine motive for the death of Jesus, who accepted with equal freedom that motive as his own.

(2) Christianity is *sui generis* in its triumphant note affirming that even on the Cross Jesus exercised his kingly rule (*Dominus regnat ex ligno*). Contrary to this exultant mood (which has been called the *gaudium crucis*), the pagan devotees mourn and lament in sympathy with a god who has unfortunately suffered something imposed on him. As Nock points out, "In the Christian commemoration the only element of mourning is the thought that *men* have betrayed and murdered Jesus. His death is itself triumph."⁹⁵⁷

(3) In all strata of Christian testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "everything is made to turn upon a dated experience of a historical Person,"⁹⁵⁸ whereas nothing in the Mysteries points to any attempt to undergird be-

⁹⁵⁵ For the history of views regarding the *disciplina arcani* down to the beginning of the present century, see Heinrich Gravel, *Die Arcandisciplin*, I Theil: *Geschichte und Stand der Frage*, Diss. Munster (Lingen a/Ems, 1902). For more recent summaries, see A. Julicher in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopdie*, v, 1175f.; L. Schindler, *Altchristliche Arhandiszipin und die antiken Mysterien*, Program. Tetschen (1911); E. Vacandard, "Arcane," *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastiques*, III, (1924), 1497-1513; O. Perler, "Arkandiszipio, Reallexikon fur Antike und Christentum," I (1950), 667-676; and S. Laeuchli, *Mithraisan in Ostia* (Evanston. 1967), pp. 93-100.

⁹⁵⁶ E.g. Pseudo-Augustine, *Quaestiones veteris et novi Testamenti*, cxiv, 6 (L, CSEL, 305 Souter): Hinc est unde nihil apud nos in tenebris, nihil occulte geritur. Omne enim, quod honestum scitur, publicari non timetur; illud autem, quod turpe et inhonestum est, prohibente pudore non potest publicari. Quam ob rem pagini mysteria sua in tenebris celebrant, ucl in eo prudentes. Erubeseunt enim palam inlundi; turpia enim, quae illic uice legis aguntur, nolunt manifestari, ne qui prudentes se dicunt hebets his uiceantur, quos stultos appellant.

⁹⁵⁷ A. D. Nock, "A Note on the Resurrection," in *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, ed. A. E. J. Rawlinson (London, 1928), p. 48; reprinted in Nock's *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background* (New York, 1964), p. 106.

⁹⁵⁸ The phrase is Nock's, *ibid.*, p. 49. See also George C. Ring, S.J., "Christ's Resurrection and the Dying and Rising Gods," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vi (1944), 216-229, and G. Bertram,

lief with historical evidence of the god's resurrection. The formulation of belief in Christ's resurrection on the third day was fixed prior to Paul's conversion (c. A.D. 33-36), as the choice of technical phraseology in I Cor. 15.3 indicates,⁹⁵⁹ and was proclaimed openly as part of the general apostolic *kerygma* from the very earliest days of the Church, as the evidence in all strata of Acts makes abundantly clear.⁹⁶⁰ Moreover, the proclamation of the Resurrection by the members of the Christian community at Jerusalem was not merely a means of confusing their opponents; it was the presupposition of their own communal life.

What shall be said of parallels to the tradition that the Resurrection of Christ took place "on the third day?" The devotees of Attis commemorated his death on March 22, the Day of Blood, and his coming to life four days later, March 25, the Feast of Joy or *Hilaria*. According to one account of the Egyptian cult, the death of Osiris took place on the 17th of Athyr (a month corresponding to the period from October 28 to November 26), the finding and reanimation of his body in the night of the 19th.⁹⁶¹ When Adonis rose is not certain, but the re-

"Auferstehung (des Kultgottes)," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, (Stuttgart, 1950), 919-930.

⁹⁵⁹ Of no little significance is Paul's choice of the pair of verbs with which he begins this account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, *parelabon* and *paredoka*. These correspond exactly to *kbl* and *tsr*, *termini technici* with which Pirke Aboth, the heart of the Mishnah, opens ("Moses received the Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets," etc.). Among other monographs dealing with Paul's *tanna*-like role in receiving and delivering tradition concerning Jesus, see G. Kittel, *Die Probleme des palästinischen spätjudentums und das Ur-christentum* (Stuttgart, 1926), pp. 26f.; Adolf Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu* (Stuttgart, 1934), p. 320; W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1948; 2nd ed., 1955), pp. 248f.; B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript, Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Uppsala, 1961; 2nd ed., 1964), pp. 288-323; and J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. by Norman Perrin (New York, 1966), pp. 101f.

The fact that occasionally either *paradidonai* and *tradere* or *paralambanein*, *accipere*, and *percipere*, were used with reference to the Mysteries (for examples see Lobeck, *Op. cit.*, 1, 39, note: Anrich, *op. cit.*, p. 54, notes 4 and 5; Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, pp. 53f.) cannot be supposed to throw significant light upon Paul's usage in I Cor. 11.23 (*pace* Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos* [Berlin, 1953], pp. 288f.) in view of the facts that (1) no pagan example has been found which employs both verbs side by side, and (2) as a rabbi trained at Jerusalem, Paul would not only have known *verbatim* the phraseology embedded in Aboth, but would have frequently heard the pair of verbs used in the course of rabbinical debate.

⁹⁶⁰ See C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London, 1936), and A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*, rev. ed. (London, 1961).

⁹⁶¹ On the diversity and reticence of the several accounts of the Osiris legends, see Georges Nagel, "The 'Mysteries' of Osiris in Ancient Egypt," *The Mysteries, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. by Joseph Campbell (New York, 1955): "The various episodes of the legend are not attested in the same way and with the same frequency. The texts often speak of the battles of Ho-

construction of a papyrus text has been thought to make the third day probable.⁹⁶²

In evaluating such parallels, the first thing that the historian must do is to sift the evidence. In the case of Attis, the evidence for the commemoration of the *Hilaria* dates from the latter part of the second Christian century.⁹⁶³ There are, in fact, no literary or epigraphical texts prior to the time of Antonius Pius (A.D. 138-161) which refer to Attis as the divine consort of Cybele,⁹⁶⁴ much less any that speak of his resurrection.⁹⁶⁵ With good grounds, therefore, it has been argued that the festival of the *Hilaria* was not introduced into the cultus of Cybele until the latter part of the second Christian century or even later.⁹⁶⁶

In the case of Osiris, after his consort Isis had sought and reassembled thirteen of the fourteen pieces into which his body had been dismembered by his wicked brother Typhon (otherwise known as Set), through the help of magic⁹⁶⁷ she was

rus and Seth for the heritage of Osiris, and often they mention the laments of Isis over her husband's death. But with regard to the actual death and resurrection of Osiris they are always quite reticent and usually give us no more than brief allusions" (p. 123).

⁹⁶² Gustave Clots, "Les fêtes d'Adonis sous Ptolémé II," *Revue des études grecques*, xxxiii (1920), 169-222, especially 213. For a convincing demolition of Glotz's reconstruction and interpretation, see pp. 230f. of Lambrechts' study mentioned in note 2 on p. 21 below.

⁹⁶³ Cf. Duncan Fishwick, "The *Cannophori* and the March Festival of Magna Mater," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, xcvi (1966), 193-202.

⁹⁶⁴ Certainly Catullus' poem, Attis, provides no hint of any such depiction of Attis, even though one may not agree with Elder's view that the poet intended to confine his attention to the psychological revulsion felt by "an ordinary man who by emasculation became a priest of Cybele" (John P. Elder, "Catullus' Attis," *American Journal of Philology*, Lxviii [1947], 395).

⁹⁶⁵ Pierre Lambrechts, Attis, *van herdersknaap tot God (Verhandelingen van de koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schone kunsten van België*, KI. der Letteren, No. 46; Brussels, 1962), pp. 8 and 26ff.; cf. G. Wagner, *op. cit.* (see above p. 3, note 2), pp. 228-235 (Eng. trans., pp. 217-229). For the ambiguous and extremely limited iconographic representations of the periodic resurrection of Attis, see M. J. Vermaseren, *The Legend of Attis in Greek and Roman Art* (Leiden, 1966), p. 40.

⁹⁶⁶ Pierre Lambrechts, "Les fêtes 'phrygiennes' de Cybèle et d'Attis," *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, xxvii (1952), 141-170, and "Attis à Rome," *Mélanges Georges Smets* (Brussels, 1952), pp. 461-471. On the reform of the cult of Magna Mater under Antoninus Pius, see Jean Beaujeu, *La Religion romaine à l'apogée de l'Empire; I, La Politique religieuse des Antonins* (96-192) (Paris, 1955), pp. 312ff., who supports his arguments with numismatic evidence. Cf. also Th. Koves, "Zum Empfang der Magna Mater in Rom," *Historia*, XII (1963), 321-347, who draws attention to the supplanting of the old "Roman" rites celebrated in April (the Megalesia) under the Republic by the Phrygian rites celebrated in March.

⁹⁶⁷ Johannes Leipoldt appropriately calls attention to the feature of magical incantations as a significant difference between pagan and Christian account of the resurrection of the cult-god ("Zu den Auferstehungs-Geschichten," *Theologisches Literaturzeitung*, LXXIII [1948], col. 738 (= *Von den Mysterien zur Kirche. Gesammelte Aufsätze* [Leipzig, 1961]. pp. 200f.).

enabled to reanimate his corpse. Thereafter Osiris became “Lord of the Underworld and Ruler of the Dead,” in which role he presides at the bar of judgment and assigns to the souls of the departed their proper reward for virtue or punishment for wrongdoing. Whether this can be rightly called a resurrection is questionable, especially since, according to Plutarch,⁹⁶⁸ it was the pious desire of devotees to be buried in the same ground where, according to local tradition, the body of Osiris was still lying.

In the case of Adonis, there is no trace of a resurrection in pictorial representations or in any texts prior to the beginning of the Christian era.⁹⁶⁹ In fact, the only four witnesses that refer to the resurrection of Adonis date from the second to the fourth century (Lucian,⁹⁷⁰ Origen,⁹⁷¹ Jerome⁹⁷² (who depends upon Origen), and Cyril of Alexandria⁹⁷³) and none of these mentions the *triduum*.

The attempt to link the Adonis and Attis cults to the worship of Tammuz and his alleged resurrection⁹⁷⁴ rests, as Kramer put it, on “nothing but inference and surmise, guess and conjecture.”⁹⁷⁵ Still more remote from the rise of Christianity is the Sumerian epic involving Ianna’s descent to the Nether World.⁹⁷⁶

⁹⁶⁸ Plutarch, de *Iside et Osiride*, 359B (20). No fewer than twenty-three locations, identified by classical authors and Greek inscriptions, claimed to be the place where Osiris’s body lay; for a list, see Theodor Hopfner, *Plutarch uber Isis und Osiris*; I. Teil, *Die Sage (Monographien des Archiv Orientalni*, IX; Prague, 1940), pp. 160f. The cult of Osiris, in fact, involved not so much a genuine “mystery” initiation, open to devotees, as a funerary service for the departed; see Georges Nagel, “Les ‘mystères’ d’Osiris dans l’ancienne Egypte,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1944 (Band XI), *Die Mysterien* (Zurich, 1945), pp. 164ff.; Eng. trans., “The ‘Mysteries’ of Osiris in Ancient Egypt,” *The Mysteries, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. by Joseph Campbell (*Boltingen Series*, xxx. 2; New York, 1955), pp. 132ff.; for the distinction cf. also Gustave Jéquier, “Drames, mystères, rituels dans l’ancienne Egypte,” *Mélanges offerts à M. Niedermann ...* (Neuchatel, 1944), pp. 37ff. On the question of the so-called parallels between the cult of Osiris and Christianity, see G. Bertram, “Auferstehung (des Kultgottes),” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, I (1950), cols. 921f., and the quotation from Brandon, p. II above, note I.

⁹⁶⁹ See, e.g., P. Lambrechts’ survey of the evidence in his “La ‘resurrection’ d’Adonis,” *Mélanges Isidore Lévy* (Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves, xxiii [1953]; Brussels, 1955). pp. 207-240.

⁹⁷⁰ *De dea Syria*, vi.

⁹⁷¹ *Selecta in Ezek.* (Migne, *PG.* xiii. 797).

⁹⁷² *In Ezek.*, viii. 3 (Migne, *PL.* xxv. 82).

⁹⁷³ *In Isaiam*, ii. 3 (Migne. *PG.* LXX. 440f.).

⁹⁷⁴ E.g., Wilfred H. Schoff, “Tammuz, Pan, and Christ,” *The Open Court*, xxvi (1912), 513-532.

⁹⁷⁵ S. N. Kramer, ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, p. 10. Cf. G. Wagner, *op. cit.* pp. 149-167 (Eng. tr., pp. 136ff.), and E. M. Yamauchi, “Tammuz and the Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXV (1965), 283-290, and *idem*, “Descent of Ishtar,” *The Biblical World, a Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. by Charics F. Pfeiffer (Grand Rapids. 1966), p. 200.

⁹⁷⁶ Contrary to W. F. Albright’s statement that in the Sumerian original of the epic of Inanna’s Descent to the Nether World the goddess “is explicitly said to remain three days and three nights

There is, however, no need to go so far afield as these beliefs to account for the Christian conviction that Jesus rose the third day. It was a widely prevalent belief among the Jews that the soul of a dead man hovered near the corpse for three days, hoping to return to the body, but that on the fourth day, when decomposition set in, the soul finally departed, a belief that seems to be reflected in Martha's comment regarding her brother Lazarus (John 11.39).⁹⁷⁷ Moreover, apart from such parallels, it might be urged that the phrase "on the third day" or "after three days" occurs so often in the Old Testament with reference to the normal interval between two events in close succession that the dating of the Resurrection "on the third day" was both appropriate and inevitable.

Apart from these considerations, however, it remains a fact that the notation of the *third* day is so closely intertwined within all the New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection as to point to the conclusion that the Christian witnesses began to experience the living presence of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion, and thereafter it was recalled that he had promised on more than one occasion that, after his death, he would in three days rise again.⁹⁷⁸

in the underworld" (*From Stone Age to Christianity*, 2nd ed. [Baltimore, 1946], pp. 341f., note 81), a careful examination of the epic (conveniently edited by J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [Princeton, 1950], pp. 52-57) indicates that it is "after three days and three nights had passed" (line 569) that Ninshubur, perceiving that his mistress, Inanna, has not returned from the Nether World, proceeds to make the rounds of the gods, lamenting before each of them in accord with a formula which Inanna had previously given him. Then Father Enki devises a plan to restore the goddess to life; he fashions two sexless creatures and instructs them to proceed to the Nether World and to sprinkle the "food of life" and the "water of life" upon Inanna's impaled body. This they do, and the goddess subsequently revives. The time of the reanimation is not disclosed, but doubtlessly the mythographer conceived it to be considerably later than the period of three days and three nights. On this point also see F. Notscher, "Zur Auferstehung nach drei Tagen," *Biblica*, xxxv (1954), 353-319. Accepting a reading proposed by Adam Falkenstein (*Bibliotheca Orientalis*, xxii [1965], 279f.) S. N. Kramer made a correction to his earlier interpretation of Inanna's Descent, concluding that "Dumuzi, according to Sumerian mythographers, rises from the dead annually, and after staying on earth for half a year, descends to the Nether World for the other half" ("Dumuzi's Annual Resurrection: An Important Correction to 'Inanna's Descent,'" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 183 [Oct. 1966], p. 31).

⁹⁷⁷ Among many discussions of this belief, see especially Emil Freistedt, *Altchristliche Totengedächtnistage und ihre Beziehung zum Jenseitsglauben und Totenhultus der Antike* (Munster, 1928), pp. 53ff.

⁹⁷⁸ For an interesting suggestion why Jesus emphasized the importance of the third day after his death, see Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (London, 1947), pp. 199-200. Hoskyns points out that, according to customs of hospitality prevailing in the East, three days constitute a temporary habitation, and the fourth day implies permanent residence. When therefore, in accord with Hosea's promise that the Lord had not permanently humiliated his people but would raise them up on the third day (Hosea 6.2), "it is said in the Gospels that Jesus emphasized the importance of the third day after His death, what is meant is that He assured to His disciples

(4) Finally, Christianity and the Mystery cults differ in what may be called their views regarding the philosophy of history.

(a) It is generally acknowledged that the rites of the Mysteries, which commemorate a dying and rising deity, represent the cyclical recurrence of the seasons. In other words, such myths are the expression of ancient nature-symbolism; the spirit of vegetation dies every year and rises every year. According to popular expectation, the world-process will be indefinitely repeated, being a circular movement leading nowhere. For the Christian, on the other hand, as heir to the Hebraic view of history, the time-process comprises a series of unique events, and the most significant of these events was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unlike the recurrent death and reanimation of the cultic deities symbolizing the cycle of nature, for the Christians the importance of Jesus' work was related just to this "once-for-all" character of his death and resurrection.⁹⁷⁹

(b) In another respect besides that of repetition, the Mysteries differ from Christianity's interpretation of history. The speculative myths of the cults lack entirely that reference to the spiritual and moral meaning of history which is inextricably involved in the experiences and triumph of Jesus Christ. In fact, not until the fourth century, when doubtless this stark contrast between the two became increasingly apparent to thoughtful pagans, is there any indication of an attempt to read moral values into certain cultic myths.⁹⁸⁰

Edwin Yamauchi has also canvassed the claim that our Christian faith is mythological in origin:

A. Dying and Rising Fertility Gods

John H. Randall, emeritus professor of philosophy at Columbia University, has asserted: "Christianity, at the hands of Paul, became a mystical system of redemption, much like the cult of Isis, and the other sacramental or mystery religions of the day" (*Hellenistic Ways of Deliverance and the Making of the Christian Synthesis*, 1970, p. 154). Hugh Schonfield in *Those Incredible Christians* (1968, p. xii) has declared: "The revelations of Frazer in *The Golden Bough*

that death could not permanently engulf Him ... He would be but a visitor to the dead, not a permanent resident in their midst" (p. 200).

⁹⁷⁹ It must not be supposed that the recurring annual festival of Easter belies what has just been said regarding the particularity of the Christian message. It has been proved that the celebration of Easter did not arise at once out of belief in the Resurrection, but developed later by gradual stages out of the Jewish Passover; see E. Schwartz, "Osterbetrachtungen," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, VII (1906), 1-33.

⁹⁸⁰ Notably into the cult of Attis by Iamblichus (died AD. 330), as reported by Julian, *Oration v*, and by Sallustius, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, iv.

had not got through to the masses.... Christians remained related under the skin to the devotees of Adonis and Osiris, Dionysus and Mithras.”

The theory that there was a widespread worship of a dying and rising fertility god-Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Adonis in Syria, Attis in Asia Minor, and Osiris in Egypt-was propounded by Sir James Frazer, who gathered a mass of parallels in part IV of his monumental work *The Golden Bough* (1906, reprinted in 1961). This view has been adopted by many who little realize its fragile foundations. The explanation of the Christian Resurrection by such a comparative-religions approach has even been reflected in official Soviet propaganda (cf. Paul de Surgy, editor, *The Resurrection and Modern Biblical Thought*, 1966, pp. 1, 131).

In the 1930s three influential French scholars, M. Goguel, C. Guignebert, and A. Loisy, interpreted Christianity as a syncretistic religion formed under the influence of Hellenistic mystery religions. According to A. Loisy (“The Christian Mystery,” *Hibbert Journal*, X [1911-12], 51), Christ was “a saviour-god, after the manner of an Osiris, an Attis, a Mithra.... Like Adonis, Osiris, and Attis he had died a violent death, and like them he had returned to life....”

B. Reexamination of the Evidences

A reexamination of the sources used to support the theory of a mythical origin of Christ’s resurrection reveals that the evidences are far from satisfactory and that the parallels are too superficial.

In the case of the Mesopotamian Tammuz (Sumerian Dumuzi), his alleged resurrection by the goddess Inanna-Ishtar had been assumed even though the end of both the Sumerian and the Akkadian texts of the myth of “The Descent of Inanna (Ishtar)” had not been preserved. Professor S. N. Kramer in 1960 published a new poem, “The Death of Dumuzi,” that proves conclusively that instead of rescuing Dumuzi from the Underworld, Inanna sent him there as her substitute (cf. my article, “Tammuz and the Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIV [1965], 283-90). A line in a fragmentary and obscure text is the only positive evidence that after being sent to the Underworld Dumuzi may have had his sister take his place for half the year (cf. S. N. Kramer, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 183 [1966], 31).

Tammuz was identified by later writers with the Phoenician Adonis, the beautiful youth beloved of Aphrodite. According to Jerome, Hadrian desecrated the cave in Bethlehem associated with Jesus’ birth by consecrating it with a shrine of Tammuz-Adonis. Although his cult spread from Byblos to the Greco-Roman world, the worship of Adonis was never important and was restricted to women. P. Lambrechts has shown that there is no trace of a resurrection in the early texts or pictorial representations of Adonis; the four texts that speak of his resurrection are quite late, dating from the second to the fourth centuries A.D. (“La ‘resurrection’ d’Adonis,” in *Melanges Isidore Levy*, 1955, pp. 207-40). Lambrechts has also shown that Attis, the consort of Cybele, does not appear as

a “resurrected” god until after A.D. 150. (“Les Fetes ‘phrygiennes’ de Cybele et d’ Attis,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, XXVII 11952], 141-70).

This leaves us with the figure of Osiris as the only god for whom there is clear and early evidence of a “resurrection.” Our most complete version of the myth of his death and dismemberment by Seth and his twofold resuscitation by Isis is to be found in Plutarch, who wrote in the second century A.D. (cf. J. Gwyn Griffiths, Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride*, 1970). His account seems to accord with statements made in the early Egyptian texts. After the New Kingdom (from 1570 B.C. on) even ordinary men aspired to identification with Osiris as one who had triumphed over death.

But it is a cardinal misconception to equate the Egyptian view of the afterlife with the “resurrection” of Hebrew-Christian traditions. In order to achieve immortality the Egyptian had to fulfill three conditions: (1) His body had to be preserved, hence mummification. (2) Nourishment had to be provided either by the actual offering of daily bread and beer, or by the magical depiction of food on the walls of the tomb. (3) Magical spells had to be interred with the dead-Pyramid Texts in the Old Kingdom, Coffin Texts in the Middle Kingdom, and the Book of the Dead in the New Kingdom. Moreover, the Egyptian did not rise from the dead; separate entities of his personality such as his Ba and his Ka continued to hover about his body.

Nor is Osiris, who is *always* portrayed in a mummified form, an inspiration for the resurrected Christ. As Roland de Vaux has observed:

What is meant of Osiris being “raised to life”? Simply that, thanks to the ministrations of Isis, he is able to lead a life beyond the tomb which is an almost perfect replica of earthly existence. But he will never again come among the living and will reign only over the dead.... This revived god is in reality a “mummy” god [*The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 1971, p. 236].

C. Inexact Parallels From Late Sources

What should be evident is that past studies of phenomenological comparisons have inexcusably disregarded the dates and the provenience of their sources when they have attempted to provide prototypes for Christianity. Let me give two examples, Mithra and the taurobolium.

Mithra was the Persian god whose worship became popular among Roman soldiers (his cult was restricted to men) and was to prove a rival to Christianity in the late Roman Empire. Early Zoroastrian texts, such as the Mithra Yasht, cannot serve as the basis of a mystery of Mithra inasmuch as they present a god who watches over cattle and the sanctity of contracts. Later Mithraic evidence in the west is primarily iconographic; there are no long coherent texts.

Those who seek to adduce Mithra as a prototype of the risen Christ ignore the late date for the expansion of Mithraism to the west (cf. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God*, 1963, p. 76). The only dated Mithraic inscriptions from the pre-Christian period are the texts of Antiochus I of Commagene (69-34 B.C.) in eastern Asia Minor. After that there is one text possibly from the first century A.D., from Cappadocia, one from Phrygia dated to A.D. 77-78, and one from Rome dated to Trajan's reign (A.D. 98-117). All other dated Mithraic inscriptions and monuments belong to the second century (after A.D. 140), the third, and the fourth century A.D. (M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, 1956).

The taurobolium was a bloody rite associated with the worship of Mithra and of Attis in which a bull was slaughtered on 'a grating over an initiate in a pit below, drenching him with blood. This has been suggested (e.g., by R. Reitzenstein) as the basis of the Christian's redemption by blood and Paul's imagery in Romans 6 of the believer's death and resurrection. Gunter Wagner in his exhaustive study *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries* (1963) points out how anachronistic such comparisons are:

The taurobolium in the Attis cult is first attested in the time of Antoninus Pius for A.D. 160. As far as we can see at present it only became a personal consecration at the beginning of the third century A.D. The idea of a rebirth through the instrumentality of the taurobolium only emerges in isolated instances towards the end of the fourth century A.D.; it is not originally associated with this blood-bath [p. 266].

Indeed, there is inscriptional evidence from the fourth century A.D. that, far from influencing Christianity, those who used the taurobolium were influenced by Christianity. Bruce Metzger in his important essay "Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity" (*Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish and Christian*, 1968), notes:

Thus, for example, one must doubtless interpret the change in the efficacy attributed to the rite of the taurobolium. In competing with Christianity, which promised eternal life to its adherents, the cult of Cybele officially or unofficially raised the efficacy of the blood bath from twenty years to eternity [p. 11].

Another aspect of comparisons between the resurrection of Christ and the mythological mysteries is that the alleged parallels are quite inexact. It is an error, for example, to believe that the initiation into the mysteries of Isis, as described in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, is comparable to Christianity. For one thing, the hero, Lucius, had to pay a fortune to undergo *his* initiation. And as Wagner correctly observes: "Isis does not promise the *mystes* immortality, but only that henceforth he shall live under her protection, and that when at length he goes down to the realm of the dead he shall adore her . . ." (op. cit., p. 112).

On the other hand, the followers of Dionysus (Bacchus), the god of wine, did believe in immortality. But they did not hope for a resurrection of the body; nor did they base their faith on the reborn Dionysus of the Orphics, but rather on their experience of drunken ecstasy (cf. M. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, 1957).

In any case, the death and resurrection of these various mythological figures, however attested, always typified the annual death and rebirth of vegetation. This significance cannot be attributed to the death and resurrection of Jesus. A. D. Nock sets forth the most striking contrast between pagan and Christian notions of “resurrection” as follows:

In Christianity everything is made to turn on a dated experience of a historical Person; it can be seen from I Cor. XV. 3 that the statement of the story early assumed the form of a statement in a Creed. There is nothing in the parallel cases which points to any attempt to give such a basis of historical evidence to belief (*Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background*, 1964, p. 107).⁹⁸¹

In conclusion, I have tried to define the various ways in which the Bible is identified as mythological. I have also examined the arguments in favor of each identification. And I have raised a range of objections to each identification. It is true that the Bible represents a radically different worldview than the outlook of the modernist. But to classify the Biblical worldview as mythological is a theory-laden value-judgment that does not arise from the contents of Scripture itself, but rather takes the secular viewpoint as the unquestioned standard of comparison and then judges the Bible accordingly. No rational effort is made to honestly grapple with the opposing witness of Scripture. So the classification is ultimately a confessional exercise in mirror-gazing as the critic puts his personal prejudice on public display.

⁹⁸¹ <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/yama.html>

Excursus III: Justin Martyr (ca. 100-167 AD)

Gene M. Bridges & Jason Engwer

On occasion, those who wish to view the New Testament through the lens of Greek pagan mythology will cite Justin Martyr in their defense, alleging that, because Justin uses analogies between pagan myths and Christianity, this demonstrates early Christian belief that the authors of the New Testament narratives used these myths as source material for the New Testament narratives themselves. Thus, so the theory goes, Justin's citations prove that he also believed that the New Testament was rightly interpreted through the comparative myths of his day.

The most abused portion of Justin Martyr in question reads (emphasis ours):

“When we say also that the Word, which is the first birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that he, Jesus Christ, our teacher, was crucified, died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, *we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter.*⁹⁸²

Before we examine the claim of these copycat theorists, let us first take a look at Justin Martyr himself and briefly discuss his methodology. Then we will examine the *First Apology* and see if the use of this quote sustains the copycat theory in light of its intent and the text itself.

Justin died ca. 165 - 167 AD. The exact date of his birth is unknown, however it must have been after 70 AD, as the city in which he was born, Flavia Neapolis of Samaria, was established about that time. Given the approximate date of his death, he must have been born near the end of the first century or the beginning of the second. He was named by his grandfather, Bacchius, and his father, Priscus. They reared him a Gentile, not a Jew, and nothing in his writing suggests Justin was familiar with the Samaritan customs or religion rites of that day.

In his *Dialogue With Trypho*, Justin related his intellectual journey that led to his conversion. Justin began as a Stoic; then he became a Peripatetic. Later he became a student of Pythagoreanism, and, finally, a Platonist. He then became a Christian after meeting a gentle old man and speaking with him. He writes:

⁹⁸² *First Apology*, 21.

“When he had spoken these and many other things, which there is no time for mentioning at present, he went away, bidding me attend to them; and I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher. Moreover, I would wish that all, making a resolution similar to my own, do not keep themselves away from the words of the Saviour. For they possess a terrible power in themselves, and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; while the sweetest rest is afforded those who make a diligent practice of them. If, then, you have any concern for yourself, and if you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God, you may--since you are not indifferent to the matter -- become acquainted with the Christ of God, and, after being initiated, live a happy life.”⁹⁸³

This event probably occurred around 130 AD. Afterwards, Justin went to Ephesus and then Rome. He also traveled, as many in his day often did, lingering in Alexandria and Cyprus, teaching as he went. Over time, his reputation as a defender of the faith grew. Eusebius relates the training sessions during Justin’s second visit to Rome that took place in the house of Martinus, who resided over the bath of Timotinus.⁹⁸⁴

Justin taught for approximately 3 decades, until he was denounced as a Christian, along with six of his friends: Chariton, Charito, Euelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and Liberianus. Justin, when brought before Rustius, the prefect of Rome, refused to sacrifice to the gods. He and his friends were beheaded after confessing Christ and praising God. Because of this, the church gave him the name “Justin Martyr.”

Justin’s Thought and Apologetic Method

Justin’s thinking and apologetic method reflect his background and education. For Justin, there is no clear distinction between philosophy and theology. Justin saw Greek philosophy and mythology as, in part, a manifestation of common grace, a result of an innate awareness of God that every man possessed that had, in Greek philosophy in particular, come to expression at just the right time to ready men to hear the gospel and believe in Christ.

He inferred the doctrine of the personal *logos* from Plato’s impersonal world-soul. He held that Moses creation narrative corresponded broadly with Plato’s doctrine

⁹⁸³ *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 8.

⁹⁸⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.11.

that God made the world from formless matter.⁹⁸⁵ Justin drew parallels between the injustice of Socrates' death and the death of Jesus as well as the contemporary persecution of Christians, to which he was responding. Just as Socrates had been put to death for atheism, so too were the Christians of Justin's day.

Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves. And those who by human birth were more ancient than Christ, when they attempted to consider and prove things by reason, were brought before the tribunals as impious persons and busybodies. And Socrates, who was more zealous in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves. For they said that he was introducing new divinities, and did not consider those to be gods whom the state recognized. But he cast out from the state both Homer and the rest of the poets, and taught men to reject the wicked demons and those who did the things which the poets related; and he exhorted them to become acquainted with the God who was to them unknown, by means of the investigation of reason, saying, "That it is neither easy to find the Father and Maker of all, nor, having found Him, is it safe to declare Him to all." But these things our Christ did through His own power. For no one trusted in Socrates so as to die for this doctrine, but in Christ, who was partially known even by Socrates (for He was and is the Word who is in every man, and who foretold the things that were to come to pass both through the prophets and in His own person when He was made of like passions, and taught these things), not only philosophers and scholars believed, but also artisans and people entirely uneducated, despising both glory, and fear, and death; since He is a power of the ineffable Father, and not the mere instrument of human reason.⁹⁸⁶

Justin believed that there were certain elements within Greek philosophy and the Greek myths that were analogical to themes of the Old Testament and the Christian narratives themselves and this presented him with a common frame of reference from which to address his readers.

Justin's method is very simple: begin an apologetic by noting what, if anything, one has in common with one's opponent, and then argue your position from there, noting analogy and disanalogy. We see this in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* as well as his *First Apology*. In answering Trypho's objection, watch how Justin be-

⁹⁸⁵ Cf. *First Apology*, 59-60.

⁹⁸⁶ *Second Apology*, 10.

gins with the Shema, that there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

And when they ceased, I again addressed them thus:--

“Is there any other matter, my friends, in which we are blamed, than this, that we live not after the law, and are not circumcised in the flesh as your forefathers were, and do not observe sabbaths as you do? Are our lives and customs also slandered among you? And I ask this: have you also believed concerning us, that we eat men; and that after the feast, having extinguished the lights, we engage in promiscuous concubinage? Or do you condemn us in this alone, that we adhere to such tenets, and believe in an opinion, untrue, as you think?”

“This is what we are amazed at,” said Trypho, “but those things about which the multitude speak are not worthy of belief; for they are most repugnant to human nature. Moreover, I am aware that your precepts in the so-called Gospel are so wonderful and so great, that I suspect no one can keep them; for I have carefully read them. But this is what we are most at a loss about: that you, professing to be pious, and supposing yourselves better than others, are not in any particular separated from them, and do not alter your mode of living from the nations, in that you observe no festivals or sabbaths, and do not have the rite of circumcision; and further, resting your hopes on a man that was crucified, you yet expect to obtain some good thing from God, while you do not obey His commandments. Have you not read, that soul shall be cut off from his people who shall not have been circumcised on the eighth day? And this has been ordained for strangers and for slaves equally. But you, despising this covenant rashly, reject the consequent duties, and attempt to persuade yourselves that you know God, when, however, you perform none of those things which they do who fear God. If, therefore, you can defend yourself on these points, and make it manifest in what way you hope for anything whatsoever, even though you do not observe the law, this we would very gladly hear from you, and we shall make other similar investigations.”

“There will be no other God, O Trypho, nor was there from eternity any other existing” (I thus addressed him), “but He who made and disposed all this universe. Nor do we think that there is one God for us, another for you, but that He alone is God who led your fathers out from Egypt with a strong hand and a high arm. Nor have we trusted in any other (for there is no other), but in Him in whom you also have trusted, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. But we do not trust through Moses or through the law; for then we would do the same as yourselves. But now--(for I have read that there shall be a final law, and a covenant, the chiefest of all, which it is now incumbent on all men to observe, as many as are seeking after the inheritance of God. For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but *this* is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous

one; and an eternal and final law--namely, Christ--has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance. Have you not read this which Isaiah says: 'Hearken unto Me, hearken unto Me, my people; and, ye kings, give ear unto Me: for a law shall go forth from Me, and My judgment shall be for a light to the nations. My righteousness approaches swiftly, and My salvation shall go forth, and nations shall trust in Mine arm?' And by Jeremiah, concerning this same new covenant, He thus speaks: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt'. If, therefore, God proclaimed a new covenant which was to be instituted, and this for a light of the nations, we see and are persuaded that men approach God, leaving their idols and other unrighteousness, through the name of Him who was crucified, Jesus Christ, and abide by their confession even unto death, and maintain piety. Moreover, by the works and by the attendant miracles, it is possible for all to understand that He is the new law, and the new covenant, and the expectation of those who out of every people wait for the good things of God. For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ, as shall be demonstrated while we proceed.⁹⁸⁷

From this common reference, Justin develops the rest of his *Dialogue*. As we can see, he found points of common understanding and used these as a springboard for his explanation of the Christian faith.

The First Apology

Now we come to the *First Apology*. The First Apology is addressed to the Emperor of Rome and his sons.

To the Emperor Titus Ælius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar, and to his son Verissimus the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred Senate, with the whole People of the Romans, I, Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis in Palestine, present this address and petition in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them.⁹⁸⁸

⁹⁸⁷ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 10 -11.

⁹⁸⁸ *First Apology*, 1.

Justin specifically defends against the charge of atheism, asserting the injustice of the charge. He admits that Christians do not serve the pagan gods and are guilty as charged, if atheism means “do not worship Roman gods.” However, it is not true, says Justin, that Christians worship no god at all, for they worship the one, true, and living God.

Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.⁹⁸⁹

And reckon ye that it is for your sakes we have been saying these things; for it is in our power, when we are examined, to deny that we are Christians; but we would not live by telling a lie. For, impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the abode that is with God, the Father and Creator of all, and hasten to confess our faith, persuaded and convinced as we are that they who have proved to God by their works that they followed Him, and loved to abide with Him where there is no sin to cause disturbance, can obtain these things. This, then, to speak shortly, is what we expect and have learned from Christ, and teach. And Plato, in like manner, used to say that Rhadamanthus and Minos would punish the wicked who came before them; and we say that the same thing will be done, but at the hand of Christ, and upon the wicked in the same bodies united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. And if any one say that this is incredible or impossible, this error of ours is one which concerns ourselves only, and no other person, so long as you cannot convict us of doing any harm.⁹⁹⁰

He then proceeds to mount an argument from the ethics of the Christians, urging that they be judged on the merits of their moral lives not on this general and unsubstantiated charge of atheism. After discussing the ethical standards by which Christians live, Justin begins discussing specific Christian doctrines that are ridiculed by his readers. Among these is the resurrection of the dead.

Before arguing for the possibility of the resurrection of the dead itself, for a physical, bodily resurrection from the dead was an alien idea by his readers, an idea they found incredible, if not altogether repugnant, Justin begins with the

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

theme of life after death. He believes that this theme is found in the philosophies and myths known by his readers. From this common frame of reference, Justin argues that Christians also believe in life after death and, furthermore, that, if life after death is a theme found in these works, which are, from his standpoint, lesser and inferior sources, how much more so is its actual reality and the possibility of the actual resurrection of the dead itself as believed by Christians.

For reflect upon the end of each of the preceding kings, how they died the death common to all, which, if it issued in insensibility, would be a godsend to all the wicked. But since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up (i.e., for the wicked), see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. For let even necromancy, and the divinations you practice by immaculate children, and the evoking of departed human souls, and those who are called among the magi, Dream-senders and Assistant-spirits (Familiars), and all that is done by those who are skilled in such matters--let these persuade you that even after death souls are in a state of sensation; and those who are seized and cast about by the spirits of the dead, whom all call demoniacs or madmen; and what you repute as oracles, both of Amphilochus, Dodana, Pytho, and as many other such as exist; and the opinions of your authors, Empedocles and Pythagoras, Plato and Socrates, and the pit of Homer, and the descent of Ulysses to inspect these things, and all that has been uttered of a like kind. Such favor as you grant to these, grant also to us, who not less but more firmly than they believe in God; since we expect to receive again our own bodies, though they be dead and cast into the earth, for we maintain that with God nothing is impossible.

And to any thoughtful person would anything appear more incredible, than, if we were not in the body, and some one were to say that it was possible that from a small drop of human seed bones and sinews and flesh be formed into a shape such as we see? For let this now be said hypothetically: if you yourselves were not such as you now are, and born of such parents [and causes], and one were to show you human seed and a picture of a man, and were to say with confidence that from such a substance such a being could be produced, would you believe before you saw the actual production? No one will dare to deny [that such a statement would surpass belief]. In the same way, then, you are now incredulous because you have never seen a dead man rise again. But as at first you would not have believed it possible that such persons could be produced from the small drop, and yet now you see them thus produced, so also judge ye that it is not impossible that the bodies of men, after they have been dissolved, and like seeds resolved into earth, should in God's appointed time rise again and put on incorruption. For what power worthy of God those imagine who say, that each thing returns to that from which it was produced, and that beyond this not even God Himself can do anything, we are unable to conceive; but this we see clearly, that they would not have believed it possible that they could have become such and produced from such materials, as they now see both themselves and the whole world to be. And that it is better to believe even what is

impossible to our own nature and to men, than to be unbelieving like the rest of the world, we have learned; for we know that our Master Jesus Christ said, that “what is impossible with men is possible with God,” and, “Fear not them that kill you, and after that can do no more; but fear Him who after death is able to cast both soul and body into hell.” And hell is a place where those are to be punished who have lived wickedly, and who do not believe that those things which God has taught us by Christ will come to pass.⁹⁹¹

Notice what he does not do here. He does not say that these pagan myths and philosophies underwrite the Christian beliefs or the narratives about Jesus. He merely uses these non-Christian sources as a springboard to underwrite his apologetic method itself and provide a common theme in order to gain a hearing. He makes an argument from what he believes is proof that the Christian idea is, at a minimum, no less absurd or unbelievable than the beliefs in these other philosophies and myths. This will be his method throughout the following sections we will examine. He simply takes a general theme and develops it, making connections that his opponents apparently were not making in order to show them the injustice of their charges and the falsity of their understanding about Christians and Christianity.

Now we come to the passages our modern copycat theorists abuse. Does Justin argue that these pagan myths actually underwrite the New Testament narratives, or does he have something else in mind?

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter. For you know how many sons your esteemed writers ascribed to Jupiter: Mercury, the interpreting word and teacher of all; AEsculapius, who, though he was a great physician, was struck by a thunderbolt, and so ascended to heaven; and Bacchus too, after he had been torn limb from limb; and Hercules, when he had committed himself to the flames to escape his toils; and the sons of Leda, and Dioscuri; and Perseus, son of Danae; and Bellerophon, who, though sprung from mortals, rose to heaven on the horse Pegasus. For what shall I say of Ariadne, and those who, like her, have been declared to be set among the stars? And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears he has seen the burning Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre? And what kind of deeds are recorded of each of these reputed sons of Jupiter, it is needless to tell to those who already know. This only shall be said, that they are written for the advantage and encouragement of youthful scholars; for all reckon it an honorable thing to imitate the gods. But far be such a thought concerning the gods

⁹⁹¹ Ibid., 18, 19.

from every well-conditioned soul, as to believe that Jupiter himself, the governor and creator of all things, was both a parricide and the son of a parricide, and that being overcome by the love of base and shameful pleasures, he came in to Ganymede and those many women whom he had violated and that his sons did like actions. But, as we said above, wicked devils perpetrated these things. And we have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue; and we believe that those who live wickedly and do not repent are punished in everlasting fire.

Moreover, the Son of God called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary generation, yet, on account of His wisdom, is worthy to be called the Son of God; for all writers call God the Father of men and gods. And if we assert that the Word of God was born of God in a peculiar manner, different from ordinary generation, let this, as said above, be no extraordinary thing to you, who say that Mercury is the angelic word of God. But if any one objects that He was crucified, in this also He is on a par with those reputed sons of Jupiter of yours, who suffered as we have now enumerated. For their sufferings at death are recorded to have been not all alike, but diverse; so that not even by the peculiarity of His sufferings does He seem to be inferior to them; but, on the contrary, as we promised in the preceding part of this discourse, we will now prove Him superior--or rather have already proved Him to be so--for the superior is revealed by His actions. And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus. And in that we say that He made whole the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, we seem to say what is very similar to the deeds said to have been done by AEsculapius.⁹⁹²

We see a number of items here. He refers to Hermes, Perseus, Dionysus, Heracles, AEsculapius, Dioscuri, and Zeus himself. Why? If he is alleging that Christianity borrows from these myths, then where is that argument? He says nothing of such borrowing.

Justin does take some general analogies and use them as common ground for his argument in order to make connections his readers failed to make. Justin cites them as evidence of divine-human interaction not unparalleled in the religions of his listeners who are saying that the Christians are teaching ideas never before heard.

Take the story of Perseus. Is Justin inferring that the authors of the New Testament borrowed the idea of a virgin birth from the myth of Danae and then created their own version in the New Testament?

⁹⁹² Ibid., 21-22.

1. Birth is a significant event for all humans. The fact that religious figures would commonly be referred to as having a birth in some sort of unique fashion isn't specific enough to warrant the conclusion that one religion was derived from another.

2. What did they believe about Perseus? Judging from what we know about the actual content myth, they would have believed he was the son of Zeus, born by having sex with Danae, and thus not a virgin birth, but a birth by divine means. Moreover, God the Father does not have sex with Mary. The Holy Spirit overshadows her.

3. Thus, the argument is simply from a generic motif that fails the copycat theory at the critical points of comparison.

4. Even if it is true that Perseus was considered to have been truly virgin born, why would the existence of a prior virgin birth account prove borrowing? It wouldn't. A birth occurs either through sex or without it. If one group claims a virgin birth, then another group claims one, the second claim could be derived from the first, but not necessarily. Why should we think that any borrowing would be necessary? And if it was necessary, why not consider the Septuagint version of Isaiah 7 a more likely source? If Justin grounds one's argument, what does Justin say about the source material for these narratives about Christ?

What about AEsculapius? He healed many. Does this then mean Justin was inferring that the writers of the New Testament borrowed from this myth to concoct their own stories?

1. Healing is a common theme in ancient literature, so this is just a general motif.

2. Where is Justin's argument connecting a New Testament pericope with AEsculapius? It would seem that one would have to supply that argument for Justin, not derive it from Justin.

What of Zeus and his sons? Is this an argument from analogy or disanalogy? Here, we have an argument from disanalogy.

Zeus' acts include capricious destruction of others, feuds with the gods, love of evil, illicit sex with women, children who murdered their parents, and sons, who, while heroes, were not known for their ethical living. Christ, in contrast, lived sinlessly, and His followers were models of civility and morality. How can Zeus represent holiness, righteousness, and virtue? Where is the evidence that Justin is

affirming a genealogical parallel between the sons of Jupiter and Christ? Where can you find that connection in the text of the New Testament? Where does Justin use this to exegete Scripture?

Christ is superior to Hermes. Hermes is a mere messenger. Christ, in contrast, is the Living Word of God Incarnate. He is superior to Perseus, because He is God Incarnate, not merely a son of a god who is not omnipotent and who is the epitome of capriciousness and immorality. Perseus rose into heaven on a horse, but even this fails at a key point of comparison. Jesus is taken into heaven via the Shekinah. Perseus rises on an animal. Even if the parallel is a strong analogy, all it proves is that his readers had already heard about an ascension in their own religions, so that of Christ should be no less worthy of respect and faith. Where, however, is Justin's argument that the story of Christ's ascension comes from the myth of Perseus? It's nowhere to be seen. The concept of a figure departing from the earth is common and vague. The departure has to occur by means of the figure moving in some manner from one location to another. Nobody would need to get such a vague concept from another belief system. It's not specific enough to warrant an assumption of borrowing.

We noted above that Justin says that the deaths of Socrates and Jesus are analogous by virtue of their injustice in the *Second Apology*, but he also uses this as the foundation of his argument that the deaths of Christians are unjust for the same reasons. It would be absurd to argue that the New Testament borrows from the account of Socrates for Jesus trial and execution based on this statement, for in that event Justin would also be saying that his interlocutors were borrowing from Socrates' story to try, convict, and execute the Christians for atheism.

This is all to say that Justin deals with these themes as common motifs and is specific about the points of disanalogy. Justin will even argue that Christ's death is disanalogous from the deaths of the other heroes. He does this specifically to draw attention to the uniqueness of the Passion narratives and show how it is unlike the Greek myths.

But in no instance, not even in any of those called sons of Jupiter, did they imitate the being crucified; for it was not understood by them, all the things said of it having been put symbolically. And this, as the prophet foretold, is the greatest symbol of His power and role; as is also proved by the things which fall under our observation. For consider all the things in the world, whether without this form they could be administered or have any community. For the sea is not traversed except that trophy which is called a sail abide safe in the ship; and the earth is not ploughed without it: diggers and mechanics do not their work, ex-

cept with tools which have this shape. And the human form differs from that of the irrational animals in nothing else than in its being erect and having the hands extended, and having on the face extending from the forehead what is called the nose, through which there is respiration for the living creature; and this shows no other form than that of the cross. And so it was said by the prophet, “The breath before our face is the Lord Christ.” And the power of this form is shown by your own symbols on what are called “vexilla” [banners] and trophies, with which all your state possessions are made, using these as the insignia of your power and government, even though you do so unwittingly. And with this form you consecrate the images of your emperors when they die, and you name them gods by inscriptions. Since, therefore, we have urged you both by reason and by an evident form, and to the utmost of our ability, we know that now we are blameless even though you disbelieve; for our part is done and finished.⁹⁹³

Justin’s Source Critical Theory

The copycat theorists’ citation of Justin is highly selective. Why use Justin’s words, “we propound nothing different” but not what he offers us in terms of his own theory? Justin has his own argument for the origin of both the New Testament materials and an argument for the origin of the Greek myths he cites. In both cases, Justin says that the source is the Old Testament itself.

Justin says that what has been taught to us by Christ and by the prophets who preceded Him are alone true and are older than all the writers who have existed, Moses in particular, “not because we say the same things they said, but because we say true things...”⁹⁹⁴ After this, Justin lists several items of disanalogy. Then, Justin tells us exactly where the universe of discourse for the testimony of Jesus Christ lays. In the Hebrew prophets⁹⁹⁵; Moses⁹⁹⁶; the Old Testament predictions of His birth⁹⁹⁷; the modes of prophecy⁹⁹⁸. He writes extensively on each. Why accept the veracity of what Justin says about the pagan parallels but not what he says, very explicitly at that, about these actual universe of literary discourse from which the testimony about Christ Himself originates? The one asserting that Justin alleges a copying from the Greco-Roman myths finds himself in opposition Justin, for Justin explicitly says otherwise. Justin discusses the origin of heathen mythology as well in the same apology, and he notes how disanalogous those myths are in comparison.

⁹⁹³ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid., 33-35.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., 36.

Justin has no firm grasp of historical chronology in this work and does not purport to be an expert on the origins of the Greco-Roman myths, but neither he doesn't simply attribute them to demonic activity without further explanation; he also discusses them in such a way that it appears that he thinks that the Greeks borrowed from the Jews, not vice versa. Justin uses the formula that when they (the demons) heard about the prophecies of Christ in the Jewish Scriptures (Moses in particular), they then influenced the Greeks to copy ideas from those texts to make men, when Christ was come, think that His story was only one among many. Using a naturalistic yardstick and discounting the statements about demons themselves in deference to our unbelieving friends, Justin is still left affirming that the Greeks built some of their myths on what they learned from the Jews. This accounts for the parallels. When the copycat theorist states he believes Justin is inferring the gospel narratives depend upon and copy from these myths, then he advances the very thesis that Justin repudiates, *not* one that he advances, proving he has taken Justin's previous words out of context.

Does Justin argue that the Christians borrowed from the Greeks? No. His argument infers that the Greeks in his audience should now listen to the Jews again and see that Christ is the fulfillment of those Jewish texts from which the Greeks in ages past borrowed, and this should inform them of the veracity of the gospel itself, for, if their own predecessors listened to the Jews and venerated them enough to borrow and copy from them in ages past, then how much more should they do so now that those prophecies which their ancestors venerated through copying into their own religion have come to clear, plain fulfillment in Christ. This is, ironically, much the same argument that the author of Hebrews makes to the Jews in his audience, that Christ is the culmination of the covenant with Israel at Sinai, which their fathers confirmed, which, in turn forms the structure of Justin's own *Dialogue with Trypho*. How much more should they now confirm the New Covenant, the shadow having been made plain. This is exactly contrary to the pagan copy cat theory, but it fits exactly what conservative scholarship has been saying all along, that the pagans borrowed from the Christians and Jews.

And so, too, Plato, when he says, "The blame is his who chooses, and God is blameless," took this from the prophet Moses and uttered it. For Moses is more ancient than all the Greek writers. And whatever both philosophers and poets have said concerning the immortality of the soul, or punishments after death, or contemplation of things heavenly, or doctrines of the like kind, they have received such suggestions from the prophets as have enabled them to understand and interpret these things. And hence there seem to be seeds of truth among all

men; but they are charged with not accurately understanding [the truth] when they assert contradictories.⁹⁹⁹

The pagan myths, according to Justin, are very likely derived from Greek interaction with the Jews, not vice versa, so, if one wishes to press “we propound nothing different” in a particular manner, then why not the rest of what Justin has to say? The other option is that they were written independently, but that still doesn’t mean that the Christians or Jews borrowed from them, unless one wants to reject what Justin says in Sections 31 – 39 and further supply a genealogical parallel, for which there is no evidence.

True, he does further argue that demons are responsible for obscuring the truth,¹⁰⁰⁰ and that may or not be true within a Christian worldview. However, even on a naturalistic worldview is this impossible? Is it not the essence of the copycat theory that since certain themes and myths precede the New Testament text that the New Testament text copied from them? Then why is it so impossible to accept Justin’s theory that the New Testament draws directly from the Old Testament and some Greek philosophies and myths draw on the same antecedent sources, but the latter are garbled and obscured, having been adapted and altered or simply used as general ideas. The latter group is separated by chronological and cultural distance. The former, the New Testament was written in the shadow of Second Temple Judaism, the epitome of the source culture, so there is only chronological distance. Which is more likely the source of the New Testament narratives? Which of these has direct, genealogical parallels within the relevant texts?

Justin makes the same arguments about the universe of discourse from which the New Testament is drawn as modern evangelical scholarship. Does he appeal to the myth of Danae for the source of the birth narratives? No, he calls upon the Old Testament, including Isaiah and Micah.

And hear again how Isaiah in express words foretold that He should be born of a virgin; for he spoke thus: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son, and they shall say for His name, ‘God with us.’ “ For things which were incredible and seemed impossible with men, these God predicted by the Spirit of prophecy as about to come to pass, in order that, when they came to pass, there might be no unbelief, but faith, because of their prediction. But lest some, not understanding the prophecy now cited, should charge us with the very things we have been laying to the charge of the poets who say that Jupiter went in to women through lust, let us try to explain the words. This, then, “Behold, a

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid., 54.

virgin shall conceive,” signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive. And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, “Behold, thou shalt conceive of the Holy Ghost, and shalt bear a Son, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,”--as they who have recorded all that concerns our Saviour Jesus Christ have taught, whom we believed, since by Isaiah also, whom we have now adduced, the Spirit of prophecy declared that He should be born as we intimated before. It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power. And the name Jesus in the Hebrew language means Swthr (Saviour) in the Greek tongue. Wherefore, too, the angel said to the virgin, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” And that the prophets are inspired by no other than the Divine Word, even you, as I fancy, will grant.

And hear what part of earth He was to be born in, as another prophet, Micah, foretold. He spoke thus: “And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come forth a Governor, who shall feed My people.” Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judaea.¹⁰⁰¹

What of Jesus’ rejection by the Jews? What pagan myth does Justin say forms the universe of discourse from which those narratives draw?

And again, how it was said by the same Isaiah, that the Gentile nations who were not looking for Him should worship Him, but the Jews who always expected Him should not recognize Him when He came. And the words are spoken as from the person of Christ; and they are these “I was manifest to them that asked not for Me; I was found of them that sought Me not: I said, Behold Me, to a nation that called not on My name. I spread out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to those who walked in a way that is not good, but follow after their own sins; a people that provoketh Me to anger to My face.” For the Jews having the prophecies, and being always in expectation of the Christ to come, did not recognize Him; and not only so, but even treated Him shamefully. But the Gentiles, who had never heard anything about Christ, until the apostles set out from Jerusalem and preached concerning Him, and gave them the prophecies, were filled with joy and faith, and cast away their idols,

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid., 33-34.

and dedicated themselves to the Unbegotten God through Christ. And that it was foreknown that these infamous things should be uttered against those who confessed Christ, and that those who slandered Him, and said that it was well to preserve the ancient customs, should be miserable, hear what was briefly said by Isaiah; it is this: “Woe unto them that call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet.”¹⁰⁰²

Are the crucifixion narratives borrowed from pagan myths according to Justin? No.

And again, in another prophecy, the Spirit of prophecy, through the same David, intimated that Christ, after He had been crucified, should reign, and spoke as follows: “Sing to the Lord, all the earth, and day by day declare His salvation. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, to be feared above all the gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols of devils; but God made the heavens. Glory and praise are before His face, strength and glorying are in the habitation of His holiness. Give Glory to the Lord, the Father everlasting. Receive grace, and enter His presence, and worship in His holy courts. Let all the earth fear before His face; let it be established, and not shaken. Let them rejoice among the nations. The Lord hath reigned from the tree.”¹⁰⁰³

Does Justin call upon the myth of Perseus for the source of the ascension narratives? No. He calls upon the Psalms.

And that God the Father of all would bring Christ to heaven after He had raised Him from the dead, and would keep Him there until He has subdued His enemies the devils, and until the number of those who are foreknown by Him as good and virtuous is complete, on whose account He has still delayed the consummation--hear what was said by the prophet David. These are his words: “The Lord said unto My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. The Lord shall send to Thee the rod of power out of Jerusalem; and rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. With Thee is the government in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of Thy saints: from the womb of morning have I begotten Thee.” That which he says, “He shall send to Thee the rod of power out of Jerusalem,” is predictive of the mighty, word, which His apostles, going forth from Jerusalem, preached everywhere; and though death is decreed against those who teach or at all confess the name of Christ, we everywhere both embrace and teach it. And if you also read these words in a hostile spirit, ye can do no more, as I said before, than kill us; which indeed does no harm to us, but to you and all who unjustly hate us, and do not repent, brings eternal punishment by fire.¹⁰⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰² Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid., 65.

Conclusion

We have seen that Justin uses parallels to Greek philosophy and myth to establish common, generic themes that also appear in the Christian narratives. He does this to gain common ground with his interlocutors in order to refute the charge of atheism. This is no different than the method he used in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. He hopes to connect with his audience on one ground so that he can argue for the legitimacy of Christianity as a valid religion that, in his view, is certainly superior to these competing philosophies and religions, but is, nevertheless, no less worthy of respect. He cites common, generic motifs and builds points of analogy and points of disanalogy. Yet in other contexts, he cites similarities and differences.

For I myself, when I discovered the wicked disguise which the evil spirits had thrown around the divine doctrines of the Christians, to turn aside others from joining them, laughed both at those who framed these falsehoods, and at the disguise itself, and at popular opinion; and I confess that I both boast and with all my strength strive to be found a Christian; not because the teachings of Plato are different from those of Christ, but because they are not in all respects similar, as neither are those of the others, Stoics, and poets, and historians. For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it. But they who contradict themselves on the more important points appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom, and the knowledge which cannot be spoken against. Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians. For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them. For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him.¹⁰⁰⁵

We have noted that Justin has his own source critical theory, one that is plausible even if we discount the reality of demonic forces operating the way he alleges. Furthermore, this source critical theory is almost exactly that offered by conservative scholarship in the modern day. If the copycat theorists wish to engage in source criticism in order to play Pagan Day on the Aeropagus using Justin, then let them construct an argument that does not reverse Justin's authorial intent. Let them construct an argument that actually deals with the text of Justin and the figures he cites.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Second Apology*, 13.

Which of the Greek heroes was truly virgin born? Which was crucified? Which rose bodily and physically from the dead? Which was God Incarnate? Where are Justin's spatial, temporal, and cultural coordinates that connect these philosophies and myths with the New Testament texts themselves? Where is the actual textual evidence that links a pagan myth to the New Testament in a genealogical fashion, even if a parallel theme was found to exist? Where is Justin's argument that any of these is genealogical? Even if we were to assume that the New Testament account was influenced by a pre-Christian source, how do you know that the source was a pagan myth rather than the Septuagint rendering of Isaiah 7, for example? If A comes before B, it does not immediately follow that B borrowed from A, particularly when the source one cites for the dating of A specifically denies that B borrowed from A, which Justin does. A pre-Christian origin of a text does not self-select for Christians having borrowed from it. How can Justin be cited to support the notion that the New Testament narratives about Christ borrowed from pagan mythology when he directly points us to Second Temple Judaism and the Old Testament in particular in a highly detailed fashion and tells us that this material forms the universe of literature that lies behind the gospel narratives? To cite him as supportive of a copycat thesis abuses Justin's work reverses its meaning and smacks of little more free association.

Afterword

The Resurrection is often considered to be the greatest miracle in history. Perhaps that is so, although it assumes a rating-system for miracles which is not self-explanatory.

1. For theological moderates, the function of the rating-system is to distinguish between the miracles we're supposed to believe and the miracles we don't have to believe. Obviously, that has no warrant in Scripture.

2. At a popular level, some miracles are considered greater than others because they're more spectacular or supernatural.

This is a very slippery distinction since, for God, one miracle is just as effortless as another.

3. Still, it is fair to say that some miracles are more intrinsically important than others. For some miracles create a framework within which other miracles are possible. And if certain miracles had never occurred, the world as we know it would not exist. If certain miracles had not occurred, there would be no Christian faith.

Miracles of this intrinsic value include creation, the flood, the confusion of languages, the Exodus, the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Parousia. To this we should add revelation, which is not a discrete event, but a repeated event during OT and NT history.

Strictly speaking, the Exodus is not a miracle. Rather, the Exodus is facilitated by a number of miracles.

In principle, God could have delivered and sustained the Israelites by less spectacular means. But the sensational element served a purpose.

Likewise, Jesus could still be the theanthropic Redeemer without having performed so many miracles. And yet they are integral to his person and work. Unlike the prophets, Jesus performs a miracle by virtue of his own divine might. His wonders attest his mission. His wonders are parables in action. His nature-miracles illustrate his sovereignty over the created order which he, himself, has made; while his healings, exorcisms, and reanimations inaugurate the eschatological reversal of the fall and the defeat of the devil.

Here we might distinguish between particular miracles and particular types of miracles. Jesus would still be the same, and the world would still be the same, if this or that miracle had not occurred. But it is necessary, in the economy of salvation, that miracles of a particular kind occur.

In addition, it is necessary that all reported miracles occur, for if the Bible contains any false reports, then that not only denies the miracle in question, but denies the revelatory character of Scripture.

4. Why is the Resurrection necessary?

i) At a rather obvious level, the Resurrection is essential for the simple reason that Jesus said it was essential. He was staking all his claims on rising from the dead. If he didn't, then he's not what he said he was, and he can't do what he said he could do.

ii) But why did he stake all his claims on rising from the dead?

There is, in Scripture, a picturesque motion to sin and redemption. Sin represents a falling motion. You have this imagery throughout the OT. In addition, you have this imagery applied to the archetypal case of Satan.

At a more subtle level, it is also applied to Adam. In Biblical iconography, Eden is situated on a mountain-top (Ezk 28:13-14,16). And there is probably more to this than sheer symbolism, for Eden was likely located in the highlands of Armenia. Hence, the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden would mark a downward motion.

In addition, the generic usage of this imagery to sin in general is implicitly applicable to the sin which gave rise to sin.

Finally, there is the parallel between the first Adam and the last Adam (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15). The life of Christ describes a classic comic curve. Part-1 consists in a downward motion, beginning with the Incarnation, and terminating in the crucifixion and burial.

The Resurrection marks the turning-point, the rebounding motion, which terminates in the ascension and session of Christ.

This downward and upward motion is a favorite metaphor in the Fourth Gospel as well as the compact hymn of Phil 2:6-11.

The downward motion recapitulates the fall of Adam, but with a difference, for Christ does not fall into sin.

But without the upward motion, the life and death of Christ would end in tragedy. It would be a failure. The upward motion inaugurates a reversal of fortunes—another leading theme of Scripture—and not merely for Christ, but for those for whom he came down to die.

He returns to the Father to send down the Spirit. He returns to the Father to govern the church from above. His resurrection is the archetype and prototype for our own to come. We rise with him and in him.

But imagery is partly figurative, but not entirely so. You have a literal ascension. The reason, moreover, that this imagery enjoys a universal appeal and significance is that we inhabit a sacramental universe. God has encoded a moral and spiritual significance in many natural relations. That's why the Bible is so full of metaphors and similes.

Ironically, the Resurrection is, in its way, just as important to the unbeliever as it is to the believer. Why do they concentrate so much fire on the Resurrection? Because they know that if Jesus rose from the grave, then their game is up. It would be futile to continue picking away at other parts of the Bible after having conceded the resurrection of Christ, for that event, alone, already has so many other things riding on it that turning that key aligns all of the other moving parts. They attack the Resurrection precisely because so many other things either line up behind it or against it depending on how this one event turns out. So believers and unbelievers have an equal stake in the Resurrection.

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Bible criticism

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