Chapter Five: Weighing Hypotheses

> [H]istorical research shows with definite clarity that Jesus was not raised from the dead. . . . For two thousand years an abiding faith in Jesus' resurrection has displayed enormous power, but because of its utter groundlessness we must now acknowledge that it has all along been a worldwide historical hoax.[1]
>
> *Gerd Lüdemann*

> At best the historian can say that there were men and women in the first century who earnestly believed that they had seen the raised Christ . . . The historian cannot say that the raised Jesus was seen in a vision without himself becoming a man of faith. Nor can he account for the certainty with which the early Christians held to the conviction that they had seen Jesus. He must qua historian hold his peace. [2]
>
> *Peter Carnley*

> In regard to the future resurrection of the dead, I am and remain a Pharisee. Concerning the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, I was for decades a Sadducee. I am no longer a Sadducee.[3]
>
> *Pinchas Lapide*

5.1 Summary of Where We Have Been and Our Intent

We have now arrived at the last phase of our investigation. This is a good place to review our journey thus far. We have discussed the nature of historical knowledge, what it means to know something, what steps to take in order to gain historical knowledge, and the impact miracle has on the equation. We have discussed our pool of sources and weighed them to determine which ones we may rely upon most heavily. We have discussed the knowable facts surrounding the fate of Jesus and identified our historical bedrock. In short, we have discussed our philosophy of history, our method, our relevant sources, and the knowable facts upon which hypotheses must be built and weighed.

We must take steps toward managing our horizons. We will do this by employing specific methodological considerations discussed especially in the first two chapters. I have exposed my horizon and my method to readers. The approaches I have taken and will take in this final chapter will be submitted to unsympathetic experts for criticisms should this dissertation be published. In the interim, I have presented and defended some of the conclusions contained in this research through two papers given

[1] Lüdemann (2004), 190; cf. 209; (1995), 135.
[2] Carnley (1987), 89.
[3] Lapide (2002), 125.

in friendly academic settings and a public debate with agnostic Bart Ehrman.[4] When weighing hypotheses, we will place a premium on accounting for the relevant historical bedrock in order to place a check on undisciplined imagination. And we will work on a detachment from bias by providing due consideration of a number of recent naturalistic hypotheses.[5] Moreover, I have attempted throughout the duration of this research project to become personally detached. I say this only as a check for myself and cannot expect others to assign any value to my simple claim on the matter.

We realize that there will never be a consensus opinion pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, given the influence of horizons. We have sought a heterogeneous consensus pertaining to our relevant historical bedrock and arrived at three facts. Since these facts are granted by scholars from a very wide range of theological and philosophical positions, we have confidence that our historical bedrock is quite secure, since those with contrary views have arrived at the same conclusions for many of the same reasons.

Pertaining to our expectations, we recognize that all historical knowledge is provisional and, accordingly, all conclusions are subject to future revision. While absolute certainty eludes us, adequate or reasonable certainty is attainable. When we say that a hypothesis is "true," we mean that it corresponds with a fair degree of accuracy to events and/or conditions in the past. A historical description does not provide a comprehensive description of the past but an adequate one relevant to a specific inquiry.

For assessing hypotheses, we adopted methodical neutrality to assign the burden of proof to the one who is making a proposition, be it affirmative or negative. Accordingly, no hypothesis may get the nod for being the best explanation unless its superiority to competing hypotheses can be demonstrated. Furthermore, merely stating "What if . . ." possibilities without supporting evidence does not challenge hypotheses with strong supporting evidence. "What ifs" must be supported by evidence and argumentation.[6] We established the following seven criteria for the best explanation (listed in descending order of importance): (1) consilience, (2)

[4] Ehrman and I debated the question "Can historians prove that Jesus rose from the dead?" The debate took place on February 28, 2008 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO (USA). A DVD of the debate is available by contacting the seminary library at 816.414.3729.

[5] Watson (1987) asks why many still find the "so-called 'historical evidence for the resurrection' convincing?" He provides two answers: (1) "[T]he inconvenient necessity of taking serious account of other possibilities is simply ignored." (2) "[There is a] very strong predisposition to accept the traditional view of the resurrection. If one finds it impossible even to imagine that the resurrection did not take place just as the New Testament says it did, one is likely to find arguments convincing which appear to confirm what one is already instinctively sure of" (371-72). In this chapter, it will be clear that we will not fall prey to Watson's first answer. Pertaining to the second, I do not find it impossible to imagine that Jesus' resurrection did not occur. I agree with Watson's points. But Watson should recognize that, in addition to asking them as he does, they should also be restated to chide a lazy skepticism as follows: Why do many still not find the historical evidence for the resurrection convincing? (1) The inconvenient necessity of taking serious account of the possibility of Jesus' resurrection is simply ignored or treated irresponsibly. (2) Some scholars have a very strong predisposition to reject the traditional view of the resurrection. If one finds it impossible even to imagine that the resurrection took place just as the New Testament says it did, one is likely to find arguments convincing which appear to confirm what one is already instinctively sure of.

[6] *What ifs* that are supported show us that we cannot know that Jesus rose with *absolute* historical certainty. But this is already granted, not only for the resurrection, but also for nearly every other historical conclusion.

explanatory scope, explanatory power, less *ad hoc*, plausibility (3) unlikely future disconfirmation, (4) illumination.

We constructed the following spectrum of historical certainty: certainly not historical, very doubtful, quite doubtful, somewhat doubtful, indeterminate (neither improbable nor probable, possible, plausible), somewhat certain (more probable than not), quite certain, very certain (very probably true), certain. We may conclude that a hypothesis is historical when it we can place it on the spectrum of historical certainty somewhere between a half-step under "quite certain" or better. We proposed two criteria for placing a hypothesis on the spectrum where historicity may be awarded: (1) it has to meet the seven criteria better than competing hypotheses and (2) it must outdistance competing hypotheses by a significant margin.

In our discussion of historians and miracle claims, we proposed two criteria for identifying a miracle: (1) the event is highly improbable given natural causes alone and (2) the event occurs in a context charged with religious significance. We are aware that the term *resurrection* can have theological components, such as the full eschatological properties of a resurrection body and the divine cause of a resurrection. Whatever one may believe concerning these aspects, they are beyond the scope of the historian's work. As historians we are limited to asking whether Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Historians cannot answer whether it was God who raised Jesus or whether Jesus' resurrection body was incorruptible, powerful, glorious, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

For our pool of sources, Paul and the oral traditions embedded throughout the New Testament literature provide our most promising material. The canonical Gospels, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, the Acts speeches, and the *Gospel of Thomas* may also be helpful on occasions. A few other sources may assist us to varying degrees.

Having examined these sources, we identified our historical bedrock:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected.
3. Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

These three facts have strong supporting evidence and are regarded as historical by a nearly unanimous consensus of modern scholars. This consensus also possesses a significant amount of heterogeneity.

Although not belonging to our relevant historical bedrock, there are four facts we may refer to as "second-level facts." Two of these are the appearance to James and, to a smaller degree, the empty tomb. Moreover, in chapter four we argued for the historicity of Jesus' predictions pertaining to his violent and imminent death and subsequent resurrection by God and that the claim of the earliest apostles was that Jesus was raised bodily. While none of these four facts may be said to belong to historical bedrock, they may serve as second-level facts.

Our approach will be to weigh hypotheses using only the historical bedrock. This will serve to eliminate the weaker hypotheses. If no clear winner emerges, we will repeat the exercise with the surviving hypotheses, considering our second-level facts in addition to the historical bedrock. This will also require a thorough treatment of the empty tomb.

With this in mind, we will proceed to examine five naturalistic hypotheses that provide a sampling representative of the variety of naturalistic hypotheses presently being forwarded in academic books and peer reviewed journals.[7] We will consider proposals by Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, Gerd Lüdemann, John Dominic Crossan, and Pieter Craffert. We will follow these with a consideration of the resurrection hypothesis. I will abbreviate these as follows:

Vermes's hypothesis: VH
Goulder's hypothesis: GH
Lüdemann's hypothesis: LH
Crossan's hypothesis: CsH
Craffert's hypothesis: CfH
Resurrection hypothesis: RH

[7] Naturalistic explanations have, of course, been around for some time. Since the early Christians first proclaimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, others made claims to the contrary. Matthew (28:13) and Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 108) reported that the Jewish leaders were claiming that the disciples had stolen the body. Tertullian (*De Spectaculis* or *The Shows*, 30) makes note of the claim but does not attribute it to the Jewish leaders. Tertullian also notes that it was being claimed by some that the gardener had reburied Jesus' corpse in order to avoid having his lettuce trampled upon by those coming to see where Jesus had been buried. Celsus (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.68; cf. 2.56) suggested Egyptian trickery (i.e., apparent death). These explanations were common throughout the nineteenth-century but are now rarely used. Only a handful today would suggest that Jesus may have survived crucifixion (for a few examples, see chapter 4.3.1.5) and it is rarely proposed that there was fraud or that the wrong tomb was visited (Allison [*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005], 202, 207-08; Allison ["Explaining," 2005], 119.). Davis (1999) notes that naturalistic explanations "are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence than the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead" (8, accessed online) and that "no strong new theory has emerged as the consensus of scholars who deny that the resurrection occurred" (1993, 16). The old hypotheses simply collapse under their own weight (Davis [1993], 16; Wright ["Resurrecting Old Arguments," 2005], 222).

5.2 Geza Vermes

5.2.1. Description of Vermes's View

Although Vermes jettisoned his Christian faith in 1957, his desire to study Jesus remained and has resulted in numerous books on the subject: *Jesus the Jew* (1973); *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (1983); *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993); *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (2001); *Jesus in His Jewish Context* (2003); *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (2004); *The Passion* (2005); *The Nativity* (2006); and *The Resurrection* (2008).

In *The Resurrection*, Vermes investigates the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, which he refers to as "an unparalleled phenomenon in history," given the emphasis laid upon it and its centrality in the teachings of the early Church.[8] His goal is to unravel "the true meaning" behind the New Testament reports that Jesus had risen from the dead and to construct a "tenable hypothesis" of how early Christianity came to ascribe "extreme importance" to Jesus' resurrection when there is a "very limited amount of interest in the subject discernible in the authentic teaching of Jesus."[9]

Vermes argues for the historicity of the empty tomb and the visions/apparitions. In support of the historicity of the empty tomb, had the accounts been the products of wholesale manufacturing, it is highly unlikely that they would have provided female witnesses who "had no standing in a male-dominated Jewish society."[10] Moreover, they would have gotten the number of women in the various narratives correct. In short, had the narratives been the result of complete invention, they would have been more uniform and they would have included credible witnesses.[11]

The visions and/or apparitions are reported by the Gospels, Acts, and Paul "in a tradition he has inherited from his seniors in the faith" (1 Cor. 15:3-8).[12] In terms of the nature of the apparitions, Vermes is unclear but appears to favor a form of disembodiment.[13] In his dialogue with the Sadducees on the resurrection, Jesus tells them that the resurrected "neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as angels in heaven."[14] What does it mean to be like "angels in heaven"? Citing two Jewish writings in support (1 En. 51:4; 2 Bar. 51:5, 10, 12), he concludes that they are "purely bodiless beings." Accordingly, his dialogue with the Sadducees implies "that in Jesus' mind the distinction between resurrection and mere spiritual survival was minimal."[15] Later on Vermes builds somewhat of a more robust case for a spiritual resurrection. Although he provides no criticisms of this explanation, it appears that he does not regard it as correct.[16] One must wonder why, since the arguments he had previously presented appear to point precisely in that direction.

[8] Vermes (2008), x, xv.
[9] Vermes (2008), x-xi.
[10] Vermes (2008), 140.
[11] Vermes (2008), 140-41.
[12] Vermes (2008), 91-120. The quote related to Paul is on 119.
[13] Vermes (2008), 63-67.
[14] Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:34-36. See also Nickelsburg (2006), 237.
[15] Vermes (2008), 66.
[16] Vermes (2008), 147-48.

Although the embarrassing testimony of women is enough to convince Vermes that Jesus' tomb was empty, differences in the accounts decrease their value for "legal or scientific inquiry. The only alternative historians are left with in their effort to make some sense of the Resurrection is to fall back on speculation, hopefully on enlightened speculation."[17] What are historians to do with the empty tomb and the appearances? Vermes asserts that these "convince only the already converted."[18] Since the accounts do not pass the standards of legal or scientific inquiry, we may only speculate what happened.[19]

Vermes notes eight hypotheses. However, he will only consider six, judging blind faith and outright rejection as the "two extremes that are not susceptible to rational judgment":[20] (1) a non-disciple of Jesus took his corpse; (2) Jesus' corpse was stolen by his disciples; (3) the wrong tomb was visited and discovered empty; (4) Jesus was not dead when buried and emerged from the tomb; (5) a variant of (4), adding that Jesus left Palestine and went to India (*a la* Ahmadiyya Muslims) or Rome where he married, divorced, remarried, and bore children (*a la* Thiering); (6) spiritual rather than bodily resurrection.[21]

Vermes asserts that none of the six hypotheses "stands up to stringent scrutiny" and then asks whether the "traditional Resurrection concept" is "doomed to failure in the rational world of today."[22] He answers that the evidence does not meet the standards of legal or scientific inquiry, leaving historians unable to determine whether Jesus actually rose from the dead. But they can speculate on the cause(s) behind "the birth and survival of Christianity."[23] Therefore, Vermes does not propose what happened to Jesus but takes a position that historians cannot know (i.e., agnosticism).

Vermes proposes that the empty tomb and apparitions of the missing Jesus gave the apostles hope, although doubts continued. He does not specify who experienced the apparitions or state whether any of the apostles did. A short time after Jesus' crucifixion, at Pentecost, his disciples had "a powerful mystical experience in Jerusalem" that changed them from a terrified and cowardly group to a band of "ecstatic spiritual warriors."[24] When they resumed their ministry of preaching the Gospel in the name of Jesus, they realized that "his charisma was working again," felt his presence and were convinced that he truly had been raised. This conviction "accounts for the resurgence of the Jesus movement after the crucifixion."[25] But it was Paul's turning the resurrection into the centerpiece of Christian doctrine that prompted Christianity to grow into the powerful world religion it is today.[26]

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[17] Vermes (2008), 141.
[18] Vermes (2008), 141.
[19] Vermes (2008), 141.
[20] Vermes (2008), 141.
[21] Vermes (2008), 142-48. It is of interest that all but the last of these six are naturalistic explanations for the empty tomb of Jesus, which Vermes grants.
[22] Vermes (2008), 148.
[23] Vermes (2008), 141, 148.
[24] Vermes (2008), 149.
[25] Vermes (2008), 150-51. Another Jewish scholar made a similar observation: "Without the Sinai experience—no Judaism; without the Easter experience—no Christianity" (Lapide [2002], 92).
[26] Vermes (2008), 151.

A Summary of Vermes' Hypothesis (VH)

- The empty tomb and the apparitions are historical.
- The Resurrection hypothesis (RH) is doomed to fail in a rational world and is not supported by evidence that meets the standards of legal or scientific inquiry.
- Outright rejection of a supernatural event eludes rational judgment.
- Naturalistic hypotheses such as the body was stolen, the wrong tomb was visited, Jesus did not actually die, or that it was a *spiritual* resurrection all fail when submitted to critical scrutiny.
- Historians are, thus, unable to determine whether Jesus was actually resurrected (agnosticism). However, they can speculate on what caused the birth of Christianity.
- After Jesus' crucifixion, his followers had a "powerful mystical experience" in Jerusalem at Pentecost. This experience transformed them to the point that they resumed their ministry. As they did, they felt his presence and this convinced them he had been raised. Paul's emphasis on Jesus' resurrection is largely responsible for its growth.

5.2.2. Analysis and Concerns

Vermes narrows his options by eliminating "extremes" on both ends "that are not susceptible to rational judgment, the blind faith of the fundamentalist believer and the out-of-hand rejection of the inveterate skeptic."[27] Elsewhere he accuses N. T. Wright's treatment on the subject of falling into the category of the former whereas treatments offered by Strauss and Price/Lowder belong to the latter.[28]

While "blind faith" and "inveterate skeptic[ism]" are not positions of historical argumentation, it is incorrect to conclude that members of these camps cannot or have not employed a critical approach. Indeed, the treatments by Wright and Price/Lowder include historical argumentation of greater sophistication than Vermes offers in his book. Wright is especially impressive in his case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, beginning with discussions of the philosophy of history and historical method followed by careful historical analyses and argumentation. Irrespective of whether one accepts Wright's arguments or conclusions, we can hardly accuse him of working out of "blind faith" as Vermes seems to suggest.[29] Accordingly, Vermes' writing off Wright's work as "extreme" and his refusal to interact with it on any point is disappointing. Vermes dismisses, without hearing any arguments, the very position that is the subject of his book: the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

The same may nearly be said of the work of Price/Lowder. I do not regard the hypercritical approaches taken by Price/Lower and their contributors as responsible historiography. While their essays are—and I believe should be—treated lightly by more sober scholarship, their work cannot be simply dismissed because they are hypercritical. A number of the essays in their volume are carefully argued and

[27] Vermes (2008), 141.
[28] See Vermes (2008): "faith and disbelief" (x); naming N. T. Wright and David Friedrich Strauss as examples of "two extremes" (101); naming treatments by N. T. Wright (2003) and Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder, eds. (2005) as "two types of extreme [sic.]" (153).
[29] Vermes (2008), 141.

warrant consideration. Vermes would have been better to propose that these have been addressed elsewhere and that since the hypercritical approach employed throughout is not embraced by the overwhelming majority of scholars, "its treatment here would be a pure waste of time."[30]

This is not the only example of Vermes moving perfunctorily. He opines that the empty tomb and the appearances cannot solve the question pertaining to whether Jesus was resurrected, since they "convince only the already converted."[31] Although exceptions exist, Vermes is largely correct that only Christians are persuaded by the evidence.[32] However, he gives no consideration to the problem of horizons. A reading through the literature on the subject of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus makes evident that no one comes to the discussion without being heavily influenced by his horizon. Everyone involved in the discussion realizes there is much on the line. Vermes' *a priori* exclusion of the resurrection hypothesis (RH) presupposes that no case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection would be able to convince historians who have made a serious effort to check their horizons. Moreover, consensus, while desirable, is not a criterion for the best explanation. Otherwise, we should conclude that the evidence is meager for the existence and execution of Jesus, since hypercritical and Muslim historians remain unpersuaded.

Moreover, why must scholars abandon the resurrection hypothesis in order to remain "rational," as Vermes seems to imply?[33] It is here that we get hints of Vermes' own worldview. When scholars supporting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus such as Wright, Habermas, and Craig provide sophisticated and reasoned arguments in support, must they be regarded as irrational because they do not *a priori* exclude the possibility that God exists and may have had a reason for raising Jesus?[34]

Vermes too hastily rules out the testimonies that Jesus had been raised, contending that the accounts do not pass the standards of legal or scientific inquiry and, thus, we may only speculate as to what happened.[35] Although a woman's testimony failed Jewish *legal* standards of the first century, the twenty-first century historian is bound by *historical* rather than *legal* standards. Even given this difference, the testimonies of the women are good enough to establish the historicity of the empty tomb for Vermes. The task of the historian is to provide the best explanation for the sincere and impassioned conviction of the earliest Christians that their crucified rabbi had been raised from the dead and had appeared to them.

Vermes at times applies exegesis that is inattentive. For example, he refers to the apparition of Jesus to his disciples in Luke and John as a "spirit" and "ghost."[36] Although Jesus is able to materialize at will, that he is a "spirit" or "ghost" is clearly not what Luke and John wanted to convey. For just two verses later Luke reports Jesus himself saying he is not a "spirit/ghost" and then as proof invites them to touch

[30] Vermes (2008), 158. For a critique of Price and Lowder, eds., see Davis (2006), 39-63.
[31] Vermes (2008), 141.
[32] But see Lapide (2002) who did not convert to Christianity, though acknowledging the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (125).
[33] Vermes (2008), 148.
[34] See Witherington (2006), 5.
[35] Vermes (2008), 141.
[36] Vermes (2008), 146. See Luke 24:36-37; John 20:19.

him and eats in front of them (24:39-43). We find similar actions reported by John (20:20-27; implied in 21:9-15).

Vermes attempts to demonstrate that Jesus thought of 'resurrection' as a state similar to disembodied existence. Why are the resurrected like the angels in Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees? The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage but the sons of God in the next age neither marry nor are given in marriage and are incapable of dying (ἰσάγγελοι γάρ εἰσιν) because they are like angels (Luke). Their likeness with the angels seems to refer to their living forever in a non-married state. Although we cannot rule out further similarities, concluding firmly that Jesus was thinking of disembodiment here seems a bit hasty. In fact, we also observe Vermes stepping up quickly in his certainty pertaining to his interpretation. He first comments that Jesus' conflict with the Sadducees is "inauthentic and probably reflects by anticipation arguments opposing the haughty Sadducees and the representatives of the apostolic Church in the latter part of the first century." Indeed, "[t]he tale itself smacks of fiction." However, he adds *without argument* that "there is no reason to doubt that the ideas expressed here correspond to the eschatological thought of Jesus"[37] and that the pericope informs us "how some first-century AD Jews, *and possibly Jesus himself*, conceived of the state of a person raised from the dead. . . . So for Jesus, or at least for his later disciples, the sons of the resurrection had an angelic, noncorporeal quality."[38] Finally, his conclusion is firm just two sentences later: "Consequently, in the eyes of Jesus, resurrected persons, or more precisely the raised just . . . were purely bodiless beings. . . . This would imply that in Jesus' mind the distinction between resurrection and mere spiritual survival was minimal."[39] Thus, we observe Vermes going from "inauthentic" to "possibly" to attributing the belief to Jesus without any supporting arguments.

Vermes defines the Jewish concept of resurrection as the reunification of the soul and revived corpse.[40] He then argues that this is *not* what Jesus meant by the term by appealing to a saying about resurrection that he thinks Jesus did not actually say (Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:34-36). In order to make this argument work, Vermes assigns an interpretation to the saying that contradicts not only what he defines as the Jewish view of resurrection but also another statement by Jesus on the matter that Vermes apparently deems authentic and which implies bodily resurrection in agreement with the Jewish view (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 18:8-9).[41] Moves like this lend the impression that Vermes knows where he wants to go and hurries there somewhat carelessly. In any sense, it lacks explanatory power in this regard.

5.2.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

These above concerns present only the beginning of the problems present in Vermes' hypothesis (VH). When we assess it employing the five criteria for weighing hypotheses discussed in chapter one, the weakness of his hypothesis becomes even more apparent.

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[37] Vermes (2008), 65.
[38] Vermes (2008), 65, 66. Italics are mine.
[39] Vermes (2008), 66.
[40] Vermes (2008), xvi.
[41] Vermes (2008), 66-67, 70-71.

1) *Explanatory Scope*. VH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead, since one must first die before being raised from the dead. VH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings, regarding the experiences as visions and apparitions. VH does not attempt to account for Paul's experience. This third fact cannot be treated lightly, since Paul was a zealous enemy of the Church when the experience occurred. Because Paul was neither grieving Jesus' death nor expecting his resurrection, one would need to do violence to the data in order to argue that Paul was psychologically predisposed to have a subjective experience of the risen Jesus. Thus, VH lacks explanatory scope. However, whether it surpasses others in this area will be discovered as we examine additional hypotheses. For now I will assign it a "*T*" (tentative).

2) *Explanatory Power*. Jesus' followers had to have been certain of his death in order to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and his death by crucifixion is the strongest candidate as a cause for their belief that Jesus had died. However, ambiguity is present in abundance when one speaks of "visions" and "apparitions" as causes of the belief that Jesus had risen. Were these hallucinations, delusions, actual communications from the heavens by Jesus who was alive, or an actual appearance of the risen Jesus to them in space-time? Who experienced the apparitions other than perhaps the women? Given Paul's mission of crushing the Church, what was the cause behind his experience of the risen Jesus? And how could Paul's experience plausibly have led him to conclude that Jesus had been raised bodily? Unfortunately, Vermes neither asks nor attempts to answer these questions. Furthermore, Vermes grants the empty tomb as historical. Since he *a priori* rules out Jesus' bodily resurrection and summarily dismisses hypotheses that his corpse was stolen, moved, reburied, or that the wrong tomb was visited, we are left wondering what happened to Jesus' corpse and Vermes is severely depleted on his available options! Accordingly, VH is very weak in its explanatory power. Whether it surpasses others in this area will be discovered as we examine additional hypotheses. Once again, I will assign it a "*T.*"

3) *Plausibility*. Is VH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? The apparitions and powerful mystical experiences at Pentecost followed by a sense of Jesus' presence during subsequent ministry proposed by VH is not implied by Paul's conversion or an empty tomb (which VH grants)—that is, if the experiences were natural phenomena. Although the empty tomb is included in VH, it is not part of our relevant historical bedrock. Accordingly, I will not allow it at this point to count against the plausibility of VH. Even so, the appearance to Paul remains and is part of our relevant historical bedrock. Since VH is not implied by the appearance to Paul, it lacks plausibility. VH does not speculate pertaining to whether the mystical experiences were natural or supernatural. This will render it more difficult to assess the plausibility of VH due to its very poor explanatory power. I do not wish to penalize VH for refusing to speculate beyond what Vermes believes is allowed by the evidence. However, if a competing hypothesis can account for the historical bedrock better, VH will trail it in plausibility. Since it is yet to be seen whether this will occur, we will assign VH a "*T.*"

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. VH does not seem to appeal to non-evidenced or baseless facts. However, its *a priori exclusion of RH without argument may be an ad hoc component.* Whether VH is less *ad hoc* than its competitors is yet to be seen. So, for the moment we will assign it *"T."*

5) *Illumination.* Because VH possesses a great deal of ambiguity and vagueness, it does not provide illumination for solving problems in other areas where unanswered questions or tensions exist. Although Vermes gives up on adjudicating on what happened to Jesus and redirects his efforts at discovering the cause(s) behind the birth and survival of Christianity, his conclusion that it was reports of apparitions combined with experiences of the apostles of Jesus' presence (in some manner) is widely accepted by scholars. Thus, VH provides no illumination. Since this criterion is more of a bonus rather than a positive criterion, the failure of a hypothesis to fulfill it should not be counted against it. Accordingly, we assign VH a "not met" or "-".

VH lacks explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, and contains an *ad hoc* component. It provides no illumination for unanswered questions. The chart below provides a quick look at how VH does at fulfilling the criteria for the best explanation. The grayed column reminds us that the criterion is of lesser importance. Each grade will be updated as additional hypotheses are assessed.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	*T*	*T*	*T*	*T*	-

5.3 Michael Goulder

5.3.1. Description of Goulder's View. Goulder appeals to the social sciences, contending that various psychological conditions brought about experiences of the risen Jesus in Peter, Paul, and the other disciples. This type of hypothesis has been the most popular naturalistic hypothesis during the last one hundred years.[42]

5.3.1.1. Peter

Goulder suggests that Peter experienced a hallucination given "the series of blows to his self-image, the guilt, [and] the bereavement" over Jesus' death.[43] Moreover, Peter is said to have experienced a number of visions, examples include Peter's presence at the transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:2-7 and his trance in Acts 10:9-16. In summary, Peter's experience was nothing more than a hallucination, the plausibility of which is confirmed by the fact that he was given to this type of experience.

Goulder cites two modern examples of others having similar hallucinations. Susan Atkins was an associate of serial killer Charles Manson. While in prison, Atkins experienced much guilt over her crimes. She viewed her options as staying in prison, attempting to escape, committing suicide, or following Jesus. One day she heard someone calling for her to make a decision. But she did not know if the voice was real or only in her thoughts. However, during the same experience she saw a door in her thoughts. She opened it and was flooded with light. Within that light was an even brighter light that took the form of a man. She knew it was Jesus who spoke to her literally, saying he was coming into her heart to stay. Her guilt and bitterness were replaced with happiness, immediately and completely.[44]

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[42] Habermas (2003), 12.

[43] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 51-52. See also Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 87; Goulder (2005), 193. Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) prefers "conversion vision" and avoids "hallucination," "because it has trivializing and pejorative associations" to the non-specialist who may think of someone "seeing pink elephants after drinking or be living in an unreal world. But to a psychologist the word is value-free. It means that the vision or voices and so on are solely within the mind" (91). In order to eliminate ambiguity and vagueness and to convey Goulder's hypothesis clearly, I will refer to his term "conversion vision" as a hallucination unless he employs it in a different sense. I do not tend to convey the "trivializing and pejorative associations" Goulder fears. By hallucination, I mean is a "sensory experience such as seeing persons or objects, hearing voices, and smelling odors in the absence of environmental stimuli" (I. Al-Issa, "Hallucination," in Benner and Hill, eds. (1999), 538. In other words, it is a false perception of something that is not there. There are no properties outside of the mind having a direct correlation to reality in a hallucination.

[44] Goulder (1996), 48-49; Goulder quotes from M. J. Meadow and R. D. Kahoe, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 90. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) also refers to this experience as "cognitive dissonance" (50). *Cognitive Dissonance* has been defined as follows: "An individual holds beliefs or cognitions that do not fit with each other (e.g., I believe the world will end, and the world did not end as predicted). Nonfitting beliefs give rise to dissonance, a hypothetical aversive state the individual is motivated to reduce or at least not increase. The aversive stimulation initiates changes in the individual's behavior (e.g., undoing) or beliefs (e.g., the world was saved because of our fervent prayer) or limits exposure to discrepant information. . . . Dissonance exists between two beliefs when one is the opposite of the other, yet both are held simultaneously. . . . Dissonance may be reduced by changing behavior, altering a belief, or adding a new one" (R. L. Timpe, "Cognitive Dissonance" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling* [1999]**,** 220). In short, cognitive dissonance occurs when known conflicting beliefs are simultaneously held and a number of actions can be taken in order to ease the mental tension that results. One can change her actions, change her beliefs, or live in denial to varying degrees. Since Goulder does not describe the specifics of this, I will provide an example

The second example involves the British parapsychologist Arthur Koestler. Having just lost three months salary in a poker game and having a car that had just broken down, he spent the night with a woman for whom he did not care. In the morning while pacing the floor of his bedroom he had the impression that he was looking down on himself from above and did not like his own hypocrisy.[45] For Goulder, Peter's hallucination was cut from the same cloth as the experiences of Atkins and Koestler.

5.3.1.2. Disciples

Goulder goes on to posit that Peter shared the news of his experience with others who then had similar experiences in groups of various sizes. Modern "communal delusions" such as sightings of Mary, Big Foot, and UFOs grant plausibility to the group experiences of the disciples.[46]

5.3.1.3. Paul

This leaves Goulder to explain Paul's conversion. He proposes that Paul may have begun entertaining secret doubts pertaining to his view of Christianity and developed a growing distaste for Judaism. This is because he felt in bondage to the strict form he followed, given his later references to the Law as "yoke" that places one in "spiritual bondage" (Gal. 5:1; Rom. 8:15).[47] His "intense religious upbringing" as a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) also contributed to his emotional state and "we know that he was going to Damascus to persecute the Church there, and this level of intense feeling is also correlated with conversion." These factors led Paul to experience a hallucination of the risen Jesus.[48] As with Peter, the plausibility of Paul having a hallucination is bolstered by the fact that he testified to having experienced multiple revelations (2 Cor. 12:7).[49] Goulder finally adds, "My own suspicion is that Paul had had a Gentile friend in his youth, and that the connection of his conversion with his call to evangelize the Gentiles has to do with some such experience."[50]

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through Ehrman and Watson who do, although neither make mention of cognitive dissonance. They argue that the followers of Jesus sincerely believed that he was the Messiah who would usher in God's kingdom. Those beliefs were dealt a crushing blow when Jesus was crucified. As a result they experienced a tension between what they had believed about Jesus and what they had just observed. They could resolve this dissonance by regarding their belief that Jesus was Messiah as mistaken. They could adjust their beliefs to accommodate what they had observed: Jesus now reigns as Messiah in heaven, that is, in a sense other than they had understood. They chose the latter and this belief led to one or more hallucinations of the risen Jesus. (See Ehrman's comments in Craig and Ehrman [2006], 29, and Watson [1987], 367-68.) Also see Craffert (1989), 336.

[45] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 50-51.

[46] M. Goulder, "The Explanatory Power of Conversion Visions," in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 103. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 53.

[47] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17. He borrows these suggestions from C. G. Jung, *Contributions to Analytical* Psychology (New York: ET, Harcourt, Brace; London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1928), 257; Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (London: SCM, 1982), 232, who cites J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 237.

[48] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 51-52.

[49] Wedderburn (1999): "one might fairly say that he shows a certain tendency to ecstatic experiences" (123).

[50] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52.

Goulder contends there were "two distinct traditions of understanding the resurrection in earliest Christianity, that is, a more 'spiritual' transformation associated with the Jerusalem church and the bodily resurrection associated with the Pauline churches and represented in narrative form in Mk 16.1-8."[51]

5.3.1.4. Appearance Traditions in the Gospels

Goulder then continues that three to seven decades after Jesus' death there were tensions between Church groups, resulting in the speculations about what else may have occurred. "When people tell an anecdote about the old times, they tend to 'fill in the gaps.' Questions are asked, and the answer is given, 'It must have been like this,' which soon becomes 'It was like this.'"[52] Eventually it was suggested that a prominent figure buried Jesus' corpse, the tomb became empty upon his resurrection, and he appeared to his disciples who touched him.[53] In reality, however, Jesus' tomb contained a decomposing body.

Goulder concludes, "So there was no resurrection of Jesus. Psychological explanations are available for the early, appearance traditions; and known intra-ecclesial controversies about the nature of the resurrection explain the Gospel additions. So the Pauline, physical theory is without basis. But the psychological explanations also take the ground from under the feet of the Jewish Christian spiritual resurrection theory too—Peter and James just had conversion visions like Susan Atkins."[54]

A Summary of Goulder's Hypothesis (GH)

- Peter experienced a hallucination brought about by his low self-image, guilt, and grief. Peter was already inclined to have this type of experience.
- Peter shared his experience with the other disciples who then had experiences of the risen Jesus that may be called "communal delusions" and are similar to Big Foot, Mary, and UFO sightings.
- Paul may have had secret doubts pertaining both to his view of Christianity and the Judaism by which he felt bound. He may even have had a Gentile friend that motivated him to go to the Gentiles. These conditions led him to experience a hallucination.
- The original view was that Jesus' resurrection was 'spiritual' (i.e., immaterial) and was the view held by the Jerusalem apostles, whereas Paul held to bodily resurrection.
- In time, speculations about what had occurred to Jesus led to embellishments that filled in the gaps with details such as the empty tomb and bodily appearances.

[51] Goulder (2005), 187-88; cf. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 57, although he does not tie resurrection belief as disembodiment to the Jerusalem church in this latter reference.
[52] Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 99.
[53] Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 103.
[54] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 58-59.

5.3.2. Analysis and Concerns

We may applaud Goulder for his innovation. His efforts go beyond others in his attempts to explain the appearances to the disciples and Paul in psychological terms. However, his hypothesis is beset by a number of problems. It should first be noted up front that it is pure speculation, significantly lacking in evidence. It is therefore, *ad hoc*. As we discussed above, the one making the assertion bears the burden of proof.[55] Appealing to *possibilities* does not warrant the conclusion that it is what happened as a sort of *potest ergo est* (It is possible; therefore, it is *this way*). We may likewise note that Goulder's psychoanalysis of those who lived two thousand years ago is a highly problematic exercise. As Craig explains: "Psychoanalysis is notoriously difficult even when the patient is seated in front of you, but it is virtually impossible with historical figures."[56]

Goulder is often guilty of a careless use of data. He asserts that Peter experienced a hallucination at Jesus' transfiguration. But he ignores the fact that Jesus, James, and John were likewise present. This is very problematic for Goulder since collective hallucinations where every group member simultaneously experiences the same hallucination are extremely unlikely if not impossible. Hallucinations are similar to dreams in that they occur in the mind of an individual. There is no corresponding external reality. Accordingly, I could not awaken my wife in the middle of the night and tell her that I am having a dream that I am in Hawaii and then have her to go back to sleep and join me in my dream where we would enjoy a free vacation. We may both return to sleep and experience dreams of being in Hawaii in which the two of us are present. But it is highly unlikely that we will dream the same dream and have the same conversations in both dreams. In a similar way, the disciples may all have been in a similar frame of mind. They would want Jesus to return to them. They may all have seen a vague and ambiguous shade in a room that resembled that of a human figure and wondered if it was Jesus (an illusion). One or more of them may have even been so mentally stressed that they experienced a visual hallucination of a light or figure or an auditory hallucination of a voice. But it is extremely unlikely that, within a group setting, many of them simultaneously experienced a hallucination possessing both visual and auditory components that were so similar in their details that the group members were convinced they had all experienced the same event. Group hallucinations are implausible.

A similar criticism applies to Goulder's use of Peter's vision related to Cornelius. According to the passage Goulder is citing (Acts 10), Cornelius had a dream sending him to Peter who had a remarkably relevant vision without knowing of Cornelius. The point to be made is that Goulder is uncritically selective pertaining to the details he accepts. One could simply deny that the transfiguration event and Peter's dream actually occurred. But once historicity of these experiences of Peter is granted, on what basis should certain details of the reports be granted while others rejected?

Perhaps Goulder would suggest that Peter was hypnotized.[57] But he neither describes what this may have looked like nor provides any support for this possibility. GH, thus,

[55] See chapter 1.2.10.
[56] Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 50.
[57] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 51. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) is open to hypnosis to account for the appearances (297).

lacks explanatory power in this regard. Given methodical neutrality, his hypnosis proposal warrants no further consideration. However, I am in agreement with Goulder that a grief hallucination is a plausible explanation for an individual experience by Peter.

Another problem with the kind of speculations offered by Goulder is that the data he uses can just as easily be employed in a much different sense. These aspects of GH are ambiguous and, thus, lack explanatory power. For example, while Peter may have solved a cognitive dissonance via a hallucination of the risen Jesus, he could just as likely have concluded that he had been deceived by Jesus after all. Craig writes,

> [T]he true problem Peter faced . . . was not so much that he had failed his Lord as that his Lord had failed him! . . . Any mockery and contempt he would face would be not for his failure to go to his death with Jesus—after all, everyone else had deserted him too—but rather for his having followed the false prophet from Nazareth in the first place. Some Messiah he turned out to be! Some kingdom he inaugurated! The first sensible thing Peter had done since leaving his wife and family to follow Jesus was to disown this pretender! . . . Ignoring the disaster of the cross, Goulder imagines without a shred of evidence a self-preoccupied Peter wrestling with his own guilt and shame rather than struggling with dashed messianic expectations. Lest anyone say that such shattered expectations led to Peter's hallucinating Jesus alive from the dead, let me simply repeat that no such hope existed in Israel, either with respect to the Messiah or to the final resurrection.[58]

Moreover, it would be easy to turn Goulder's argument on its head by asking whether his hypothesis is the byproduct of a cognitive dissonance Goulder himself is experiencing in order to continue in his rejection of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. In other words, Goulder starts off with a conviction that Jesus did not rise from the dead, is faced with evidence to the contrary creating a dissonance, and resolves it with a proposal using a highly speculative psychoanalysis without any direct factual support coupled with an appearance that he has limited his exposure to conflicting data. I am not actually attempting to psychoanalyze Goulder and claim that he is suspect of cognitive dissonance, but I am attempting to expose the subjective ground on which he stands.

Goulder explains Paul's hallucinatory experience by noting that he was given to having visions. However, there is an *a priori* assumption present that these other experiences were also hallucinations rather than the real thing. And it may be noted that there is no hint that Paul had any such experiences prior to his conversion to Christianity. Accordingly, a hallucination of the risen Jesus by Paul while possible is implausible.

GH revives an old theory pertaining to a split between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership that has long been rejected. Paul asserted that he and the other apostles were teaching the same things pertaining to Jesus' resurrection (15:3-11). If Paul was teaching a bodily resurrection as Goulder holds, the Jerusalem apostles were teaching

[58] Craig in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 194; cf. Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 243.

it too.[59] Thus, this component of GH is dead in its tracks, since a "spiritual" or disembodied resurrection could not have been the earliest claim of the Christians if Goulder is correct about Paul.

Surprisingly, Goulder never supports his contention that the Jerusalem church taught a 'spiritual' (i.e., ethereal) resurrection while Paul taught a bodily resurrection. He only answers Wright's assertion that those whom Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15 were probably those who were reverting back to pagan beliefs. In doing so, Goulder provides a number of arguments that the resurrection deniers Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 15 had a Jewish background.[60] But this in no way supports Goulder's

[59] See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

[60] Goulder (2005), 189. (*1*) Goulder asserts that although there was a spectrum of Jewish views of resurrection in the first century, the "spiritual view" "is in line with Josephus and Philo" and is what at least some in the Corinthian congregation were holding. While this grants plausibility to GH, bodily resurrection was likewise on the spectrum of Jewish views to which Goulder appeals. This likewise grants plausibility to RH, which Goulder does not take into account. Consequently, (*1*) does not uniquely support the assertion that a "spiritual view" of resurrection was held by the Jerusalem leaders. More importantly, those whom Paul was addressing were not interpreting 'resurrection' differently than Paul; they were denying it (15:12). (It is unclear to me whether the Corinthian believers holding this view were thinking in terms of a disembodied post-mortem existence or of no post-mortem existence at all, such as embraced by the Sadducees, since certain statements in the text fit better with the latter [1 Cor. 15:32 and possibly 15:19 in reference to 15:27].) In response, Paul provides *kerygma* pertaining to Jesus' resurrection, adding that he *and the other apostles* are teaching the same things in this respect (15:3-11). Goulder grants this but adds that "We should therefore have to think that both groups proclaimed that Jesus had been raised, but interpreted that slightly differently" (190). However, Goulder does not provide support that they were interpreting resurrection differently. In fact, as will be stated in the main text, Paul's commitment to *tradition* renders is much more plausible that if Paul was teaching a bodily resurrection, the Jerusalem apostles were too. Thus, in answering the resurrection deniers, the Jewish authority to whom Paul appeals in support of his position is the Jerusalem leadership whom Goulder asserts is siding with the resurrection deniers! This completely undermines Goulder's third argument (*3*). (*2*) Goulder asserts that there were Jews in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 7:19). But he fails to mention that there were also Gentile converts whose background must be taken into consideration. Paul's decision to go to the Gentiles was made while in Corinth (1 Cor. 18:5-6) and Hellenistic thinking leaned strongly in the direction of a disembodied postmortem existence. (See Wright [2003], 32-84. Also see Acts 17:32. When Goulder appeals to Philo and Josephus as having a view of *resurrection* that involves a disembodied existence, it is worth noting that Philo was a Hellenized Jew and interpreting Josephus on the matter is difficult since he may be altering a Jewish view in order to make it more acceptable to his Gentile Roman readers. Moreover, Philo and Josephus do not refer to the disembodied existence they promote as *resurrection*.) Most importantly, as noted in (*1*) bodily resurrection was believed by many first-century Jews. Since (*2*) does not argue for why the Corinthian believers preferred a "spiritual view" over bodily resurrection, it does not uniquely support a "spiritual view" of resurrection on the part of the Jerusalem leadership. (*3*) Goulder contends that the context indicates a Jewish background since Paul cites two Jewish authorities: himself and the Jerusalem leadership (1 Cor. 15:17). Not only may this be inconsequential since the earliest Christians were Jews, it does not uniquely support the assertion that the Jerusalem leadership held to a "spiritual view" of resurrection. (*4*) Goulder asserts that "The deniers based their belief on an exegesis of Psalm 8" which they understood as Jesus now having "all the powers under his feet, including Death." There is no reason why Jews who believed in Jesus' bodily resurrection would not believe that all powers including death were now under Jesus' control. So, this argument also does not uniquely support a "spiritual view" of resurrection. (*5*) Goulder argues that "[t]he discussion of the first and second man in 15.44-49 depends upon a sophisticated Jewish tradition of the double creation of man in Gen. 1.27 and 2.7." I have argued for a different interpretation of 15:44-49 that I believe is more faithful to the text than Goulder's interpretation (see chapter 4.3.3.9.b). (*6*) Goulder contends that the "boasting of men" in 3:21 and "being puffed up for the one against the other" in 4:6 refers to "Peter against Paul." But Paul is clear that he does not approve of such divisions (1:12-13; 3:3-7), there are no indicators that the divisions resulted from rifts between the Christian leaders such as Peter and Paul, and there are no clear indicators that doctrinal differences were the reasons why some were preferring one Christian leader over another. It could have been a matter of by whom one had been baptized or of being drawn to a

contention that the Jerusalem leaders were likewise resurrection deniers. Given Paul's tenacious commitment to *tradition*, it is much more plausible that if he was teaching a bodily resurrection, the Jerusalem apostles were as well.[61]

Goulder asserts that the resurrection appearances of Jesus to groups are "communal delusions" and of the same nature as apparitions of Mary and sightings of Big Foot and UFOs. Goulder's analogy fails. Since people who claim to have seen Bigfoot actually *saw* a physical being and large footprints in the mud, they were neither experiencing delusions nor hallucinations. In many cases, they were deceived. Delusions are beliefs held in the presence of strong disconfirming evidence. Thus, a *communal delusion* would have occurred if a group continued to believe that Big Foot was real after learning they had been tricked. Weather balloons and hoaxes have often been mistaken for UFOs.[62] Again, the people involved *saw* something with their ordinary sight and mistook it for something else. So, Big Foot and UFO sightings are not of the same nature as what Goulder is claiming pertaining to the disciples' group experiences. Accordingly, experiences similar to Big Foot and UFO sightings are implausible as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Modern Marian apparitions can often be accounted for as hallucinations or optical illusions, but of course, not all apparitions of Mary are so easily explained.[63] Although there are many, the three most prominent cases include apparitions in Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje. At Lourdes (France), a fourteen-year-old girl named Bernadette claimed to have experienced 18 apparitions of Mary in 1858. At Fatima (Portugal), three children, aged 10, 9, and 7, claimed that Mary appeared to them while together on six occasions in 1917. No others present could see Mary while the three children experienced their apparitions. However, it was reported that on one occasion others present observed that the sun was moving in the sky. At Medjugorje (Croatia), apparitions of Mary began in 1981 and continue daily to this very day. In 1981, five of the seers were teenagers while the sixth was 10. On the third day of the apparitions, some in the group of a few thousand who had gathered for the event with

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particular personality given his temperament and speaking style. Most importantly, it provides no support for the contention that Peter or any of the Jerusalem apostles held to a "spiritual view" of resurrection. (*7*) Goulder finally asserts that Paul contrasts the "word of the cross" in 1:18 with the gospel of his rivals who "taught words of human wisdom" in 2:13. His rivals are those mentioned in 1:19 and those "who insisted on Jewish laws in Galatians 2 were Jewish leaders, Peter and James." Goulder ignores the immediate context. In 1:17-19 and 2:7-16, Paul is not contrasting his teachings with those of rival apostles but with nonbelievers.

[61] See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

[62] Some UFO reports remain unexplained. While I personally do not believe that intelligent life exists on planets other than the earth, I remain open. I would be shocked if a UFO landed on our planet in public view. But it would not cause a major shift in my worldview. Nor do I think it would provide reason for me to reexamine my historical approach.

[63] There have been two instances when others have sent photographs to me of what they understood as a Marian apparition. I received the first in 1996 from a friend who witnessed an interesting silhouette resembling the traditional figure of Mary on the mirrored windows of the Seminole Finance Corp Building in Clearwater, Florida. The second occurred in 2006 when a stranger emailed a few photographs to me of discoloration in a stone resembling the silhouette of a person at the location where his relative had recently committed suicide. He identified the silhouette as Mary and wondered if she was trying to communicate that his relative was okay. Although I had to admit that in both cases the silhouettes were fascinating, I thought that only wishful thinking had allowed them to see Mary in them. It is hard to imagine that silhouettes such as these are what the early *kerygma* and Paul had in mind or that Paul would have radically reversed his view of Jesus based on something of this nature.

the youth reported seeing three flashes of light in the sky just prior to the apparition to the six youth. But only the youth saw Mary. Even today, only the six seers are privy to the apparitions. Those with a seer during his or her experience will see nothing.

As of June 1, 2008, the Catholic Church has not rendered any official pronouncement regarding the supernatural nature of these three cases, although it remains open to the possibility. Kenneth Samples had the opportunity to interview a number of the seers at Medjugorje as well as a few other key figures. Although a conservative Protestant, he comments, "Any honest effort to provide a satisfying explanation for the phenomenon known as Marian apparitions will prove to be a complex and difficult task. I freely admit that I may not be able to account for everything connected to these unusual occurrences."[64] Although Samples is open to naturalistic explanations, he leans more toward the opinion that they are supernatural in nature. However, for theological reasons he regards them as experiences of the demonic.[65]

My point here is not to adjudicate on the matter or bolster the case for Marian apparitions. I am simply summoning a minimum of evidence to suggest that the apparitions of Mary are not necessarily natural, psychological events in the minds of the seers.[66] Goulder must demonstrate that they are in order for his argument to work, which compares Jesus appearances to Marian apparitions and claiming they are hallucinations. He has not demonstrated this.

Goulder appears to prefer any natural explanation over one that is supernatural, because "we shall fall into superstition" if we do not.[67] I regard this concern as an over-reaction. Our commitment to taking deliberate actions for managing our horizons and applying method carefully are hindrances to a pseudo-critical investigation ruled by credulity. And it is appropriate to remind ourselves that credulity is not unique to believers and can be present in the historical work of skeptical scholars who uncritically accept poorly supported natural hypotheses that are terribly *ad hoc*.[68]

These problems vary in severity. Combined, they strongly undermine Goulder's hypothesis. Given these and his revivified nineteenth-century theory that there was a

[64] Miller and Samples (1992), 129.
[65] Miller and Samples (1992), 126-35.
[66] For myself, I am not prepared to adjudicate on the matter of Marian apparitions. Because I am Protestant, I carry a theological bias against an appearance of Mary. However, I am not predisposed to reject the reality of apparitions in general. I have two personal friends who have experienced a few apparitions of the dead close to the moment of the person's death which was unknown to them at the time. Biblical scholar Dale Allison reports of having experienced a couple apparitions of a dead friend and that some of his family members experienced apparitions of his deceased father. Although I have not had an experience of a dead person appearing alive to me, I, both of my parents, and one of my sisters have witnessed paranormal phenomena on a number of occasions, which we interpreted as demonic given our Christian worldview. They were quite frightening to all of us. I would argue that none of these appears to be the type of appearances reported by the early Christians. *I note that at this point I am appealing to a conclusion that does not belong to our historical bedrock:* Paul who is our earliest known Christian author writes of Jesus' transformed resurrection body and is consistent with the resurrection narratives.
[67] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 55.
[68] See chapter 1.2.2 above.

major division of ideologies between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership,[69] it is not surprising that his hypothesis has received support from only a very few scholars.[70]

5.3.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Goulder's hypothesis (GH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.[71]

1) *Explanatory Scope*. GH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead. GH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings and the appearance to Paul, regarding the experiences as psychologically induced phenomena, such as hallucinations, delusions, cognitive dissonance, and hypnotism. GH meets this criterion nicely.

2) *Explanatory Power*. Jesus' followers had to have been certain of his death in order to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and his death by crucifixion is the strongest candidate as a cause for their belief that Jesus had died. However, GH sometimes pushes the facts in order to make them fit. For example, in positing that Peter experienced a hallucination of the risen Jesus, Goulder states that Peter was given to this type of an experience and cites the transfiguration as an example. As noted above, since others were present this would involve a group hallucination, a phenomenon that would not be granted by most professionals in the discipline of psychology.[72] Moreover, as previously noted, a number of the psychological conditions Goulder attributes to the disciples and Paul can easily be explained otherwise. A hallucination experienced by Peter as an unconscious resolution of his cognitive dissonance is faced with the equally likely possibility that he believed he had been deceived by Jesus and had left the sect upon Jesus' crucifixion. Indeed, ambiguity is easily spotted in GH. In reference to Peter's experience, Goulder writes, "Psychologists have suggested various theories to account for such conversions, the cognitive dissonance theory, for instance; but we do not for the moment need to claim that we fully understand such experiences; it is enough that we see the general thrust of what is happening."[73] Stated differently, their experiences could have resulted from cognitive dissonance, a hallucination, a delusion, or even a hypnotic experience. For Goulder, we may have uncertainty pertaining to how we should define the psychological experiences but we are certain that they were psychological in nature since any natural explanation is to be preferred over one that is supernatural. This ambiguity throughout GH demonstrates how much it lacks in explanatory power. We also observed that Goulder's contention that the group

[69] Wright (2005), 222.
[70] Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 129. One scholar who finds Goulder's hypothesis somewhat compelling is Lüdemann (2004), 48, 140n18.
[71] See chapter 1.3.2.
[72] This conclusion is evidenced by a lack of any empirically supported examples of collective hallucinations in the professional psychological literature. Biblical scholars such as Goulder often appeal to a specific psychological phenomenon and confuse it with another. See Habermas ("Explaining," 2001; "The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection," 2001).
[73] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 50.

appearances to the disciples and others were "communal delusions" is illegitimate. Consequently, GH lacks explanatory power.

But how does it compare with VH? VH lacks explanatory power because it possesses ambiguity and vagueness pertaining to the appearances and makes no suggestions pertaining to the cause of the empty tomb (which VH grants). GH lacks explanatory power because it squeezes facts pertaining to the appearances in order to accommodate them and possesses ambiguity pertaining some of the appearances. Furthermore, GH's employment of "communal delusions" is illegitimate. Though this is somewhat of a close call, GH appears to trail VH in explanatory power.

3) *Plausibility*. Is GH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? It is now generally accepted that no split existed between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership. Yet such a split is crucial to GH. A grief hallucination to Peter postulated by GH is plausible. While some Marian apparitions plausibly support an individual hallucination experienced by Peter, the three major group apparitions of Mary typically cited do not, since they have not been shown to have been hallucinations and positing that they were is speculation. Since group hallucinations are rare to impossible, a group hallucination to the disciples is implausible. That Paul hallucinated an appearance of Jesus is implausible, since he was not in a state of grief over Jesus' death. Moreover, it seems unlikely that a hallucination experienced by Paul would have led him to the conclusion that Jesus had been raised bodily (remember GH asserts that Paul believed in Jesus' bodily resurrection). In light of Paul's commitment to tradition, it is implausible that the Jerusalem church believed in a "spiritual resurrection" in contrast to Paul's belief in a bodily resurrection. Sightings similar to those that produce testimonies to Big Foot and UFOs are implausible as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, given that those reporting them probably saw something with their ordinary vision. These are more plausibly explained as mistaken identity or illusions, which GH does not claim. GH lacks plausibility.

How do GH and VH compare in plausibility? We have already observed that it is difficult to assess the plausibility of VH given its poor explanatory power. Neither would seem to be the logical outcome given Paul's experience. But GH is implausible in a number of additional respects. Thus, it trails VH in plausibility. This means that the agnostic position posited by VH has greater plausibility than the psychohistory of GH. Stated another way, it is preferable to conclude that we do not know what occurred than to regard the psychohistory of GH as an accurate representation of what occurred.

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. This criterion may be where GH is weakest. As previously stated, GH is entirely speculative, positing compounded psychoanalyses in order to explain the data. Peter experienced a hallucination and the groups experienced communal delusions. And there is more.

Goulder's proposal that Paul's conversion resulted from having secret doubts, a growing distaste for Judaism, and a friend from his youth who was a Gentile is speculation without a scrap of supporting evidence. He appears open to the

assertion that fanaticism is present only in people who secretly have doubts about their beliefs.[74] While this may be true of some, it is a huge leap to claim that *all* or even most fanaticism results from secret doubts. Were Hitler's atrocities the result of his personal doubts about his anti-Semitic views? Do Muslim extremists commit violent acts including suicide because they secretly doubt their beliefs? Would Goulder suggest that anyone with a passion for his cause—whether noble or wicked—has that passion precisely because he doubts the validity of his cause?

Goulder appears to realize that his theory is on somewhat shaky grounds. However, he asserts that, since a natural explanation can account for the known data, it should be preferred over a supernatural explanation given Occam's Razor, which states that the hypothesis importing fewer assumptions or sub-hypotheses is simpler and, thus, preferable. In other words, this criterion seeks to explain data using the least number of suppositions. Accordingly, Goulder disposes of the Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) since it must presuppose God.[75] I agree with Goulder's appeal to Occam's Razor and his contention that hypotheses "should not be multiplied beyond what is necessary." But he appears careless in his use of it. GH certainly multiplies explanations, presupposing a psychological experience by Peter, another for Paul resulting from multiple psychological conditions present—all of which are presupposed without any evidence—and still more psychological experiences for the disciples. Whether GH is less *ad hoc* than RH will be assessed in our analysis of RH.[76] For the moment, I simply observe that GH is far more *ad hoc* than VH and, thus, fails this criterion.

5) *Illumination*. If true, GH may provide illumination pertaining to religious experiences in antiquity and today. Accordingly, GH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, GH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). In is also noteworthy that GH passes only one of the four most important criteria. Moreover, I noted that there are numerous elements to GH that render it implausible even prior to weighing it by our criteria for the best explanation.[77]

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P

[74] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52.
[75] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 54, 55. For a similar argument, see Wedderburn (1999), 95-96.
[76] See section 5.7.3 below.
[77] Now that we have been able to compare VH with GH, I have updated the *"T"*s previously in VH to reflect this comparison. These updates will occur at the end of each analysis.

5.4 Gerd Lüdemann

5.4.1. Description of Lüdemann's View. Gerd Lüdemann is a New Testament scholar who converted from Christianity to atheism. He rejects attempts by others to claim that Jesus' resurrection is beyond the scope of the historian's practice.[78] Lüdemann sought to investigate and answer whether Jesus rose from the dead. He distinguishes himself from those who assert one can remain a Christian if Jesus did not rise from the dead or that the historicity of Jesus' resurrection is a non-issue.[79] Lüdemann is forthright in his objective in writing. His aim is "to prove the nonhistoricity of the resurrection of Jesus and simultaneously to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly."[80]

A number of his statements make public certain aspects of his worldview:

> Anybody who says that he rose from the dead is faced with another problem that I shall address later—namely, if you say that Jesus rose from the dead biologically, you would have to presuppose that a decaying corpse—which is already cold and without blood in its brain—could be made alive again. I think that is nonsense.[81]
>
> [A]ny historical element behind [Luke 24:44-49] and/or behind Acts 1:9-11 must be ruled out because there is no such heaven to which Jesus may have been carried.[82]

Lüdemann's statements inform us that his atheistic worldview will be guiding his historical investigation. As discussed earlier, biases can be helpful and a hindrance.[83] It is a hindrance because, left unchecked, bias will tend to cause one to see only what she wishes to see and to miss data that may disconfirm tightly held views. One might call it a response to a cognitive dissonance. But bias can also be helpful. If atheism presents the most correct worldview, atheist scholars maintain an unequivocal advantage when seeking to discover what actually happened to Jesus. By eliminating hypotheses involving a supernatural component, they may focus on finding the most plausible naturalistic hypothesis. The converse is likewise true. If the Christian worldview is most correct, an unequivocal advantage is held by those Christian scholars who attempt to verify the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, since they will tend to work harder than others in order to discover confirming data and will not tend toward credulity in accepting certain naturalistic interpretations of the data. Lüdemann has not supported his worldview and if the Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) is strong enough to be awarded historicity, Lüdemann's atheistic worldview would face a most serious challenge.

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[78] Lüdemann (2004), 21-22.
[79] For an example, see Borg (2006), 281; Borg in Borg and Wright (2000), 131. In agreement with Lüdemann that the truth of Christianity is disproved if the resurrection is falsified, see Cohn-Sherbok in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 186; Davis (1993), ix; Wedderburn (1999), 4.
[80] Lüdemann (2004), 7. Similar is Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), where he states that we should "abandon" the long held supernatural explanation for the extant data pertaining to the fate of Jesus (55; cf. 58-59).
[81] Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 45.
[82] Lüdemann (2004), 114.
[83] See chapter 1.2.2.

5.4.1.1. Peter

Lüdemann grants all of our historical bedrock.[84] Like Goulder, he appeals to the social sciences with the expectation that "modern psychological studies" will assist us in understanding "the rise of Easter faith."[85] Peter was a victim of "self-deception."[86]

> Peter's vision would be delusion or wishful thinking. Indeed, his vision is an example of unsuccessful mourning, because it abruptly cuts off the very process of mourning, substituting fantasy for unromantic reality[87]. . . . By a bold if unconscious leap Peter entered the world of his wishes. As a result he 'saw' Jesus and thus made it possible for the other disciples to 'see' Jesus as well.[88] . . . Peter experienced Jesus' appearance to him as reacceptance by the one whom he had repudiated; the other disciples experienced it as forgiveness for their desertion.[89]

Lüdemann describes phenomena affiliated with the grieving process, such as sensing, hearing, and sometimes even seeing the deceased loved one. The sounds can be as vague as creaking steps or as precise as words. The seeing can be as vague as a shadow or as precise as a clothed and smiling figure who can be touched.[90] He notes two women, each of whom claimed to have seen an apparition of the dead.[91] The experiences were very vivid and unexpected. When a person's world is dramatically changed, resulting in grief and loss, "libidos," "aggressive drives," and "guilt" frequently appear. "[N]ormal reality controls" break down and the unconscious self "creates artificial fulfillments."[92]

He notes research conducted at Harvard involving 43 widows and 19 widowers who were monitored during the first 13 months of their grieving periods.

> Three primary factors were identified as inhibiting or preventing a successful passage through the mourning period: *first*, a sudden death; *second*, an ambivalent attitude toward the deceased, involving feelings of guilt; and *third*, a dependent relationship. In the case of all the disciples, but especially that of Peter, we should note that all three factors that inhibit grieving apply. *First*, Jesus' death was violent, unexpected, and sudden. *Second*, even the gospel accounts offer evidence that the relationship between the disciples and Jesus was colored by a sense of guilt and profound ambivalence: only recall that Judas was involved in Jesus' arrest and then committed suicide; that Peter denied him and wept bitterly. *Third*, the dependent relationship of the disciples to Jesus is evident in that most of them had given up their work and homes and families to be with him. This merging was clearly further

[84] Lüdemann (2004), 78, 88, 107.
[85] Lüdemann (2004), 163.
[86] Lüdemann (2004), 24.
[87] Lüdemann (2004), 165.
[88] Lüdemann (2004), 166.
[89] Lüdemann (2004), 174.
[90] Lüdemann (2004), 163-64.
[91] Lüdemann (2004), 164-65.
[92] Lüdemann (2004), 165.

> magnified by their status as a tiny group that had effectively cast off its religious and social moorings, withdrawing from much of the larger culture.[93]

In short, when Jesus had been suddenly and unexpectedly executed, Peter experienced profound sorrow and guilt for his occasional ambivalence toward Jesus on whom he had been completely dependent. Unable to cope with his loss, Peter's unconscious self created a hallucinatory experience of the risen Jesus in order to ease his intense mental anguish.

5.4.1.2. Disciples

After Peter experienced a psychotic disorder that led him to believe Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to him, he informed the others of his experience. Since the early Christians were members of the lower part of intellectual culture that believed in ghosts and miracles and were not a part of the primitive scientific culture, they succumbed to group ecstasy where they actually experienced "a shared hallucinatory fantasy" which had both audible and visual aspects.[94] This assured them of forgiveness for their desertion of him in his time of need.[95]

5.4.1.3. More than 500

Lüdemann understands the group appearance to the more than five hundred (1 Cor. 15:6) to be "a kind of foundation legend of the Christian community."[96] It is not a resurrection appearance since "it is improbable that such an event witnessed by more than five hundred people should otherwise have left no trace."[97] Rather, it derives from the event underlying Acts 2.[98] It is a "mass ecstasy," stimulated by one or even a few others.[99] "Such an explanation fits in well with what has been worked out so far, namely, that the first appearance to Peter was the impulse to further appearances among the disciples."[100]

Lüdemann cites the now more than ninety-year old work by Gustave Le Bon in support of such an experience. Le Bon writes the following:

> Before St. George appeared on the walls of Jerusalem to all the Crusaders he was certainly perceived in the first instance by one of those present. By dint of suggestion and contagion the miracle signalised by a single person was immediately perceived by all. . . . Such is always the mechanism of the collective hallucination so frequent in history—hallucinations which seem to

[93] Lüdemann (2004), 165-66.
[94] Lüdemann (2004), 166, 175, 176. In support of grief hallucinations, Lüdemann cites Spiegel (163) and Jaffé (164). In support of group hallucinations he quotes Renan (175) and Paine (177), neither of whom are psychologists and both are very dated (Renan—1886; Paine—1794-95).
[95] Lüdemann (2004), 174.
[96] Lüdemann (2004), 73.
[97] Lüdemann (2004), 73-74.
[98] Lüdemann (2004), 73.
[99] Lüdemann (2004), 81.
[100] Lüdemann (2004), 81.

> have all the recognised characteristics of authenticity, since they are phenomena observed by thousands of persons.[101]

5.4.1.4. James and the Brothers of Jesus

This mass ecstasy was so compelling that "the natural brothers of Jesus were caught up in the excitement, and went to Jerusalem. James even received an individual vision—the same James who had little to do with his brother during Jesus' lifetime, and seems to have participated in the attempt to have his 'crazy' brother put away."[102] James' experience of his risen brother may have occurred during the appearance to the more than five hundred and may have been followed by an individual appearance.[103]

5.4.1.5. Paul

According to Lüdemann, Paul, like Peter, was a victim of self-deception. Thus, the "early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection" is "a history of self-deception."[104] He understands Romans 7 as Paul's "unconscious conflict" experienced prior to his conversion.[105] This conflict consisted of two matters. The former was a tension between the Jewish God who is "a stern and demanding tyrant intent on punishing even those who could not help themselves" with the Christian God who is "a loving and forgiving leader who offered rest and peace to imperfect humans who accepted his grace." Paul saw a different view of God in Jesus' humility and self-sacrifice, a compassionate God also represented by Philo and later by Josephus and the Rabbinic literature.[106] With Goulder, Lüdemann thinks that Paul had secret doubts about the Christian teachings and his Jewish faith. His vehement response to the Christians "indicates that the basic elements of the preaching of Christians had a powerfully disturbing effect on him" and "unconsciously attracted Paul."[107] At the same time he was a competitive overachiever.

> [A]s a Jew he claimed to have surpassed his Jewish contemporaries in ardor, piety, and practice; the same was true for him afterward. As a Christian he claimed to have worked more than all the other apostles and to have a greater gift for speaking in tongues than any of the Corinthians. A person like Paul must always be 'number one.'[108]

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[101] Lüdemann (2004) quoting Le Bon (80). Le Bon's quotation appears in Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 41-42.
[102] Lüdemann (2004), 176.
[103] Lüdemann (2004), 82.
[104] Lüdemann (2004), 24.
[105] Lüdemann (2004), 171.
[106] Lüdemann (2004), 170-71.
[107] Lüdemann (2004), 169. Kent (1996) also sees an inner conflict in Paul: "I maintain that Paul had a very deep psychological conflict about his persecution of the followers of Jesus" (16). Paul had been a student of the Pharisee Gamaliel who "favoured leniency." He cites Acts 5:33-39 where Gamaliel opined that the disciples of Jesus should be left alone (16). Moreover, "[t]he Pharisees, as represented by Gamaliel, saw nothing wrong in the teachings of the followers of Jesus. . . . On the other hand, Paul had changed and become a Sadducee courting and winning the support of the High Priest" (17).
[108] Lüdemann (2004), 171.

Paul recoiled "against his subconscious but all-consuming needs for acceptance and self-importance," projecting these negative qualities "onto the Christians so as to justify attacking them all the more savagely."[109] As he approached Damascus, the time was right. "Paul fled from his painful situation into the world of hallucination from which he soon returned to make himself the apostle to the Gentiles, commissioned by Christ himself."[110] He perceived an opportunity "to assume the obviously vital role of foremost apostle to the Gentiles" and "was eager—of course subconsciously—to assume that exalted position."[111]

With Goulder, Lüdemann finds a parallel to Paul's experience in the conversion of Susan Atkins, the former accomplice of Charles Manson.[112] Similar experiences may be found in numerous Marian apparitions such as the story of 14-year-old Bernadette who in 1858 claimed that Mary had appeared to her in Lourdes. Although she "later admitted that she had been 'overcome with confusion' and now thought it was a 'deception,'" the Catholic Church pressed on, since the words of Mary confirmed a previous papal edict and supported papal infallibility.[113] "Once we understand that visions commonly arise from the frustrations, the hopes, and even yearning for power on the part of both individuals and groups, we are able to examine history as well as human motivation in a more revealing light.[114]

In resurrection Paul saw a corporeal continuity between our present body and the immortal one to come,[115] given his "inability to think of the existence of a person after death in a nonbodily form."[116] He interpreted his Damascus road experience as being called by God in a manner similar to Isaiah and Jeremiah. The vision he experienced was Christ in the form of a light but was not caused by external and objective stimuli.[117] Paul's vision must be interpreted like those experienced by those in the Old Testament,[118] other Jewish sources,[119] the Greco-Roman culture in which the

[109] Lüdemann (2004), 169.
[110] Lüdemann (2004), 171.
[111] Lüdemann (2004), 171-72. In terms of Paul's "Christ complex," Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) is sympathetic to Lüdemann, mentioning the twentieth-century Hindu Sadhu Sundar Singh who, like Paul, opposed Christianity. He burned a Bible in front of his friends and threw stones at Christian preachers. Distraught over a lack of peace he planned to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a train. In a final prayer asking God to reveal Himself, Jesus appeared to Sudhu (267). Allison comments that "while Lüdemann's story fits the facts, the facts do not demand it" (267). While I believe Allison is correct, the parallel is close enough that one must take note of it. How significant is the difference that Singh was about to commit suicide when he had the vision? Throwing rocks at preachers and burning a Bible is not as intense as arresting, imprisoning, and consenting to the execution of Christians as we find in Paul. However, I do not wish to engage in a sort of splitting hairs. Not having investigated Singh's experience, I do not know what to make of his vision. Why must we *a priori* rule out that Jesus appeared to Singh? It may be added that Singh's testimony is that he was suicidal prior to his experience; but Paul's testimony is that he had been quite confident in his opposition to Christianity. In short, if we take both of their testimonies seriously (as Allison's appeal to Singh's story must), Singh was conflicted over his opposition to Christianity whereas Paul was not. This is perhaps the most serious disanalogy between the two stories.
[112] Lüdemann (2004), 140n18. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) understands this as an experience similar to what Paul and Peter experienced (49).
[113] Lüdemann (2004), 48-49.
[114] Lüdemann (2004), 49.
[115] Lüdemann (2004), 45.
[116] Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 151; cf. Lüdemann (2004), 178.
[117] Lüdemann (2004), 47.
[118] Lüdemann (2004), 48. Lüdemann provides the following examples: Job 4:12-16; Isa. 6; Dan. 10:4-21; Ezek. 1:1-3:15; Amos 7:1-9.

first-century Christians lived,[120] and the New Testament itself.[121] That it was "esoteric and ecstatic" is "central to any attempt to understand the nature and circumstances of the very first appearances."[122]

For Lüdemann, all of the appearances were subjective experiences emerging from varying psychological disorders. There is no room for regarding them as objective in nature. The risen Jesus existed only in the minds of those who thought they saw him.[123] There was no corresponding external reality. The objective vision hypothesis "can be nothing more than an apologetic move, since by their very nature visions cannot be examined."[124]

5.4.1.6. Appearance Traditions in the Gospels

Lüdemann writes, "[S]ource criticism and tradition criticism are everything here. You have to start with Paul and see that the Gospel stories are later developments."[125] Paul's experience involved a visionary appearance of Jesus from heaven. Yet his strong view of bodily resurrection prohibited him from understanding Jesus' postmortem existence in anything other than bodily terms. Given their Palestinian influence, the earliest Christians likewise understood Jesus' resurrection as an event that happened to his corpse.[126]

Almost from the beginning, however, there were many Christians who did not understand resurrection as the transformation of a corpse. Instead, they interpreted the statement 'God has raised Jesus from the dead' as symbolic. Lüdemann admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief."[127] However, that many embraced a symbolic interpretation is certainly "true of Paul's converted Gentiles and, I am tempted to say, all Christians from the first generation whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally."[128]

Later on, those holding the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection grew in number. We see this in 2 Timothy 2:16-18, where it is said that Hymenaeus and Philetus assert that the resurrection has already occurred, and in the later Gnostic literature.[129] Furthermore, the Docetists taught that Jesus only appeared to have risen bodily. Lüdemann contends that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels

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[119] 1 En 14; 4 Ezra 3:1-9:25.
[120] In support Lüdemann cites the 1927 work of Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts from the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).
[121] NT examples are 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Acts 7:55-56; Rev. 1:13-16.
[122] Lüdemann (2004), 166.
[123] Lüdemann (2004), 176. In agreement is Lindars (1987): The appearances reported in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 "may be explained as merely subjective" (74).
[124] Lüdemann (2004), 196.
[125] Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 55.
[126] Lüdemann (2004), 180.
[127] Lüdemann (2004), 180.
[128] Lüdemann (2004), 178.
[129] Lüdemann (2004, 178-80): He provides the following as examples, *Letter to Rheginos* (NHC I.4), the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II.3, logion 90a/73.1-5), and the *Gospel of Thomas* (no references are provided by Lüdemann).

were created later in response to challenges such as the symbolic interpretation and Docetism.[130]

Other early Christians who had interpreted the visions of the risen Jesus in bodily terms observed that such visions are often difficult to distinguish from "apparitions of demons and ghosts." Because their faith was rooted in Jewish thought, the visions "took on physical manifestations in different communities at almost the same time."[131]

There is a final argument offered by Lüdemann. Belief in the resurrection, ascension, and glorious return of the Son of God were major interconnected elements in the earliest Christian beliefs. Remove one brick and everything collapses. According to our earliest Christian writer—Paul—Jesus' return would occur "within the lifetime of first-generation Christians. But that return from heaven didn't come. And the fact that it still hasn't happened after two thousand years is a very strong argument against it."[132] In other words, if the belief in Christ's return is false, so are the beliefs in Christ's resurrection and ascension, since they are all interdependent beliefs.

Lüdemann concludes, "The original Easter faith sprang from a visionary perception of Jesus being with God in heaven. This phenomenon is properly denominated a vision, for though seen as being alive, Jesus was and remained in fact dead. Ontologically speaking, this 'risen Jesus' existed only in the memory of the disciples. . . . [and was] no more than a fancy of the mind."[133] It is not so much "the results of natural science as conclusions based on historical criticism and sober insight"[134] that show "with definite clarity that Jesus was not raised from the dead."[135]

A Summary of Lüdemann's Hypothesis (LH)

- Peter experienced a hallucination of the risen Jesus in order to cope with his mental anguish brought about by his profound sorrow and guilt.
- Peter shared his experience with the other disciples who were experiencing guilt over deserting Jesus. These then had experiences of the risen Jesus that may be called "a shared hallucinatory fantasy" and are similar to Marian apparitions, grief hallucinations, and ecstatic experiences.
- The appearance to the more than 500 resulted from mass ecstasy that started with one or two others.
- Hearing reports of what was occurring, the brothers of Jesus went to Jerusalem and were caught up in the group experiences. James may have been one of the more than 500 who partook of the ecstatic experience and/or had a private experience that occurred afterward.

[130] Lüdemann (2004), 35, 109, 111. Carnley (1987) shares a somewhat similar opinion although he differs from Lüdemann concerning how the stories of a bodily raised Jesus developed: "We are therefore led to conclude that the first appearances took the form of 'heavenly visions' or Christophanies of the raised and glorified Christ and that when, in the ensuing weeks and years, attempts were made to express the 'heavenly vision' or 'appearance' in verbal form, a variety of different images was used" (242).
[131] Lüdemann (2004), 177.
[132] Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 62.
[133] Lüdemann (2004), 176.
[134] Lüdemann (2004), 203; cf. 209.
[135] Lüdemann (2004), 190.

- Paul was disenchanted with the God of Judaism and attracted to the Christian God in Christ. Given his need for acceptance and self-importance, he resolved his mental tension with a hallucination and seized an opportunity to assume the role of leading apostle to the Gentiles.
- Although all of the appearances were subjective visions, the strong influence of Jewish views led those who experienced them to interpret Jesus' resurrection as bodily in nature.
- A very short while later, more sophisticated Christians reinterpreted the claim that Jesus had been raised in symbolic terms. Other believers who could only think in terms of bodily resurrection created supporting narratives, some unconsciously while others as a deliberate response to those who denied bodily resurrection.
- Jesus' resurrection was one of several interconnected beliefs that made up the foundation of Christianity. Another was his imminent and glorious return. Since that did not and still has not occurred, it is dubious that any of the other foundational beliefs are true.

5.4.2. Analysis and Concerns

5.4.2.1. Psychoanalysis

Like Goulder, Lüdemann is very innovative in his attempts to explain the historical bedrock in natural terms. Because his hypothesis is similar in many respects to Goulder's, it is plagued with many of the same problems. LH is pure speculation and is not "based on any evidence whatsoever."[136] Psychoanalyzing persons who are not only absent but who also lived in an ancient foreign culture is a very difficult and highly speculative practice. Allison opines that Lüdemann's conjectures "are just that: conjectures. They do not constitute knowledge. In recent decades contemporary historians have been more leery than their predecessors of the viability of reconstructing and then analyzing the psycho-histories of men and women long dead."[137] Lüdemann appears not to recognize this. Instead, his approach is a methodical skepticism that says, "As long as I can offer a naturalistic proposal that has an ounce of being correct, I do not need to consider a supernatural one." This is where methodical neutrality places LH in check. Those making a proposal must defend it. Lüdemann must show that LH is a superior hypothesis to all others that are proposed and argued for, even supernatural ones. His methodical skepticism does not at all demonstrate his hypothesis as superior, but rather reveals that he is being guided more by his worldview than by historical method. In a sense his method is his worldview. Like VH, in this sense, LH is suspect of being *ad hoc*.

Lüdemann appeals to a "scientific view of the world" and "natural law," claiming that these render statements about Jesus' resurrection as "nonsense" and that they have "irrevocably lost their meaning."[138] In the 2006 Theme Issue of *History and Theory* that focused on "Religion and History," Brad Gregory comments on the approach we observe in Lüdemann.

[136] Wright (2003), 20.
[137] Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 242.
[138] Lüdemann (1995), 135; (2004), 62; (2000), 45.

> Consequently, spirituality, for example, can only be approached through secular psychological categories; sacraments only in terms of anthropological rituals and symbols that ostensibly construct and reinforce community identity: sin only in terms of socially and/or politically disapproved behaviors that threaten stability or some other interests. That prayer might *really* entail relationship with God, or that sacraments might *really* be channels of grace, or that sin might be an objective category of actions disapproved of *by God*, are notions that modern social-scientific and cultural-theoretical approaches to religion simply reject as incompatible with their implicit assumptions. . . . Put bluntly, the underlying beliefs of the modern social sciences and humanities are metaphysically naturalist and culturally relativist, and consequently contend that religion is *and can only be* a human construction.[139]

Habermas asserts that naturalists are "mistaken if they think that the advances of science make supernatural belief obsolete."[140] Science is designed to explain natural phenomena and is limited in its scope. Scientific equipment such as telescopes, microscopes, and MRIs are useless in psychology, historical investigation, political science, and abstract analyses of the arts. Historical investigation cannot tell us about quasars and black holes. Historical research observes extant effects and seeks to identify the condition(s) that caused them. The hypothesis that best explains the effects is to be preferred.

Lüdemann's allowance of his worldview to guide his historical investigation unchecked raises red flags. We have no hesitation considering the probability of his hypothesis (LH). However, "possible" and "probable" are not interchangeable terms and I reiterate that those making the assertion bear the burden of proof.[141] Merely stating that a resurrection is "nonsense" is an opinion rather than an argument. If that is a conclusion that results from Lüdemann's worldview, he must defend it. Hypotheses must be weighed carefully and we must be painfully active in managing our horizons when engaging in any investigation concerning the historical Jesus. In this respect, Lüdemann disappoints.

Lüdemann is more precise than Goulder in reference to the psychological experiences he attributes to the early Christians. While this lends greater explanatory power to LH over GH, it does not come without cost. Historian Mark Gilderhaus explains that the amalgamation of psychoanalytical theory and history is psychohistory. He provides the example of "the unfortunate and much-lamented psychoanalytical biography of Woodrow Wilson by William C. Bullitt and Sigmund Freud, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study* (1967)." Bullitt and Freud "attributed Wilson's deficiencies, notably his need to fail, to his inability as a boy to satisfy the demands of an insatiable father. . . . [S]ome individual practitioners have inadvertently produced comic consequences, for example, the claim that the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 appeared to President John F. Kennedy as a psychosexual drama in which Russian weapons, seen as phallic symbols, threatened the Western Hemisphere with penetration."[142]

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[139] Gregory (2006), 137.
[140] Habermas in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 126.
[141] See chapter 1.2.10.
[142] Gilderhaus (2007), 106.

There are clear parallels to the above in the psychohistories provided by Lüdemann and Goulder.

- Paul had a childhood friend who was a Gentile and that this unconsciously contributed to his call to the Gentiles.[143]
- Paul maintained secret doubts about Judaism and was unconsciously attracted to Christianity.[144] He was consumed by a need to be important and accepted. He unconsciously projected his negative qualities on the Christians in order to fight his secret admiration for them.[145]
- Peter experienced Jesus' appearance to him as reacceptance by the one whom he had repudiated.[146]
- The appearance to the more than 500 is "mass ecstasy."[147] This "mass ecstasy" was so inviting that it drew in the skeptical brothers of Jesus.[148]

In this observation I do not mean to imply that the psychohistories proposed by Lüdemann and Goulder are *a priori* impossible. Probability must be determined by weighing hypotheses. It is clear, however, that they are so speculative in nature that I do not think it would be inappropriate to label them as *historical fiction*.

5.4.2.2. Disciples

Lüdemann's appeal to Le Bon's example rests on shaky ground. The appearance of St. George to the crusaders is found only in Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (c. AD 1260):

> And when it was so that they had assieged Jerusalem and durst not mount ne go up on the walls for the quarrels and defence of the Saracens, they saw appertly Saint George which had white arms with a red cross, that went up tofore them on the walls, and they followed him, and so was Jerusalem taken by his help.[149]

Similar reports exist pertaining to other battles.[150] Medieval writers viewed them as literal, metaphorical, allegorical, and mystical.[151] We do not have enough data to assess how the above account of St. George appearing on the wall was meant to be

[143] Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52.
[144] Lüdemann (2004), 169; Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17.
[145] Lüdemann (2004), 169.
[146] Lüdemann (2004), 174.
[147] Lüdemann (2004), 73, 81.
[148] Lüdemann (2004), 176.
[149] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* [a.k.a. *Lives of the Saints*]. First Edition Published 1470. Translated by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.) Volume 3, 58-61, archaic spelling in original.
[150] For a similar story, see William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen, with notes and illustrations by J. A. Giles* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 382. This work is also known as *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and was compiled c. AD 1120. Of the battle of Antioch in AD 1098 he writes, "They imagined, moreover, that they saw the ancient martyrs, who had formerly been soldiers, and who had gained eternal remuneration by their death, I allude to George and Demetrius, hastily approaching with upraised banner from the mountainous districts, hurling darts against the enemy, but assisting the Franks."
[151] I owe this comment to a personal email correspondence with medieval scholar Christopher Tyerman of Oxford (dated April 30, 2008).

understood by medieval readers. If other than literal, Le Bon and Lüdemann are applying psychoanalyses to a legend. This is similar to writing psychohistory detailing why the six-year-old George Washington refused to lie about chopping down a cherry tree.[152] It approaches explaining Fiona's decision to marry Shrek and forever remain an ogre as the consequence of a repressed disenchantment with royal life and a desire for independence from her parents.

On the other hand, it may be that the group of crusaders actually believed they had simultaneously seen St. George. Modern psychology has not come close to confirming the possibility of collective hallucinations.[153] As discussed in our assessment of GH, hallucinations are phenomena occurring in the mind of the individual having the experience and others may not participate in the same experience.[154] But collective delusions are possible and cannot be ruled out pertaining to this appearance of St. George. It should be noted that the conditions for the appearance were quite different than we have for the disciples. The crusaders were dressed up and positioned for a battle with a known severe handicap. The disciples were already in hiding and could have walked away accepting their losses, intent on finding another Messiah or finding something else to do with their lives. Lüdemann also equates the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to Marian apparitions and we have already addressed this assertion previously with Goulder.[155] Like Goulder, Lüdemann does not bother to argue that Marian apparitions are necessarily natural and solely psychological events.

5.4.2.3. More than 500

Lüdemann is incredulous of the appearance to the more than five hundred, since "it is improbable that such an event witnessed by more than five hundred people should otherwise have left no trace" outside of 1 Corinthians 15:6. He instead understands the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 as underlying this appearance. But neither has the event in Acts 2 left any trace outside of that passage. And why must the Pentecost event reported in Acts be behind the appearance to the more than five hundred reported by Paul decades earlier? Given the form criticism approach employed by Lüdemann, we would anticipate an argument in the opposite manner: Paul reported an appearance to more than five hundred at one time. We have no narrative of this event. The number became embellished over time and we find the initial report reworked by Luke in the Pentecost event where about three thousand converted (Acts 2:41)!

Moreover, the smaller we postulate the size of the crowds, it would seem that there would be a corresponding shrinking probability that the brothers of Jesus would become attracted to the phenomena as Lüdemann proposes, since the draw would be less. He must also explain why Paul believed that some of the more than five hundred were still alive and could be examined as witnesses.[156]

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[152] This is a widely circulated story portraying the longstanding honest character of the first president of the U.S.A. But it is a legend.
[153] See Habermas ("Explaining," 2001), 30-31.
[154] See section 5.3.2. above.
[155] See section 5.3.2. above.
[156] Lüdemann (2004), 41.

Lüdemann argues that this appearance resulted from "mass ecstasy," claiming he has shown how this could occur with his explanation for how Peter's experience was contagious to the other disciples. What he has actually provided is an unverified speculation supported by the example of another unverified speculation pertaining to Peter. The group appearance to the more than five hundred is not as easy to dismiss as Lüdemann imagines.

5.4.2.4. Paul

Lüdemann's characterization of the appearance to Paul is crucial to his understanding of the appearances to Paul and the earliest Christians.[157] He asserts that Paul and the early Christians interpreted their visions as a bodily resurrection of Jesus, because their particular Jewish views prohibited them from thinking otherwise. I think this is also problematic. Although their Jewish views would most likely have contributed a theological component to the meaning behind 'resurrection,' Jews who believed in a resurrection of the dead held that resurrection occurs on the last day. Thus, if Paul and the early believers were to have experienced hallucinations, it is more likely that their background would have produced images of Jesus in an intermediate state of disembodiment since the last day had not yet come. In the end, if we understand Jesus' resurrection in terms of a revivification of his corpse, the resurrection narratives make sense, despite the tensions that exist between them. Paul's experience was such that he could relate both to these narratives and the Acts reports that his experience was caused by external stimuli also perceivable to some extent to his traveling companions.

Serious challenges to LH present themselves. In order to account for Paul's conversion, Lüdemann postulates dissatisfaction with Judaism and that this is reflected in Romans 7. However, the tensions Paul discusses in Romans 7 do not hint at the struggles Lüdemann suggests.[158] There is no indication in Paul's writings that he was disenchanted with the Jewish God or that he felt guilt over his actions against the Christians.[159] And the fact that Jews would have considered Jesus accursed by God (Gal. 3:13; cf. Deut. 21:23) complicates any suggestion that Paul was leaning toward Christianity.[160]

Some of the psychological conditions Lüdemann proposes may certainly have been present in the disciples immediately after Jesus' death. But Lüdemann makes for an inept psychologist. Let us suppose that I am suffering from an upset stomach. I visit my physician who informs me that an upset stomach could be the result of too much stress, a stomach virus, food poisoning, a parasite, or stomach cancer. He proceeds to ask me a number of questions pertaining to my family history, whether I had recently

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[157] Lüdemann (2004), 166. cf. Lüdemann in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000): "source criticism and tradition criticism are everything here. You have to start with Paul and see that the Gospel stories are later developments" (55).

[158] Neither does Romans 7 hint at his feeling of bondage to the Law as is suggested by Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 52, 60n15-17. Paul said the Law is by no means sin (7:7). Sin, rather than the Law, was the problem (7:13, 17, 20). The Law is holy, righteous, and good (7:12). And Paul agrees with the Law and confesses that the Law is good (7:16).

[159] Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000) offers a criticism of Lüdemann on this very point: "It is a mistake to stress [Paul's] feelings of guilt about the law because he seems to have been proud of his success in keeping it ('as to the righteousness in the law, blameless,' Phil 3:6)" (95).

[160] Gundry in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000), 112.

visited a third world country, where and what I ate yesterday, and whether I am under a lot of stress. Numerous causes can be responsible for my stomach condition. It would be irresponsible of the physician to diagnose my stomach condition as the result of a parasite merely because that was the reason for the upset stomach of a patient who visited him earlier. Similarly, although Peter's experience can be accounted for by a grief hallucination or a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, the whole of the evidence should be considered prior to selecting a preferred explanation. That is accomplished by weighing hypotheses. Lüdemann never makes such an attempt.

5.4.2.5. Symbolism and Doceticism

Lüdemann asserts that the earliest Christians believed and asserted that Jesus was raised bodily and that, shortly thereafter, some reinterpreted 'resurrection' as a symbol. These include Paul's Gentile converts and "all Christians from the first generation whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally."[161] Here Lüdemann projects his own anti-supernatural bias onto the first-century theists in a demeaning manner. One can recognize in Lüdemann "the spirit of modernity with its inability to stomach the miraculous."[162]

He admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief."[163] Despite this admission, he is certain that Paul's Gentile converts, probably those whom Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15, were among those interpreting resurrection in a symbolic manner. However, as noted in our response to Goulder, there is no hint that they were reinterpreting the resurrection; rather, they were denying it (1 Cor. 15:12). In other words, these Gentiles in Corinth who, given their culture, naturally preferred the concept of disembodied existence may have been denying that the corpse is raised. They may even have denied an afterlife altogether.[164]

Perhaps they reinterpreted resurrection symbolically and Paul characterized their position as denial. If we are to understand their position in this manner, Paul is correcting them by saying Jesus was raised and so shall believers be raised, too. In support, he cites what both he and the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. Responsible historians must assign greater value to the claims of the purported eyewitnesses even if they may not choose to believe their reports.

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[161] Lüdemann (2004), 178. We may observe Lüdemann (2004) straining in order to make his claim of symbolic interpretation fit. Having acknowledged that "the resurrection was from the very beginning understood in bodily terms," he adds, "Still, we can recognize the somewhat ironic nature of the process thus far described, since the real origin of early Christianity's resurrection belief was a vision—which, as a subjective representation of a reportedly objective 'event,' comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection" (180). Stated differently, a subjective vision prompted belief in the perceived objective event of Jesus' bodily resurrection and, thus, serves as a symbol for the latter. Lüdemann says this "comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection." This is a desperate move and does not support his contention that there were early Christians who understood Jesus' resurrection symbolically. The Gnostics of the second-century are the first clear example who regarded it in this manner.
[162] L. T. Johnson (1996), 34.
[163] Lüdemann (2004), 180.
[164] See n60 above.

It seems unlikely to me that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels are a response to docetic beliefs as Lüdemann proposes. If bodily resurrection was the original view as he acknowledges, symbolism and docetism were in response to it. If the Evangelists were responding to symbolism and docetism, it was to correct them and bring about a return to the original teaching.[165] They could have accomplished this either by recounting the narratives that had been passed along by the apostles or by inventing them. Although Lüdemann would hold the latter, it is by no means required and has no effect on RH, which does not depend on the accuracy of the resurrection narratives. Neither does Docetism necessarily deny bodily resurrection.[166] The Gnostic Cerinthus maintained Docetic views but taught that *Jesus* died and was resurrected while *Christ* remained a spiritual being.[167] Moreover, if Luke and John were inventing stories to combat the docetic idea of a Jesus who existed in a 'spiritual,' that is, an immaterial sense, why portray Jesus as appearing, disappearing, and materializing through walls at will (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26)? Why portray the appearance to Paul as a light from heaven (Acts 9:3-5)?[168]

Aside from Lüdemann's speculations pertaining to communities who held to a symbolic view of resurrection, if I have argued correctly pertaining to the beliefs of Paul and the other apostles, then what we do know is profound: Paul and the Jerusalem apostles were all proclaiming that Jesus had been raised bodily and had appeared to them. At some later point, probably three to seven decades after Jesus' crucifixion, the Evangelists wrote narratives portraying the event of Jesus' resurrection, all of whom clearly tell of a bodily resurrection. In other words, without a single known exception, all of the original apostolic leaders and all of the relevant Christian literature strongly believed to have been penned in the first century are of a single voice in their proclamation that Jesus had been raised bodily.

There can be no doubt that this belief was challenged not only by those outside of the early Church, but also from some within it (1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). Lüdemann also cites the later Gnostic literature as examples of those who interpreted 'resurrection' other than as a transformed revivification of a corpse.[169] But this in no

[165] See Craig (1989), 335.
[166] See Craig (1989), 336-37.
[167] Iren. *AH* 1.26.1.
[168] See Wright (2003), 606.
[169] Although Lüdemann (2004) cites Gnostics and others as members of the "next generation of those who denied the bodily resurrection . . . [and] belonging to the late first and early second centuries," he admits that "we have no sound way to place [their interpretation] of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief" (178). Nickelsburg (2006) has a similar thought but proceeds without caution: "The tendency [to objectify 'Jesus' presence by emphasizing bodily features and functions' in the canonical Gospels] may have been a corrective to stories that were originally narrated in the tradition of angelophanies or divine epiphanies and that may have presumed that the exalted Christ appeared from heaven. This viewpoint is amply documented in second-century Gnostic sources" (247). This is a place where our discussion of sources in chapter three proves helpful. Nickelsburg here prefers second-century Gnostic sources over first-century canonical Gospels and the strong testimony of Paul, all of which regarded Jesus' resurrection as something that occurred to Jesus' corpse. This is a flimsy move at best and an irresponsible use of sources. When we can solidly conclude that the Jerusalem apostles and Paul were, to the best of our knowledge, teaching the bodily resurrection of Jesus, why should second-century Gnostic sources whose authorship and source material remain very uncertain be given priority pertaining to the original claims about the nature of the appearances? I hasten to add that if we do not allow Clement of Rome and Polycarp in our investigation—two sources which have more promise than any of the Gnostic sources of bringing us back to apostolic traditions, we are not warranted in allowing the Gnostic sources.

way changes the fact that the purported eyewitnesses believed that Jesus had risen bodily from the dead and had appeared to them.

Before moving on to weigh LH, I would like to address Lüdemann's accusation that, for Paul, Jesus' return would be imminent, so that the fact it has yet to occur two thousand years later argues against Jesus' resurrection, given the interconnectedness of Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and glorious return. I believe this objection can be quickly answered in its present form: Either Paul misunderstood the Jerusalem apostles or the Old Testament scriptures to which he may have appealed pertaining to the timing of Jesus' return, or Paul is himself misunderstood by some of those who read him. Neither option undermines a case for Jesus' resurrection that is built upon the relevant historical bedrock and does not depend on Paul's theology being correct. Furthermore, Jesus' death and resurrection are even more closely connected throughout the New Testament literature. If we follow Lüdemann's logic, we would have to deny Jesus' death if we were to deny his resurrection. This is something the nearly universal consensus of scholars, including Lüdemann, would rightly be unwilling to do.[170]

We can strengthen Lüdemann's case by including Jesus' teachings pertaining to his return as found in the canonical Gospels.[171] For the moment, we must assume that these reflect the authentic teachings of Jesus. Otherwise, we could only claim at most that the tradition with which the Evangelists were familiar was mistaken. The language Jesus employs is apocalyptic in genre and leaves ambiguity in the interpretation of the relevant text. A number of interpretations do not involve unfulfilled prophecy pertaining to Jesus' return. And even if we interpret certain texts in a manner that understands Jesus as mistaken, I see no reason in principle why one could not simultaneously hold that Jesus was mistaken about the timing of his return and that he was raised from the dead.[172]

5.4.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Lüdemann's hypothesis (LH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.

1) *Explanatory Scope*. LH accounts nicely for Jesus' death by crucifixion. Indeed, the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead. LH likewise accounts for the appearances in individual and group settings, the appearance to Paul, and the appearance to James to boot, regarding the experiences as psychologically induced phenomena. LH meets this criterion nicely and matches GH in this regard.[173]

[170] Lüdemann (2004): "Jesus' death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable" (50).
[171] As examples, see Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matthew 10:23.
[172] Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) believes that Jesus was mistaken in a number of matters and also holds that he enjoys postmortem existence and actually appeared to his disciples (146-47, 375).
[173] In a tie-breaker, we might introduce second-level facts such as the appearance to James and redo the exercise. In this case, LH would be superior to GH in its explanatory scope since it accounts for the appearance to James whereas GH does not.

2) *Explanatory Power*. Similar to GH, LH nicely explains Jesus' death by crucifixion. However, as with GH, LH sometimes pushes the facts in order to make them fit. For example, in order to get Paul into the frame of mind to experience a hallucination, Lüdemann posits a strained interpretation of Romans 7. Furthermore, although he admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief," he adds, "Still, we can recognize the somewhat ironic nature of the process thus far described, since the real origin of early Christianity's resurrection belief was a vision—which, as a subjective representation of a reportedly objective 'event,' comes very close to a symbolic or a non-literal understanding of the resurrection."[174] If I am understanding Lüdemann correctly, he asserts that the earliest Christians had subjective visions they were convinced were bodily appearances of Jesus, which in reality was a non-bodily Jesus. Thus, the early Christians came close to a non-literal understanding of resurrection! Again, *if* I understand Lüdemann correctly here, we may note that this is a desperate move of great strain on his part in order to support a component of his hypothesis lacking in explanatory power. Lüdemann could simply delete this component of LH, since its truth does not demand it. However, the lack of explanatory power in relation to the appearance to Paul is highly problematic for Lüdemann, since explaining it adequately may be perhaps the most crucial component of LH.[175] LH fails this criterion since it has less explanatory power than VH.

3) *Plausibility*. Is LH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? LH relies on collective hallucinations to account for the group appearance(s) to the disciples. But we have already seen that such an event is not supported by the professional literature in psychology and is implausible. Regarding Lüdemann's proposal that the brothers of Jesus were caught up in the "mass ecstasy" that was behind the experience of Pentecost, it seems more likely that Jesus' unbelieving brothers, especially James who was apparently quite pious about his Jewish faith, would have regarded their dead brother as a heretic rather than rush to Jerusalem and be caught up in such group ecstasy as Lüdemann would have us believe. And if the Gospels accurately report that Jesus was chided and rejected by his brothers who thought him at times crazy (which LH grants), it seems more likely that Jesus' execution as a criminal and blasphemer would have supported their continued unbelief rather than their conversion to a faith that especially pious James would have regarded as apostasy. Since all historians are selective in their content, the possibility remains that there are unknown data that would strengthen Lüdemann's view. But we do not necessarily expect these. We may also imagine some of Jesus' brothers desiring to see a way in which Jesus was not accursed by God. But this does not come close to relieving the current tension. This aspect of LH is convenient, but it lacks plausibility. Because LH and GH are based on psychohistory, it is difficult to determine which has greater plausibility. Because GH heavily relies on a position that has been largely rejected by scholars for some time (i.e., a rift between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership) and offers only a weak case for its acceptance, whereas LH does not heavily rely on such a position, LH may be said to possess greater plausibility

[174] Lüdemann (2004), 180.
[175] Lüdemann (2004), 166.

than GH. What happens when we compare the plausibility of LH to VH? VH is so lacking in explanatory scope and explanatory power that it does not attempt to account for or describe the nature of any of the appearances. While we may fault VH for its failure in these criteria, we must not confuse that with its plausibility. Since VH does not postulate what happened to Jesus, it cannot be said to be implied to any degree by accepted truths. But it lacks plausibility in that it is not implied when Paul's experience of the risen Jesus appearing to him is taken into account. On the other hand, LH and VH could be said to be implied to a degree by the fact that religious experiences that may best be accounted for in natural terms are common. However, LH lacks plausibility since it relies on a collective hallucination(s) to the disciples, which is not in accordance with accepted beliefs among psychologists. Moreover, that Jesus' skeptical brothers and especially James were caught up in "mass ecstasy" that resulted in their belief that their brother had risen from the dead and had appeared to them is implausible. However, since the appearance to James does not belong to our relevant historical bedrock, I will not penalize LH related to it. Still, LH trails VH in plausibility.

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. As with GH, this criterion may be where LH is weakest. LH posits many psychological conditions in so many different people, in friend and foe, in different situations, within individuals and groups, and all without an ounce of solid evidence. It possesses the appearance of being an attempt to salvage a favored but failing hypothesis. We might accept Lüdemann's explanation of hallucination if Peter was the only one to have an experience of the risen Jesus. In this case, a natural explanation would certainly be superior to a supernatural one, since it is highly plausible that the conditions existed for Peter to have a hallucination, although he could just as well have become angry with the one whom he now believed to have been self-deluded or deceptive. But Peter is not the only one to claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus. The appearances occurred in both individual and group setting, and to friend and foe. This makes it challenging for those like Lüdemann who must engage in numerous *ad hoc* constructions in order to bolster explanatory scope.[176] LH certainly fails to pass the 'less *ad hoc*' criterion, since it is far more *ad hoc* than VH.

5) *Illumination*. As with GH, I think it a legitimate claim that, if true, LH provides illumination pertaining to numerous ancient religious experiences. Accordingly, LH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, LH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). It is also noteworthy that LH fails three of the four most important criteria. Moreover, we observed that there are numerous problematic elements to LH aside from and prior to weighing it by our criteria for the best explanation.

[176] Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): "The apologists for the faith say that the sightings of Jesus must, given the reports, have been objective. One person can hallucinate, but twelve at the same time? And dozens over an extended period of time? . . . These are legitimate questions, and waving the magic wand of 'mass hysteria' will not make them vanish" (269).

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P

Lüdemann asserts that his conclusions are "solidly based on historical scholarship" and "sober insight."[177] My observation is that it is instead based *entirely* on numerous speculative conjectures, some of which are implausible, and presupposes an atheistic worldview that he fails to support.[178]

[177] Lüdemann (2004), 209, 203.
[178] For what I regard to be a far more fair and sophisticated use of psychological speculations that bespeak of significant reflection on the impact of his own bias, see Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 213-28 (on bias); 269-99 (on the appearances).

5.5 John Dominic Crossan

5.5.1. Description of Crossan's View. The works of John Dominic Crossan have received more attention than perhaps those produced by any other member of the Jesus Seminar. His kind demeanor and quick wit makes his writing enjoyable reading. When discussing the resurrection of Jesus, Crossan is far more interested in discussing its meaning and our response than he is the question of historicity. The historical question is "not invalid," but is "simply less important than the question of meaning."[179] Because the historical question has been debated for so long with few minds changing in the process, Crossan says we are at an impasse in this "irreconcilable debate"[180] and that the historical question "is probably unanswerable."[181]

5.5.1.1. Six Problems. Crossan names six problems that are present when proposing a literal resurrection. First, it *requires a theistic worldview.* An approach to the resurrection that views it as a historical event "requires a 'supernatural interventionist' understanding of the way God relates to the world." But do we see God acting in the world in this way?[182] Crossan does not think so. "I have made certain judgments about what I'm going to call 'divine consistency'—how God works in the world. Not what God 'can' do—that I bracket completely—but what God 'does' do. I don't think it was different in the first century from the twentieth."[183]

Second, the literal view *lays down a stumbling block for non-theists.* The debate over historicity is "a stumbling block for people who have difficulty believing that these stories are factual. If these think that believing these stories to be historically factual is essential to being Christian, they think they can't be Christian."[184]

The third objection is *ethical* in nature. The view that God has raised only Jesus "privileges Christianity as the only true or 'full' revelation of God, the 'only way.'"[185]

Fourth, arguments that approach Jesus' resurrection literally, whether for or against its historicity, fall prey to *cultural misunderstanding.* The conservative cannot argue that Jesus' resurrection was unique, since similar accounts existed in antiquity. And skeptics who argue that these kinds of things simply do not happen are not dealing

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[179] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185; cf. 29.
[180] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 173.
[181] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185; cf. 29.
[182] Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18.
[183] Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 515; cf. Crossan (1995), 215. Crossan in Halstead (1995-96): "I am completely, totally convinced that reason and revelation cannot contradict one another unless we're misreading one or the other or both. That's absolutely rock bottom for me. In the realm of theory, I would say that revelation surely rules reason. In the realm of practice—I would have to tell you, if you had a vision and you were going, like Abraham, to execute your son, I would call the police. Even if I was completely convinced that you were convinced that you weren't lying, I would call the police. Reason and revelation work in tandem for me" (513; cf. Crossan [1995], 214). Crossan's example is stacked to gain emotional assent. What if Crossan had lived in Nazi Germany and one of his colleagues informed him that he had a revelation that he was to assassinate Hitler, would he still call the police?
[184] Borg and Crossan (2006), 191-92.
[185] Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18.

adequately with a pre-Enlightenment worldview held by the ancients who believed that they did.[186]

Fifth, the literal view does not adequately take into account the *difficulty in the sources.* There are differences among the resurrection narratives that are difficult to reconcile and the language that is employed to report them often does not seem to be what is commonly employed to report historical events.[187]

Finally, the focus on a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection *neglects meaning*. Crossan (and Borg) distinguish between viewing Jesus' resurrection as *history* and *parable*. By *history*, they mean that Jesus' resurrection and appearances could have been photographed or videotaped.[188] By *parable*, they mean that the meaning or truth behind the resurrection "is not dependent upon whether they are historically factual."[189] And to argue over whether a parable is historical "misses its point."[190] Since scholars rarely get beyond the question of historicity, the question of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is usually neglected.[191] For Crossan and Borg, focusing on the meaning behind the resurrection stories "is always the most important question. The alternative of fixating on 'whether it happened this way' almost always leads one astray."[192]

Although I am in full agreement with Crossan that the question of meaning is as important today as it was in the first century, the present research focuses on the question of historicity and we will assess Crossan's hypothesis (CsH) on those terms.

5.5.1.2. The Appearances

Crossan acknowledges that the apostles believed Jesus had risen from the dead. He explains the appearance traditions in a number of ways. Starting with Paul, Crossan contends that his experience of the risen Jesus occurred while in a trance, since Luke's three accounts in Acts all agree on its "dissociative" and "ecstatic" character.[193] Relying on the work of Erika Bourguignon and a few of her doctoral students, Crossan explains that "*ecstasy*, *dissociation*, or *altered states of consciousness*" occur when brain chemistry moves critically above or below its normal range. "Trance, therefore, can be produced by any critical change, be it decrease *or* increase, in the external stimulation of the senses, internal concentration

[186] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 185.
[187] Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.
[188] Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.
[189] Borg and Crossan (2006), 192-93. Elsewhere Crossan (1995) refers to the empty tomb and appearances as parables (216).
[190] Borg and Crossan (2006), 193.
[191] Borg and Crossan (2006), 192; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 173.
[192] Borg and Crossan (2006), 194. Elaborating in an endnote, they contend that disputes over creation and evolution, intelligent design and random evolution "would not have occurred without the modern (Enlightenment) conviction that truth equals factuality" (219n19). Although Crossan is in agreement, these thoughts appear to be primarily those of Borg. See Borg (2006), 281, 333-34n24.
[193] Crossan (1994), 88, 167, 168; cf. Crossan (1995), 204. Crossan and Reed (2004) bracket the "blinded-by-light sequence and imagine instead a vision in which Paul both *sees* and hears Jesus as the resurrected Christ, the risen Lord. It need not be added that, then as now, dreams and visions are hard-wired possibilities of the human brain. But, of course and always, their value depends on contents and results, purposes and intentions, means and ends" (8).

of the mind, or chemical composition of the brain's neurobiology."[194] The content of these psychological phenomena is guided "by cultural training, control, and expectation." As a result, those having the experiences may only borrow from what they already know.[195] "[T]he *what* of trance, is absolutely psychosocially conditioned and psychoculturally determined."[196] Pre-Christian Paul must have known at minimum certain contents of the Christian *kerygma* that he opposed. Crossan thinks that "it was their opening of Judaism to paganism and their willingness to abandon any ritual tradition standing in their way that had caused his initial persecution of Christianity, and it was precisely what he had persecuted them for that he now accepted as his destiny."[197]

Crossan presumes (cautiously) that Paul's trance in which the risen Jesus appeared to him was the only actual appearance and was the dominant experience of the risen Jesus.[198] How then are the appearances to the others reported in the early *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 and the resurrection narratives to be understood? Crossan says the experiences of the risen Jesus involved "different options and combinations [of "*trance*, *life-style*, and *exegesis*"] for different followers and different groups within earliest Christianity."[199] There were other visions, but they were not the only way in which the continuing life of Jesus was acknowledged and came *after* their belief in God's continuing power and presence through Jesus rather than serving as the cause of it.[200] Accordingly, Paul listing his experience on par with the others equates "its validity and legitimacy but not necessarily its mode or manner. Jesus *was revealed* to all of them, but Paul's own entranced revelation should not be presumed to be the model for all others."[201]

Approaching the resurrection narratives, Crossan contends that Mark invented his story of the empty tomb.[202] The original passion narrative was to be found in a hypothetical *Cross Gospel*, which Crossan dates to the 40s and contends was "the

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[194] Crossan (1994), 87. Like Goulder in Copan and Tacelli, eds. (2000, 91), Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) denies that this type of experience is a hallucination (33). As with GH, in order to eliminate ambiguity and vagueness and to convey CsH clearly, I will refer to Crossan's description of Paul's "trance" as a hallucination.
[195] Crossan (1994), 87, 168.
[196] Crossan (1994), 88.
[197] Crossan (1995), 204.
[198] Crossan (1994), 169; Crossan (1995), 209.
[199] Crossan (1994), 169. In support of seeing Jesus in an exegetical experience, see Pierce (1995), 140.
[200] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 34; Crossan (1995), 209, 216. See also Koester (2007), 244. Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005) thinks that an interpretation of Jesus' resurrection as "essentially a state enjoyed inwardly" may have been quite early (207). Elsewhere (*LJC*, 2003) he comments that Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim. 2:16-19 may have taught such a view and if 2 Timothy is dated between AD 70-100, it was held by some long before Valentinus (530).
[201] Crossan (1995), 204; Crossan (1994), 169. In Borg and Crossan (2006), an appeal to Paul's Damascus road experience as reported in Acts is made: "Those traveling with Paul did not share the experience, indicating that it was a private and not a public experience. In short, it was what is commonly called a vision. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that Paul thought of the appearances of the risen Jesus to Jesus's other followers also as visions. In the list of appearances in 1 Corinthians, he uses the same verb, 'appeared,' for their experience and for his own" (206-07; cf. 277). "Moreover, the fact that [Paul] includes his experience in this list [i.e., 1 Cor. 15:3-8] suggests that he saw it to be like theirs. Thus Paul provides reason to think of the Easter appearance stories in the gospels as visionary in nature" (207). We are probably reading Borg rather than Crossan in this matter, since it is contrary to what Crossan has earlier written (1994, 169; 2004, 8). Accordingly, I have not employed it here.
[202] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 33.

original passion narrative" and "is the single source of the intracanonical passion accounts."[203] Although now lost, he adds that we are reading a redacted form of it in the *Gospel of Peter* and even find traces of it in the canonical Gospels. Despite all this, none of the reports is historical. They presume the appearances in Paul's list but completely reformulate them.[204] Since Jesus' disciples had fled, no one would have known where his corpse had been placed. They could only hope that Jesus had received a proper burial according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23.[205] "[B]y Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care."[206]

Crossan notes that the appearances in the resurrection narratives differ from Paul's experience. There is no blinding light, no voices, no falling to the ground. Instead, they are "profoundly political" and "have nothing whatsoever to do with ecstatic experiences or entranced revelations," but are instead interested in "authority, power, leadership, and priority." Presuming the Christian community, "they detail the origins of Christian leadership, not the origins of Christian faith."[207] They do this just as Jesus' nature miracles speak about "the apostles' spiritual power over the community" rather than "Jesus' physical power over the world."[208]

Crossan observes this occurring in the story of the appearance to the Emmaus disciples.

> What we have here is not an event from Easter Sunday but a process that happened over many years. The presence and empowerment of Jesus remain in the community as it studies the scriptures 'about' him and shares a meal of bread and fish together. This is not trance but exegesis, not ecstasy but eucharist. Luke, however, has broken up that eucharist of bread and fish so that now only the bread is a eucharist while the fish is a remarkably crude proof that Jesus is not a ghost. . . . But you can still see what was there before Luke started work on it: two missionaries leave Jerusalem, experience the full presence of Jesus through Scripture and especially Meal, most probably of bread and fish, and return to Jerusalem to report.[209]

Crossan notes the "awkward syntax of 24:33-35" where it is said, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon."[210]

> But that awkward syntax is quite deliberate. We have just seen those two followers encounter Jesus, but *before* they can tell the others, the others tell

[203] Crossan (1991), 385, 429. Crossan (1995), 223. Koester (1990) asserts that the *Gospel of Peter* preserves the original resurrection narrative that was redacted by the Evangelists (240).
[204] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.
[205] Crossan (1991), 387, 392. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 128 and Lüdemann (2004), 97.
[206] Crossan (1991), 394.
[207] Crossan (1995), 203, 208; Crossan (1994), 169, 170; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.
[208] Crossan (1994), 170. For examples, see 174-78; 182-86 and Crossan (1991), 396-410.
[209] Crossan (1994), 172; cf. Crossan (1995), 205-05. That *resurrection* means the continued power and presence of Jesus, see also Borg in Borg and Wright (1998), 135; Wedderburn (1999), 147-48. Harrington (1986) asserts that, for the early Christians, the resurrection of the body simply referred to belief in life after death (99).
[210] Crossan (1994), 172; cf. Crossan (1995), 207.

> them about Simon Peter. Only then do they get to recount their story. Peter's witness preempts theirs: *specific leader* over *general community*.[211]

One may also observe a discussion over the priority of leadership in John 20:2-8 where Peter and John run to the empty tomb upon hearing Mary's report. This "race" between Peter and John illustrates "a duel over authority" in the early Church.[212] Since apparitions in the resurrection narratives are designed to confer authority on the recipient, arguing over the historicity and nature of the appearance misses the point. "The point is that here, unlike with Paul, we are dealing with quite a different phenomenon. These are dramatizations of power and visualizations of authority."[213] Given this, the first Christians would have been insulted had someone suggested that their lost faith was restored on the first Easter after experiencing a number of apparitions.[214] They may have lost their nerve and fled but they did not lose their faith and quit.[215]

5.5.1.3. The Meaning of Resurrection

What did the earliest Christians mean when they proclaimed that God has raised Jesus from the dead? If the appearances were visions experienced while in a trance (e.g., Paul), communal experiences of ecstasy (e.g., the appearance to the more than 500), or created from exegesis to be symbolic of Jesus' continuing power in the Church and felt presence in the eucharist, how did Paul, the Evangelists, and many of the earliest Christians come to claim that Jesus had risen bodily from the grave?

For Crossan, the answer is an equation: apparitions plus eschatology equal bodily resurrection. Crossan disagrees with Wright's contention that an empty tomb and apparitions get one to a belief in bodily resurrection. Because an individual bodily resurrection ahead of the general resurrection was such a large mutation of the existing Jewish doctrine, an empty tomb and apparitions are not enough. They could only get one to "an *absolutely unique assumption* or *extraordinary heavenly exaltation* of Jesus as Christ, Lord, and son of God." From this we would expect to find appeals to Psalm 2 and 110 and early Christian hymns such as Philippians 2:9-11.[216] To get bodily resurrection, in addition to the apparitions, the early Christians must also have had an understanding of Jesus' statements that the kingdom of God had already come and was present, even if not fully consummated.[217]

For Crossan, the Christians understood that God's "Great Clean-Up" of the world had begun. This was not the end of the world but its "cosmic transformation" from evil, injustice, impurity, and violence into a world of justice, peace, purity, and holiness.[218] They mutated the Jewish concept of the general resurrection, which was not only imminent, it had already begun.[219] Each person has two programs from which to

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[211] Crossan (1994), 172-73; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 200-01, which appears to be primarily the words of Borg. See Borg (2006), 281, 286.
[212] Crossan (1995), 207.
[213] Crossan (1994), 170; cf. Crossan (1995), 206.
[214] Crossan (1995), 209-10.
[215] Crossan (1995), 209.
[216] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 177.
[217] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 26, 38; cf. 33.
[218] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 24, 25.
[219] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 25-26.

choose: the power of Rome that conquers to gain peace or the humble program of Jesus that seeks justice in order to obtain peace.[220]

While the Romans were proclaiming the deity of Caesar, Christians were proclaiming the deity of Christ. Crossan says we cannot know whether the Romans or the Christians actually believed, in a literal sense, the deity of Caesar and Christ. We do know that a confession of deity was meant in a "programmatic" sense. To confess that Caesar or Christ is Lord meant that you were *getting with their program*.[221] The Christian program included God's vindication of Jesus who, as risen Lord, is in opposition to the thugs of this world like Caesar. It also included eschatology: The kingdom of God had come.[222]

There were numerous ways to say that God's Great Clean-Up had begun. Resurrection was just one of them. Crossan asserts that the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* "were concerned with departure and return, passion and parousia, not death and resurrection. They could imagine Jesus being with God and returning in triumph but never have to mention resurrection at all. Where, then, did all the emphasis on resurrection come from? In a word, from Paul."[223]

If God's program is to clean up this world rather than shut things down and escort the righteous to heaven, the clean-up must involve "*transformed* physicality." All of creation must be renewed, including bodies. Furthermore, God's justice must redeem the tortured bodies of the martyred, such as those killed during the Seleucid persecution described in 2 Maccabees 7.[224] Therefore, understanding that God's kingdom had come, Paul and some other Christians concluded that "God's Great Clean-up" began with the general resurrection of which Jesus was the "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:12-13). Since there was a backlog of martyrs to be vindicated, Jesus could not have received a privileged position over them in resurrection. His resurrection was not God exalting Jesus as supreme over all others.[225] It was about the commencement or inaugural event of God's Cosmic Clean-Up. As the liberator, he was resurrected with them, so that divine justice came first to the past in preparation for the present. This corporate rather than individual resurrection event is portrayed in the harrowing or robbing of hell which will be discussed immediately below. The remainder of the general resurrection of those still alive would occur within the imminent future.[226]

Paul did not literally mean that Jesus' corpse was resurrected leaving behind an empty tomb, but wrote in poetic terms. Jesus lived, died, and is still alive. Accordingly, resurrection did not involve Jesus' corpse, which had become food for scavengers.[227] Paul is employing metaphors. Jesus is God in the sense that he represents God's program. Jesus is risen in the sense that "people are experiencing the power of God

[220] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 28.
[221] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 28, 128.
[222] Borg and Crossan (2006), 208.
[223] Crossan (1994), 163. See his comments on the *Epistle of Barnabas* (149-52).
[224] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 25, 175-76; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 172-73.
[225] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) refers to such an interpretation as "impossible" (181); cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 173-74.
[226] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 27, 176, 180-81; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 208-09.
[227] Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 520. See also Crossan (1994), 126-27; Borg (1999), 131; Craffert (2002), 98.

through Jesus all over the Western Mediterranean world. That's how we know he's risen."[228] Paul would regard a belief in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus as theological "Yuk."[229] For him, *resurrection* was "the only possible way" to express Jesus' continuing presence and is tied to an imminent general resurrection. However, since the end did not come and still has not, today we may ask if *resurrection* is the best way to describe what was being experienced and believed by the early Christians.[230]

5.5.1.4. The Harrowing of Hell

Crossan admits that what persuades him most to go with a metaphorical understanding of *resurrection* is the harrowing (or robbing) of hell theology found in a hymn (*Odes of Solomon*), images (found in two ancient churches), a narrative (*Gospel of Peter*), two texts in 1 Peter (3:18b-19; 4:6), and a "weird residual fragment" in Matthew (27:52-53).[231] If taken literally, there would have been many, perhaps hundreds, of empty tombs around Jerusalem on that first Easter.[232]

The harrowing of hell is clearly presented in the *Odes of Solomon* (42:10-20; end of first century or early second century AD). The relevant statements in the text are as follows:

> Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me.
>
> And I made a congregation of living among his dead; and I spoke with them by living lips.
>
> And those who had died ran toward me; and they cried out and said, 'Son of God, have pity on us. And deal with us according to your kindness, and ring us out from the chains of darkness. And open for us the door by which we may go forth to you, for we perceive that our death does not approach you. May we also be saved with you, because you are our Savior.'[233]

The harrowing of hell appears in the iconography of the Greek Orthodox Church. The first appears in St. Sargius Church in Old Cairo while the second in the Chora Church in Istanbul.[234]

The harrowing of hell is likewise found in the *Gospel of Peter* (10:39-42). In this text, Jesus emerges from the tomb being carried by two angels. While the heads of the angels extend to the clouds, Jesus' head extends above the clouds. Following them out of the tomb is a cross. Crossan imagines a procession in the shape of a cross rather than a "walking and talking wooden cross." A voice is heard from the heavens

[228] Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 521.
[229] Crossan in Halstead (1995-96), 521.
[230] Crossan (1994), 164-65; cf. Crossan in Copan, ed. (1998), 53; Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 178.
[231] Borg and Crossan (2006), 181; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.
[232] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 182; cf. 27.
[233] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181; Crossan (1995), 196-97. The English translation is the one provided by Borg and Crossan (2006), 179.
[234] Borg and Crossan (2006), 180-82; cf. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

asking whether those who sleep have been preached to. The procession answers, "Yes."[235]

Although the harrowing of hell does not fit into a more historically sounding narrative as we find in the canonical Gospels, it fits "with moving beauty into the poetic language of hymn and chant."[236] Crossan and Borg provide additional Petrine texts as examples: 1 Peter 3:18b-19 and 4:6.[237]

> 1 Peter 3:18b-19: θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζῳοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν [19] ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν
>
> having been put to death in the flesh but made alive in spirit [19] in which also he went *and* preached to the spirits in prison[238]
>
> 1 Peter 4:6: εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη, ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι.
>
> For this reason, the gospel was preached even to the dead, in order that they may be judged in the flesh *as before men* and that they may live in the spirit *as before God*.[239]

Crossan contends that those coming out of a Pharisaic understanding of the general resurrection would have to be thinking in terms of something like the harrowing of hell, which must be "very, very early."[240] But in time, four reasons contributed to its

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[235] Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 389; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 176-77.
[236] Borg and Crossan (2006), 178.
[237] Crossan (1991) stated that the harrowing of hell "may not even be mentioned in the New Testament" (388) and did not appeal to the two texts in 1 Peter until his book co-authored with Borg in 2006. Realizing that authors do not always agree on everything in a book they co-author, I asked him if he had changed his opinion on the matter pertaining to 1 Pet. 3:18b-19 and 4:6. In a personal email to me from Crossan dated May 21, 2008, he stated that he had, indeed, changed his mind and was convinced that the harrowing of hell is present within hymn fragments in these texts.
[238] My translation. This text contributes to the discussion pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection body taught by the early Christians. Peter makes no other comments pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection body. Accordingly, he could here be referring to Jesus' being put to death in his physical body but raised in his spirit only (i.e., a *spiritual* or *ethereal* resurrection). This seems to me to be the easiest translation. However, the datives may be rendered as locatives of sphere: "having been put to death *in the sphere of the flesh* but made alive *in the sphere of the spirit*." In other words, Jesus was killed within the sphere of earthly existence (or in a body animated by the flesh) and made alive within the sphere of heavenly existence (or in a body animated by the Spirit). This interpretation would resemble Paul's thoughts in 1 Corinthians 2 and 15. See also Romans 1:3-4. The NET provides a translation of 1 Peter 4:6 that also seems plausible to me: "Now it was for this very purpose that the gospel was preached to those who are now dead, so that though they were judged in the flesh by human standards they may live spiritually by God's standards." Moreover, I have argued earlier (chapter 3.2.3.4.d; 4.3.3.9) that it is very probable that the Jerusalem apostles—of which Peter was a member—were reporting that Jesus had been raised bodily. If I am correct, an interpretation of 1 Peter that regards Jesus' post-resurrection state as one of disembodiment is unlikely in so far as either 1 Peter is Petrine in authorship or it reflects his thoughts.
[239] My translation. It is initially tempting to render κατὰ ἀνθρώπους as "as men." However, it then becomes difficult to translate the parallel κατὰ θεὸν ("as god"). See Ramsey, M. J., *1 Peter* in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series (Dallas: Word, 2002), 238.
[240] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 388; cf. 27; Crossan (1995), 197; Borg and Crossan (2006), 182.

marginalization.[241] For one, it was an "intensely Jewish-Christian" tradition "and the future did not lie with that stream of tradition."[242] Second, it is "serenely mythological."[243] Jesus was killed by demons, descended according to plan, and emerged victoriously.[244] Third, it created numerous doctrinal problems: Did those whom Jesus led out of hell need to become Christians prior to their release? Did they need to be baptized? Who was freed—everyone or just the righteous?[245] The fourth reason was the most potent: How could Jesus have led forth the corporate resurrection of the just straight into heaven and have appeared alone to his disciples prior to his ascension?[246]

Crossan thinks that a trace of the harrowing of hell appears in Matthew 27:52-53, which may have been an attempt to solve this fourth problem that eventually brought about its marginalization.

> καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεῴχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, [53] καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.
>
> and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had been sleeping were raised, [53] and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, went into the holy city and showed themselves to many.

This strange report in Matthew 27:52-53 attempts to retain the corporate harrowing of hell and the individual pre-ascension appearances. However, "the magnificent harrowing of hell is already lost in that fragment's present redaction."[247] A later attempt has the apostles and teachers leading the harrowing of hell after their deaths.[248] For Crossan the marginalization of the harrowing of hell is "one of the most serious losses from earliest Christian theology."[249]

A Summary of Crossan's Hypothesis (CsH)

- A literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection is confronted with six problems: It requires a theistic worldview, which goes against our observation. It sets up a stumbling block for non-theists who may otherwise become Christians. It privileges Christianity as the only true religion. It misunderstands the culture in which the stories of Jesus' resurrection appear, since similar stories are present in other religions. Numerous theological and textual problems surface when Jesus' resurrection is interpreted literally. Finally, a literal interpretation tends to neglect the meaning behind Jesus' resurrection.
- Paul experienced a hallucination of Jesus while in a trance. This was the only actual appearance of Jesus to someone.

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[241] Crossan (1991), 388-89; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 182-84.
[242] Crossan (1991), 388.
[243] Crossan (1995), 197; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 182.
[244] Crossan (1991), 388.
[245] Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 388.
[246] Crossan (1995), 197; Crossan (1991), 388.
[247] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.
[248] *Similitudes* of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (9:16:5-7). See Crossan (1991), 388-89; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 183-84.
[249] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 181.

- Other Christians perceived that God's kingdom was still present and operating after Jesus' death. These perceptions came through exegesis, visions, and both corporate and individual psychological experiences of ecstasy, all of which occurred *after* they were convinced that Jesus was still alive in some sense and that God's kingdom was still present among them.
- *Resurrection* was only one way the early Christians expressed the presence and power of God's kingdom through Jesus.
- The *Cross Gospel* was the original passion narrative and has been partially preserved in the *Gospel of Peter*, which predates the canonical Gospels, although its present form reflects redaction. That is, the *Gospel of Peter* in its present form postdates the canonical gospels.
- The empty tomb narrative in the canonical Gospels was invented by Mark.
- The appearances reported in the canonical Gospels differ significantly from Paul's entranced visionary experience. They have nothing to do with actual appearances but rather are expressions of authority and priority within Church leadership. The early Christians would have been insulted by those who interpreted the resurrection narratives in a literal sense.
- The early Christians understood that God's "Great Clean-Up" of the world had begun and that the final consummation of God's kingdom would soon occur. Some of them did not think in terms of Jesus' resurrection (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Letter of Barnabas*). Others, of whom Paul is most prominent, mutated the existing Jewish concept of the general resurrection on the last day. God had started the general resurrection through Jesus who led a procession of dead saints with him. It was a corporate rather than an individual resurrection.
- Paul did not believe in the literal bodily resurrection of the corpses of Jesus and those he had liberated from hell. *Resurrection* was the metaphor he used. He believed that Jesus lived in an embodied existence, but it was a body with no continuity with his corpse, which still lay in a spot unknown to the Christians, decomposing and being devoured by scavengers.
- The harrowing of hell theme present in the *Cross Gospel* and the *Gospel of Peter* (i.e., the earliest Gospel traditions) is very early and demanded by the same background beliefs that brought about the belief that Jesus had been resurrected. In time this theme was marginalized.

5.5.2. Analysis and Concerns

Crossan offers a unique view of Jesus' resurrection that is unsurpassed in its innovation. Far from the standard naturalistic hypotheses we have thus far examined, Crossan takes us onto new ground. And we admire the winsomeness and humility with which he asks us to consider his proposal while acknowledging its weaknesses.

5.5.2.1. Crossan's Six Initial Concerns

Crossan provides six initial concerns that present themselves when proposing a literal interpretation of Jesus' bodily resurrection. His first concern is that it requires a theistic understanding of the world and he does not see God acting in the world in the manner portrayed in the Gospels. We have already discussed the problems with this objection,[250] but two may be noted here. While Crossan has not observed God's open

[250] See chapter 2.2.2.

and miraculous activities in the modern world, many others claim that they have.[251] Thus, the pool of experience from which Crossan draws is quite limited. Second and more important, if God's Son had actually visited the earth, reports of phenomena not normally observed in his absence would be of no surprise.

Crossan's second concern with a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection is that it may thwart non-Christians from embracing the Christian faith. This objection is a *red herring*, since it distracts from the issue of historicity with another issue that is not logically related. It needs to be noted that this objection does not in any sense address the *historicity* question. Rather, it is a pragmatic concern for those interested in evangelistic efforts. Crossan may want others to identify themselves as Christians in the sense he promotes. But would his definition of *Christian* be recognizable to the early Christians? And has Crossan considered that many who presently embrace the Christian faith might become uninterested in it if Crossan's definition is what it actually means to be a Christian? If he is truly interested in removing a stumbling block, he must recognize that in doing so he places a new one that may be even larger.[252] The belief that Messiah was crucified and risen was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles in the first century (1 Cor. 1:23; Acts 17:32) and Crossan's objection is a reminder that it remains so to this very day. Regardless of how we tally the net gain or loss of Christian church membership, how the faith is best marketed is not a concern for the historian.

Crossan's third concern is *ethical* in nature: the view that God has raised only Jesus sets up Christianity as the only true religion. This objection is likewise a *red herring*, irrelevant to historical inquiry. It ignores truth, being concerned with the 'what now?' rather than the 'what occurred?' What if following Jesus' teachings *is* the only way to please God while other religions fall short in this regard? Crossan's proposal would actually lead many away from the truth.

In July 2007, my mother discovered a lump on her right breast. She was 67 years old at the time and had not had a mammogram in more than five years. She quickly scheduled an appointment with her physician. After running a number of tests, the physician called with sobering news. She had stage four breast cancer than had spread to her lymph nodes and back. The physician recommended several months of chemotherapy, followed by surgically removing her right breast and lymph nodes, followed by seven weeks of radiation, followed by a few more months of special medications. My mother was told that it would be a difficult process. She would feel sick and fatigued, would lose her appetite and her hair, and would age. However, this was a necessary course if she wanted to have a chance of surviving cancer. What if her physician had then added the following: "Of course, there are others who would contend that there are no guarantees that all that I have recommended will work and that you should instead increase your vitamin C intake, frequently eat chicken soup

[251] For examples of scholars, see, Dale Allison, Gary Habermas, Craig Keener, and J. P. Moreland.
[252] Recent data reveals that there is a general trend among North American Christian churches. Those moving to the left are losing members while those taking firmer orthodox positions are gaining members. See Eileen W. Lindner, ed. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches: When Did We See Thee Sick: Congregations Respond* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2008). See also the 2007 results at "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" by The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life located at http://religions.pewforum.org/reports (accessed May 28, 2008). This report shows that Evangelical Protestant (26.3%) and Catholic churches (23.9%) attract more U.S. adults than Mainline Protestant churches (18.1%).

and think positively. While I would not recommend such a course, who am I to say that they are wrong and, thus, privilege my opinion?"

We would regard such a statement from a medical professional to be absurd. Why then is it acceptable from a religious scholar such as Crossan? It must be that he is indifferent to or does not regard as true the particular religious claim in question, such as Jesus' resurrection. But he *a priori* excludes this possibility before an examination of the data. The ethical objection should be offered only after a close examination of the data and a firm conclusion that Jesus did not rise from the dead has been made. Crossan's ethical objection is an emotional, even political, appeal that says, "Can't we all just get along?" But it is not historical. He has put the cart of theological implications before the horse of historical truth.[253]

The ethical objection is also culturally insensitive, since it favors one cultural attitude over another. As previously noted, while Crossan's ethical objection may appease those who do not possess strong convictions toward a particular religious tradition, it may tend to alienate those who do. Accordingly, if one of the purposes of Crossan's proposal is to unite, it is bound to fail in that respect.

Amy-Jill Levine provides a strong counter-argument against contentions articulated by those like Crossan in his second and third concerns:

> We are not inevitably directed [towards pluralism], as the continuing publication of parochial materials demonstrates. Nor is a non-pluralistic approach necessarily a betrayal of cultural awareness, of scholarship, or of 'theology.' Scholars should be free to choose their audiences, and a non-pluralistic reading can have claims to historical credibility. A better case will need to be made that we should sacrifice parochial values to the idol of pluralism or cultural sensitivity. Exclusivism should not be 'morally dubious,' as the blurb claims. One may disagree with the biblical text, or a reading of it, but that disagreement should not prevent others, individuals or churches, from holding exclusivist interpretations. What I would find more 'morally dubious' is my insisting to another that his or her reading or presuppositions, because they are not pluralistic, are somehow wrong. In some contexts, a parochial reading may be warranted. The evangelical Christian should be free to try to seek to convert me to Christianity: such an attempt is biblically warranted and consistent with evangelical (exclusivist) theology. I remain free to say 'thank you, but no thanks.' I would not want someone telling me that my 'cherished confessional traditions' have only limited value. I would not presume to do the same to another.[254]

A few years ago I had a public discussion with a Muslim professor on the campus of Old Dominion University. During the question and answer period one of the audience members asked me why the Muslim professor and I hated one another. Now we had been very collegial to one another during the evening's event. I responded that I did not hate him and did not sense that he hated me. If I were to say that his views were as valid or as factually true as my own, he would not respect me and regard me as weak

[253] A problem of which Ehrman is likewise guilty. See chapter 2.5.3.
[254] Levine, A-J, "Homeless in the Global Village" in Penner and Stichele, eds. (2005), 195-96.

and lacking in religious convictions. This is especially true in Middle Eastern culture. I added that such a comment would be rather insulting, since both of us are strongly persuaded that our own religious tradition is true to the exclusion of the other. Accordingly, if I were to assert that the Muslim view is as valid as the Christian view, he would understand my comment as a significant demotion of Islam. I ended by stating that it is certainly possible for us to disagree in the strongest sense with the other's cherished views while acknowledging and even defending the right of the other to have them. We do no less in the political arena.

Crossan's fourth concern contends that cultural misunderstanding occurs when it is debated whether Jesus rose literally from the dead. For example, the conservative fails to recognize that similar traditions exist in other religions and, thus, are not meant to be interpreted in a literal sense. Crossan's concern is valid to an extent, since there were a few myths of dying and rising gods that predate Christianity. However, their impact is significantly trimmed when we are reminded that none of these provide a clear parallel to Jesus. In fact, the first clear parallel is not until at least a hundred years after him.[255] Moreover, the number of miracles ascribed to anyone within two hundred years before and after Jesus is very small in comparison.[256] Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the nearly unanimous consensus among historical Jesus scholars is that the evidence warrants the conclusion that Jesus performed amazing deeds both he and his followers regarded as miracles and

[255] See Habermas (2003), 30; Habermas ("Replies," 2001), 78; Mettinger (2001), 221; Montefiore (2005), 114; Wagner (1968), 269; Wright (2003), 36. Perhaps the most recent thorough treatment on the subject of dying and rising gods in the ancient Near-East is that of T. N. D. Mettinger (2001). Mettinger states that the scholarly consensus lay with the position that there was no clear motif of the dying and rising god in antiquity. However, he takes issue with the consensus and argues that his recent research has led him to a different conclusion: "There is now what amounts to a scholarly consensus against the appropriateness of the concept [of dying and rising gods in the ancient near-eastern world]. Those who still think differently are looked upon as residual members of an almost extinct species. The results of my investigation led me to challenge this scholarly consensus and to disagree with a number of colleagues whom I greatly esteem" (7). Mettinger's work is impressive. He argues there are three fairly clear examples of a dying and rising god in the ancient Near East (Dumuzi, Baal, Melqart) and possibly two others (Eshmun and Adonis) (218). Mettinger arrives at four conclusions as a result of his research: (1) "The world of ancient Near Eastern religions actually knew a number of deities that may be properly described as dying and rising gods" (217). (2) These examples existed "long before the turn of the era, in pre-Christian times" (217). (3) "One should not hypostasize these gods into a specific type '*the dying and rising god.*'" On the contrary, the gods mentioned are of very different types, although we have found tendencies to association and syncretism" (218). (4) "The gods that die and rise have close ties to the seasonal cycle of plant life. The summer drought is the time when their death may be mourned ritually. The time after the winter rains and floodings may provide the occasion for the celebration of their return" (219). What about Jesus as a dying and rising god? Mettinger says that the answer is beyond the scope of his study. However, he makes the following notes: (1) For the earliest Christians "the resurrection of Jesus was a one-time, historical event that took place at one specific point in the earth's topography. The empty tomb was seen as a historical datum" (221). (2) Whereas the dying and rising gods were closely connected to the seasonal cycle with their death and return reflected in the changes of plant life, the death and resurrection of Jesus "is a one-time event, not repeated, and unrelated to seasonal changes" (221). (3) "The death of Jesus is presented in the sources as vicarious suffering, as an act of atonement for sins. The myth of Dumuzi has an arrangement with bilocation and substitution, but there is no evidence for the death of the dying and rising gods as vicarious suffering for sins" (221). (4) "There is, as far as I am aware, no *prima facie* evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions. The riddle remains" (221).

[256] Twelftree (1999), 247.

exorcisms.[257] The same may not be said of many other ancient figures, since wholesale legendary influence and other naturalistic explanations are more probable in many instances.[258]

Crossan also chides skeptics who argue against these kinds of events occurring, since they do not adequately deal with the worldview held by the ancients who believed they did. However, skeptics existed in antiquity as today.[259] So, not all of the ancients would have believed that the sort of actions attributed to Jesus actually occurred. Moreover, skeptics interested in the historical question of Jesus' resurrection should not be prohibited from such an investigation because they have a different worldview. Historians need to comprehend the worldview of those they are investigating in order to have a better understanding of the things they describe. Notwithstanding, all historians are inevitably going to judge the historicity of ancient reports according to their own worldview. In fact, we observed in his first concern that Crossan himself is guilty of this very practice. Crossan today does not see God acting in the manner described in the Gospels and concludes that he did not act that way in the first century.[260]

Crossan's fifth concern is that a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection introduces a number of difficulties related to the sources. There are irreconcilable differences in the narratives and the language employed does not appear historical. This has already been addressed above and will be addressed further below.[261] For here, we only need remember that conflicting accounts do not warrant the conclusion that *both* are mistaken. Moreover, the differences among the accounts occur mostly in the peripheral details and a core may be easily identified. Furthermore, the language employed concerning Jesus' resurrection is much more at home when taken in a literal rather than metaphorical sense (more on this below).

Crossan's sixth and final concern is that those who focus on a literal understanding of Jesus' resurrection often neglect the meaning it conveys. I agree with Crossan. But this only reminds scholars that there are practical applications to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. This is not a reason to abandon the historical question. In addition, if scholars abandoned the historical question and focused only on meaning, their

[257] See chapter 4.2.1.
[258] See chapter 2.5.4.
[259] Davis (1993): "The record of Thomas's reaction to talk of the resurrection in John 20 and the record of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers' reaction in Acts 17 would seem to suggest that the idea of a dead man living again was no less intellectually scandalous to first-century people than it is to us. On the whole, I believe first-century people were no more superstitious, credulous, or just plain stupid than we are" (37-38). Although many ancient historians did not *a priori* dismiss the possibility of miracles on philosophical grounds as many do today, they viewed such stories with skepticism. Hemer (1990) notes "the fluctuation and ambivalence between skepticism and credulity which characterizes many of [the ancient] writers. In any case the supernatural is little more or less than an anomalous curiosity" with historians in antiquity (428–29). He goes on to say, "It is clear that ancient writers were not completely naïve or gullible, but accepted or rejected miraculous stories on the basis of their regard for the evidence, albeit differently weighted than modern historians. See for example Herodotus (2.73) on the story of the Phoenix" (441). For examples of historians of the period closer to the time of Jesus and who did not accept miracle claims uncritically, see Tacitus, *Annals* 1.28, and Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, e.g., Nero 56 and Vespasian 4.
[260] Crossan (1994):"I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life" (95).
[261] See chapter 2.5.1 and section 5.7.2.4 below.

opinions would collide on the meanings they ascribed to *resurrection*. The impasse Crossan dislikes would not be eliminated. Crossan might answer that at least we would be discussing how to fight social injustice. While that would certainly yield benefits, it may reveal that Crossan is more interested in anthropology and theology than in history. We may admire a historian who works to reduce social injustice in his off hours. However, this should not be his primary concern when acting within his professional capacity as a historian. When it is, the integrity of his historical work is in danger of being compromised.[262]

It is likewise important to observe that Crossan's interpretation of the meaning of resurrection is inextricably linked to his historical conclusion: "By *resurrection*, the early Christians did not mean a crude literal understanding that Jesus' corpse had been raised but rather that God's power and presence in Jesus can still be experienced in his absence." A similar meaning can be seen in a literal understanding of resurrection: "Because Jesus literally rose from the dead, his claims that God's kingdom had come were true. Forgiveness of sins is available allowing God's power and presence in Jesus to be experienced even by those who never met him." A skeptic may come to an opposite historical conclusion and meaning: "Jesus did not rise from the dead. The experiences of Paul and the early Christians involved only natural phenomena such as hallucinations, group ecstasy, and political polemic. Although they sensed God's continued power and presence in their fellowship, it was all a delusion, since I do not see an actual God acting in this way today. Contemporary experiences of a similar kind are likewise delusional. Although this may bring comfort and direction to some, we may ask whether it better to live a life of delusion or face and deal with reality. And what are the potential dangers to the prosperity and safety of our nation and world when someone choosing delusion is calling the shots?" I also find myself in agreement with atheist Gerd Lüdemann who comments that "it is meaningless to write anything about the 'reality of the resurrection' if its nonhistoricity is certain."[263]

Crossan may reiterate his contention that the historical question pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus is "probably unanswerable" in this "irreconcilable debate." However, in doing so he would fail to recognize that the impasse is largely a result of the conflicting horizons of the historians participating in the debate. Since this problem is not unique to historical questions of a religious nature, many historical questions in non-religious matters would likewise need to be abandoned if Crossan's concerns were to be applied consistently.

In summary, three of Crossan's six concerns with focusing on a literal understanding of Jesus' resurrection are not historical in nature and need not be of concern in our present investigation. Crossan is certainly free to go beyond the historical question and ask how his historical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection may apply to our

[262] The same principle applies to those who set out to confirm the historicity of Jesus' resurrection using historical method. That is why the careful and persistent application of controls throughout an investigation is essential.

[263] Lüdemann (2004), 17; cf. R. Brown (*Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 1994), 165. Another point is worthy of consideration. Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006) notes that the early Christians were off regarding their timing of the future consummation of God's Great Clean-Up by 2,000 years and counting (178). What then are we left with according to CsH? Did the Great Clean-Up not begin after all or were the early Christians only wrong about a future consummation?

present situation. But he is then acting more in the capacity of theologian and anthropologist than historian. His other three concerns provide welcome warnings that historians should proceed only with great caution.

5.5.2.2. Sources

There are serious challenges to the attempt to identify hypothetical earlier strata in the relevant written sources as Crossan does. For one, direct evidence is absent and the indirect evidence offered is matched by counter-evidence that is usually at least equal in strength.[264] Second, since horizons have tremendous influence in historical investigation, and especially the one on which we have embarked, historians must proceed with great caution. Crossan appears negligent in this respect. His portrait of the historical Jesus largely depends on sources he regards as early (*Cross Gospel*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Secret Gospel of Mark*, *Gospel of Thomas*, and the Egerton papyri). But they are regarded as late and of dubious value for the task by most scholars.

The same approach occurs when Crossan postulates on Jesus' resurrection. He claims to be able to extract from the *Gospel of Peter* (the relevant text is represented only in the Akhmîm fragments from the seventh-ninth centuries) a passion and resurrection narrative from a hypothetical *Cross Gospel* (which he dates from middle of the first century) that predates the canonical Gospels.[265] Stated another way, CsH is founded upon a hypothetical source that, after being redacted, is detected primarily and most accurately in a single source of uncertain origin and character and is attested in only a single late manuscript.[266]

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[264] C. A. Evans, "In Appreciation of the Dominical and Thomistic Traditions: *The Contribution of J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright to Jesus Research"* in Stewart, ed. (2006), 56. During a discussion between John Dominic Crossan and Charles Quarles at the 2004 Synoptic Gospels Study Group for ETS, Quarles provided counter-arguments that challenged Crossan's arguments for the priority of the *Gospel of Thomas*, contending that they were equally if not more plausible than Crossan's. Crossan replied that he thought Quarles' analysis of the parable of the wicked tenant "is much better" than his own (approx. 2 minutes into Crossan's reply to Quarles). Crossan went on to say that he had wrestled with the pro and con arguments for the independence of the *Gospel of Thomas*. Although he had chosen to accept the priority of the *Gospel of Thomas*, he admitted of the competing arguments, "I do appreciate that many of them come out even" (approx. 21:30 into Crossan's reply to Quarles).

[265] Crossan (1994) also asserts that the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* were concerned with passion and parousia without any thought of death and resurrection (149-52, 163). But the *Gospel of Thomas* is somewhat Gnostic in its teachings, including a disembodied postmortem existence, while *Barnabas* does mention death and resurrection, contrary to Crossan's claim (see *Barnabas* 5).

[266] Nickelsburg (2006) makes a similar move: "In 28:1-10, Matthew combines Mark 16:1-8 with another story about the empty tomb, which is independently attested in *Gos. Pet.* 35-44, and which plays up miraculous elements that Matthew has dampened" (237). As previously stated, while most scholars propose that we can be assured we are reading earlier tradition when it is simpler and appears less embellished, this principle apparently will not do for Nickelsburg when it comes to the *Gospel of Peter*, which appears far more mythical than the canonical Gospels. In order to get around this, Matthew has "dampened" the narrative found in the *Gospel of Peter!* But Nickelsburg's imagination does not stop there. He argues that an ambiguity is present in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that renders a bodily resurrection interpretation difficult, even in the presence of an empty tomb. "Jesus materializes and disappears suddenly (Luke 24:31-32, 36; John 20:19, 26); he is mistaken as a mysterious stranger (Luke 24:31-32) or a gardener (John 20:15); he is thought to be a spirit, that is an angel or a ghost (πνεῦμα, Luke 24:37) or is simply not recognized (John 21:4); the disciples disbelieve (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:38-41; John 20:24-29). This suggests an apologetic tendency in the tradition that objectified Jesus' presence by emphasizing bodily features or functions (Luke 24:35-43; John 20:24-27) or, later, by citing neutral or antagonistic witnesses. The tendency may have been a corrective to stories that were originally narrated in the tradition of angelophanies or divine epiphanies and that may

It is difficult to see how this may be regarded as a sound approach. Even a cursory reading through the *Gospel of Peter* suggests that the canonical Gospels present much more subdued versions of Jesus' resurrection. Although Crossan assigns a mid-second century dating to the extant text of the *Gospel of Peter*, he believes that it derives from a *Cross Gospel* which he dates to the 40s. Crossan's assigning of an earlier date to the resurrection narrative employed by the *Gospel of Peter* an earlier date is a reverse of the current scholarly assumption that sees the more extraordinary reports as reflecting legendary additions and which Crossan employs consistently with the canonical Gospels. Crossan may contend that the canonical Gospels have recast the resurrection narrative to read as history rather than poetry. But he has not shown that this is more plausible that the opposite which normally occurs; poetry is created in honor of historical events. And if the earliest Christians did not intend for Jesus' bodily resurrection to be understood in a literal sense, why write in a genre that would encourage such a misunderstanding when the present poetic one will do? Quarles notes that the *Gospel of Peter* contains features not found until later Christian literature. The cross appearing with Jesus is also found in the *Epistle of the Apostles* (16) and the *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter* (1), both of which probably belong to the second century. An oversized Jesus is also present in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (83:1) and 4 Ezra (2:43).[267]

We have resisted the temptation to employ sources of uncertain value as well as potential facts that would certainly bolster the Resurrection hypothesis (RH).[268] In our assessment of the relevant sources in terms of their ability to yield valuable data for our investigation, we noted that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels may be useful. However, because of unknowns, such as the amount of liberty the Evangelists may have taken in their reports, as well as the sharp disagreement among scholars pertaining to their reliability, we have chosen to use them only when necessary and to rely more heavily on earlier sources about which more is known and a greater agreement exists within a heterogeneous majority of scholars. We rated both *Gospel of Thomas* and *Gospel of Peter* as *unlikely* in terms of their ability to yield valuable data for our investigation. The speeches in Acts and Polycarp's letter to the Philippians were both rated *possible* while Clement of Rome

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have presumed that the exalted Christ appeared from heaven. *This viewpoint is amply documented in second-century Gnostic sources*" (246-47, ital. mine). The problems with Nickelsburg's conclusions are numerous. First, if the empty tomb and physical tendencies in the accounts were apologetic as Nickelsburg suggests, why would the Evangelists retain supposedly contrary elements, such as Jesus' ability to appear and disappear at will? Why not simply omit them? Second, details regarded as difficulties by Nickelsburg are easily resolved if we allow the Evangelists to speak for themselves, assisted by Paul, rather than look for conflicting layers of tradition that the Evangelists were frantically attempting to reconcile. The Evangelists report that Jesus was resurrected in a corpse that had been transformed into an imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spirit-empowered body. With such a body it is not at all difficult to imagine an empty tomb, eating food and being touched, appearing and disappearing at will, and keeping others from recognizing him at times. The disbelief of the disciples upon seeing Jesus is explained elsewhere (see chapter 4.3.2.6). And third, in a sense more shaky than Crossan, Nickelsburg appears to place an unwarranted amount of weight in the "second-century Gnostic sources." This is flimsy at best and an irresponsible use of sources.

[267] C. L. Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 117. For the more detailed critique, see 106-20.

[268] Examples of sources include the Speeches in Acts, *1 Clem.*, Pol. *Phil*., and the canonical Gospels to a large extent (chapter 3.2.1; 3.2.3.3; 3.2.5.1-2). Examples of potential facts include Jesus' predictions of his violent death and subsequent vindication by God (chapter 4.2.3), the appearance to James (chapter 4.3.4), and, possibly, the empty tomb (chapter 4.3.5).

received a rating of *possible-plus*. Accordingly, Crossan has based a significant portion of his hypothesis on sources having a far more questionable pedigree than those we have restrained ourselves from using.[269]

5.5.2.3. Metaphor

Can modern historians know whether a report or claim was intended to be interpreted literally or metaphorically? Crossan answers that it is nearly impossible. He asks whether the Romans and Christians literally believed in the deity of Caesar and Christ. He answers, "I think the honest answer is: we do not have the faintest idea, and we do not even know how to figure it out."[270] For the first Christians and for us today, "Jesus was and is divine for those who experience in him *the* manifestation of God." For Crossan, the word of great importance here is "*the*." When a husband says that his wife is *the* most beautiful woman or his newborn daughter is *the* most beautiful baby in the world, he and everyone else recognize that his claim is not meant to be understood in the strictest literal sense. In reality, she is *a* beautiful woman or baby. It is the same with one's claim that Jesus is *the* way rather than *a* way. Problems only appear when someone understands such a statement literally so that it negates similar statements by others.[271]

This does not appear to be an accurate reading of the early Christian texts. In Romans 10:1-4, Paul asserts that his fellow Jewish countrymen have an unenlightened zeal for God. In light of this, he regards them as condemned and needing salvation.[272] While granting the status of deity to an emperor may have originally been intended to be interpreted honorifically rather than ontologically, it seems clear that a number of Roman emperors actually believed themselves to have been divine. Many of the people may not have taken those claims seriously and merely worshiped them out of respect—and fear. But it appears that some of the emperors actually believed themselves to be a god.[273]

Is the language of resurrection found in the Gospels of a historical genre? Crossan answers in the negative.[274] He sees a development in Matthew over Peter when reading about the presence of guards at the tomb.

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[269] Crossan's approach has received criticism for this approach. The following are a few comments offered regarding Crossan's source hypothesis: Bauckham (2002): it is "largely unconvincing, at best unverifiable" (262); Evans (2006): it "completely lacks a critical basis" (98); Johnson (1996): it uncritically accepts dubious sources while being overly critical of more promising ones (47-48, 50); Wright in Borg and Wright (1998): "Despite frequent claims, a century of research has failed to reach anything like consensus on a single one of the stages in question, let alone on the hypothetical developments in between" (20-21); cf. Stewart in Stewart, ed. (2006): "More and more, awareness is increasing among Jesus scholars that the time-tested methods of source, form, and redaction criticism, apart from some other methodological ingredient, are not up to the task" (14).

[270] Crossan in Stewart, ed. (2006), 182.

[271] Crossan (1995), 216.

[272] Rom. 10:1-4; cf. 2 Thess. 1:8.

[273] On Caligula see Philo of Alexandria, *On the Embassy to Gaius* XI-XV; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.20; 59.26, 28; Suetonius, Gaius (Caligula) 4.19.2-3; Josephus, *Ant.* 19:1:6.; John Sanford, "Did Caligula have a God complex?" *Stanford Report*, September 10, 2003, reports of archaeologists from Stanford and Oxford who discovered that Caligula annexed a sacred temple to his palace. This article may be accessed at http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2003/september10/caligula-910.html (accessed May 28, 2008). On Nero see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 63.20.5.

[274] Borg and Crossan (2006), 192.

> A guard for three days now comes from Jesus' prophecy [instead of requiring three days to elapse in order to know the corpse of Jesus had not returned to life as we find in *Peter*]. Thereafter, no guard is necessary because Jesus will have been proved wrong. I find Matthew a development over Peter and not the reverse in that case.[275]
>
> Behind the guards at the tomb . . . lie apologetics and polemics along the line from Peter to Matthew. *Christians:* Jesus rose from the dead. *Opponents:* he did not, you stole his body. *Christians:* no we did not; you had guards at the tomb who know the truth, but you told them to lie.[276]

Here we find a troublesome tension in CsH: If the Evangelists and early Christians would have been insulted by a crude literal interpretation of bodily resurrection as Crossan claims, would it not be strange, even counterproductive, for those Christians to defend that very view in their polemic with opponents and by Matthew who reports it without corrective comment? In other words, if these early Christians did not believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus' corpse, why are they defending it by saying they could not have stolen the corpse since the tomb was guarded? When their opponents interpreted them as claiming Jesus' corpse had been resurrected, why not instead answer, "You misunderstand us. We don't mean Jesus' physical corpse. We are simply proclaiming that the general resurrection has begun and my fathers and yours have been rescued from hell. God's kingdom is present among us. Come and see!"

This problem becomes even clearer when 1 Corinthians 15 is given full consideration. Crossan does not venture in any detail beyond 15:7. But, as discussed at length earlier, in 15:35ff. Paul is answering the questions of those who either prefer disembodied post-mortem existence and deny bodily resurrection, believe in a postmortem existence involving a new body sharing absolutely no continuity with the present one, or deny an afterlife altogether.[277] If a literal bodily resurrection would have been theological "Yuk" to Paul as Crossan asserts, why provide comments that tend to support bodily resurrection, especially those in 15:53-54?[278]

Moreover, we certainly know that the canonical Evangelists and Paul intended their statements regarding Jesus' *death* by crucifixion to be interpreted literally, in spite of the fact that they are theologically adorned, contain differing details, and report phenomenal events such as darkness and the tearing of the temple veil (at minimum). In what sense may their statements concerning Jesus' resurrection be regarded as differing in genre?

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[275] Crossan (1995), 180.
[276] Crossan (1995), 181. Craig (1989) also notes that the apologetic purpose behind the text indicates "a tradition history of Jewish/Christian polemic" (207) but offers a number of reasons for why the story may reflect history rather than legend (211-21). He then concludes, "So although there are good reasons to doubt the existence of the guard at the tomb, there are also weighty considerations in its favor. It seems best to leave it an open question. . . . [T]he real value of Matthew's story seems to the incidental information that Jewish polemic never denied that the tomb was empty, but instead tried to explain it away" (221-22).
[277] See chapter 4.3.3.9.b.
[278] Crossan in Halstead (1995) does comment on 1 Cor. 15:50 (521). However, we have observed that his interpretation is mistaken (chapter 4.3.3.9.b).

To be sure, *resurrection* is employed occasionally as a metaphor. It refers to leaving a sinful life in darkness for one that is centered on the light provided by Christ (Eph. 5:14), to our relation to Christ (Col. 2:13; 3:1-3), and to the spiritual life of the believer (2 Cor. 4:10-13; Rom. 8:11). But Paul also employed *resurrection* in a literal sense (1 Cor. 15:53-54; Rom. 8:11, 23; Phil. 3:21). In Romans 8:11, both metaphorical and literal senses are present: The *resurrection* of our bodies can refer both to a present process and a future event (8:11, 23).

It is difficult to read the biblical texts and walk away with Crossan's interpretation without doing great violence to them.[279] After citing proposals by six scholars who interpret *resurrection* in a metaphorical sense, among whom are Bultmann and Marxsen (and we may add Crossan), the Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide commented that these proposals "strike me as all too abstract and scholarly to explain the fact that the solid hillbillies from Galilee who, for the very real reason of the crucifixion of their master, were saddened to death, were changed within a short period of time into a jubilant community of believers. . . . I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material fact of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way."[280] Davis contends rightly I think when he asserts that "an enormous burden is placed on the shoulders of anybody who wants to interpret the text in a way that cuts against the grain of that text's plain sense and that overturns the way that it has always been interpreted."[281]

5.5.2.4. The Harrowing of Hell

Since the harrowing of hell is what most strongly persuades Crossan to go with a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection, it may be beneficial to spend some time taking a further look at this Christian theme. We may first note that *all* of the references to the harrowing of hell which Crossan cites *post-date* our known earliest Christian sources, Paul and Mark, who not only appear to speak of Jesus' resurrection in physical terms but the harrowing of hell is nowhere to be found in them.[282]

Crossan's date for the *Odes of Solomon* is sometime between the late first and early second centuries. The images portraying the harrowing of hell are also late. The

[279] Davis (1993), 40; Harvey (1989), 339; Lüdemann (2004), 180.
[280] Lapide (2002), 128, especially, 129-30. The appearance of subterfuge is readily seen in the proposal of Bentz-Letts (1997): "Far from undermining the Christian affirmation of Christ's resurrection, I believe an acknowledgment of the decomposition of Jesus' body after death is compatible with that affirmation and may endow it with added power and vitality for our post-modern age. The tomb of Easter Sunday morning is indeed empty, not in the sense that Jesus' body did not return to the earth, but in the sense that we are no longer captive to those demonic forces which are leading us to emotional, social and ecological death. So with the church throughout the ages we too cry: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed" (273-74; cf. 268)!
[281] Davis (2006), 52.
[282] Borg and Crossan (2006) also appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:20 where the risen Jesus is said to be the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep (κεκοιμημένων). They note that "in the Greek original, that final phrase is literally 'those who were asleep" (176). This is a poor translation of the perfect tense, given that fourteen verses earlier Paul comments that some believers have fallen asleep (ἐκοιμήθησαν) in the years between when the risen Jesus had appeared to them and the time of Paul's writing 1 Corinthians (15:6). I list this reference by Borg and Crossan here, because I am uncertain whether Crossan himself would argue in this manner, since it is absent in his writings on the subject.

St. Sargius Church building in Old Cairo cannot be dated earlier than the fourth century and the Chora Church in Istanbul was built in the early fifth century. That, of course, is not to say that belief in the harrowing of hell was not held earlier by Christians in those cities. But they are too late for establishing what part if any the harrowing of hell played in the beliefs of the first post-Easter Christians.

For the Petrine sources, we have already noted that the *Gospel of Peter* is of a highly questionable pedigree. Crossan does not see the walking and talking cross as being the wooden one to which Jesus was crucified. Instead, he views it as a cross-shaped procession of the dead saints whom Jesus was leading out of hell. This appears allowable but it is by no means required. The text does not indicate to whom the voice in heaven is addressed. Since the question comes after the head of Jesus is said to have ascended beyond the heavens, it may be directed toward him with the saints in the cross formation providing the answer. The question may also be addressed to a wooden cross, which is following Jesus and the angels and which answers in the affirmative. I see no reason for preferring one interpretation over the other. Nothing else in the text indicates that the cross is a large formation of people. While we may assign Crossan's interpretation as *possible*, prudence limits us from going further. And when the questionable origin of the *Gospel of Peter* is added, the disciplined historian should not place much weight on the *Gospel of Peter* to support the contention that the harrowing of hell was a belief of the earliest Christians that was in competition with Jesus' bodily resurrection.

When we approach the two texts from 1 Peter, Crossan and Borg assert that, although it is debated whether 3:18b-19 refers to the harrowing of hell, there can be no question pertaining to 4:6. Comparing the two texts, one can notice some parallel thoughts:

3:18b-19
- (a) Jesus was put to death in flesh
- (b) but Jesus was made alive in spirit
- (c) in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison

4:6
- (c) The gospel was preached[283] to the dead
- (a) in order that the dead may be judged in the flesh (as before men)
- (b) but that the dead may live in the spirit (as before God)

Accordingly, if the harrowing of hell is mentioned in 4:6, the preaching to the spirits in prison in 3:19 appears to be a related activity. However, in 3:20 it is stated that these spirits were once disobedient. Were the spirits human (at least formerly) or demonic? That they were demons may be more at home with 3:18-20 but that they were humans now dead fits better with 4:6. While debating over interpretation continues, a consensus has begun to emerge within Petrine scholarship that holds that Peter is describing "Jesus' declaration of victory over demonic spirits in the lower heavens during his ascent, not descent into Hades to proclaim the gospel to the dead."[284] Thus, neither of the two texts in 1 Peter provides support of much weight for the harrowing of hell.

[283] Note that it is ἐκήρυξεν in 3:19, whereas εὐηγγελίσθη appears in 4:6.
[284] Quarles in Stewart, ed. (2006), 112.

This brings us to that strange little text in Matthew 27:52-53 where upon Jesus' death the dead saints are raised and walk into the city of Jerusalem. During Jesus' crucifixion and upon his death, Mark and Luke report two phenomena that occurred: there is darkness and the temple veil is torn in two (Mark 15:33, 38; Luke 23:44-45). John is silent on the matter. Matthew likewise reports the darkness and tearing of the temple veil but adds four more phenomena: the earth quakes, the rocks split, the tombs are opened, and the dead saints rise up and walk into Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection (27:51-54).

Brown notes that similar phenomena were reported at the death of Romulus and Julius Caesar.[285] Confining himself only to those who wrote within one hundred years on either side of Jesus' death, his examples include Plutarch (*Romulus* 27.6; *Caesar* 69.4), Ovid (*Fasti* 2.493), Cicero (*De Republica* 6.22), Virgil (*The Georgics*, Georgic 1.466ff.), Josephus (*Ant.* 14.12.3; 309) and Pliny (*Natural History* 2.30; 97). Virgil's account appears to be encomium when he reports the following sixteen phenomena that occurred after Caesar's death in a passage that is clearly poetic: prolonged darkness, dogs and birds acted unusually, Etna erupted, fighting in the heavens was heard, the Alps shook near Germany, a powerful voice was heard in the groves, pale phantoms were seen at dusk, cattle spoke portents, streams stood still, the earth opened up, ivory idols wept and bronze idols were sweating in the shrines, dark intestines appeared outside of animals in their stalls, blood trickled in springs, wolves howled, lightning appeared in a cloudless sky, a bright comet was seen.

Going more than one hundred years after Jesus, we may add that six phenomena connected to the death of Claudius were reported by Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 65.35.1). These include a comet, raining blood, lightning striking Pretorian standards, Jupiter's temple opening up by itself, bees swarming in the camp, and an incumbent of every political office dying. Philo (*On Providence* 2.50) claimed that eclipses were omens of the impending death of a king. However, phenomena were not limited to the death of a king. Dio Cassius (51.17.4-5) reported eight phenomena when Julius Caesar enslaved Egypt: It rained where it had never rained previously, it rained water, blood, and weapons from the dead, the sound of musical instruments was heard, a huge snake appeared and let out a loud hiss, there were comets, apparitions were seen, images frowned, and the image of the bull deity Aris lamented and wept.

Also of interest is the comment by Lucian (AD 170) of how he embellished a story for the sake of "dullards" (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 39): Having just described Proteus's public suicide at which he was present, he wrote the following to Cronius:

> I had no end of trouble, telling the story to all while they asked questions and sought exact information. Whenever I noticed a man of taste, I would tell him the facts without embellishment, as I have to you; but for the benefit of the dullards, agog to listen, I would thicken the plot a bit on my own account saying that when the pyre was kindled and Proteus flung himself bodily in, a great earthquake first took place, accompanied by a bellowing of the ground, and then a vulture, flying up out of the midst of the flames, went off to Heaven, saying, in human speech, with a loud voice: 'I am through with the earth; to Olympus I fare.' They were wonder-struck and blessed themselves

[285] R. Brown (*Death*, 1994), 1120-27; cf. 1114.

> with a shudder, and asked me whether the vulture sped eastwards or westwards; I made them whatever reply occurred to me.[286]

Lucian noted their credulity, then added that shortly thereafter he heard a gray-haired man with beard who presented himself in a very credible and believable manner telling about Proteus's suicide, swearing that he had seen a vulture flying out of the pyre and that he had just seen him walking cheerfully in the Portico of the Seven Voices, wearing white clothing and a garland of wild olive.[287]

Josephus (*War* 6:288-309) tells of numerous wonders that accompanied the destruction of the Temple: a star shaped like a sword hovered over the city, a comet appeared and remained for a year, during one night for one hour a light that was as bright as daylight shone on the altar and the holy house, a cow gave birth to a lamb in the temple, the eastern gate of the temple's inner court which could hardly be moved by twenty men opened by itself, chariots and angels were seen in the clouds surrounding the city, while in the inner court of the temple the priests felt a quaking and heard a large number of people say, "We are departing from here." Jesus the son of Ananus went around Jerusalem for four years predicting the impending destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Josephus reports that even the strangest of these things actually happened.

That the biblical writers were familiar with and employed this type of language seems clear. The sun goes down at noon in Jeremiah 15:9. In Amos 8:8-9, the earth will quake and the sun will go down at noon. In Zephaniah 1:15ff. and Joel 2:2, the day of the Lord is described among other things as "a day of darkness and gloom" (ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου). Later in the passage Joel adds the following:

> It will come about after this that I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29] Even on the male and female servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days. [30] I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. [31] The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. [32] And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls (2:28-32, *NASB*).

In Acts 2:15-21, Peter quotes from this text and indicates these things were being fulfilled in their presence.

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[286] The English translation is that of A. M. Harmon, in *Lucian*, Volume V in the Loeb Classical Library (45).

[287] Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 40. Harmon notes that an eagle flew up at the deaths of Plato and Augustus, and at the martyrdom of Polycarp it was a dove (44n1). This is not so clear to me. Although Harmon provided no references, the eagle at Augustus' pyre is found in Dio Cassius' *Roman History* 56:42 and seems to be an eagle that was ceremoniously released during the event. Holmes (1999) notes that the reference to a dove at Polycarp's burning and impalement at the stake in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16:1 is only in manuscript G(L) and that the "reference to the dove is almost certainly a later addition to the text (possibly by the Pionius mentioned in the last paragraph of the epilogue)" (239n20). I was unable to locate a reference to an eagle related to the death of Plato.

The rending of rocks is reported in Isaiah 2:19 (LXX), 1 Kings 19:11-12, Zechariah 14:4, Nahum 1:5-6, and the Testament of Levi 4:1 (109-106 BC). In the last, "the rocks are rent and the sun darkened." The opening of tombs and the dead walking in Jerusalem may have a parallel in Ezekiel 37:12b-13: "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. [13] Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, my people." Compare this with Matthew 27:52-53: "the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had been sleeping were raised, and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, went into the holy city and showed themselves to many."

On the other hand, in favor of the historicity of the phenomena reported by Matthew, the darkness reported in all three Synoptics is also apparently reported by the secular historian Thallus (c. AD 52).[288] Moreover, destructive earthquakes were common in the region and can explain four of the six phenomena (tearing of the temple veil, earthquake, rocks splitting, tombs opened).[289]

A number of sources may report that these were real persons who were raised by Jesus. Ignatius may refer to them when he speaks of the prophets raised by Jesus (Ign *Mag* 9:1-2). But it is uncertain how this report was intended to be interpreted. Quadratus (AD 117-138) reported that those whom Jesus had raised continued to live for a considerable period and some even still lived (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.3.2). However, he is more likely referring to those whom Jesus raised from the dead during his earthly ministry. *Acts of Pilate* 17:1 reports that Jesus raised Simeon and his two sons, that their tombs could still be seen opened, that they were alive and dwelling in Arimathea, and that people had gone and talked with them. However, the authenticity of this source has long been questioned and it is likewise possible that this was a reference to one of Jesus' activities during his earthly ministry.

Given the presence of phenomenological language used in a symbolic manner in both Jewish and Roman literature related to a major event such as the death of an emperor or the end of a reigning king or even a kingdom, the presence of ambiguity in the relevant text of Ignatius, and that so very little can be known about Thallus's comment on the darkness (including whether he was even referring to the darkness at the time of Jesus' crucifixion or, if so, if he was merely speculating pertaining to a natural cause of the darkness claimed by the early Christians), it seems to me that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52-53 as poetic is most plausible. There is further support for a poetic interpretation. If the tombs opened and the saints being raised upon Jesus' death was not strange enough, Matthew adds that they did not come out of their tombs until *after* Jesus' resurrection. What were they doing between Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning? Were they standing in the now open doorways of their tombs and waiting?[290]

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[288] Mark 15:33; Matthew 27:45; Luke 23:44-45. For Thallus, see "The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus" (18.1) in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, Logos Libronix ECF 1.6.2.1.3.25).

[289] For references on destructive earthquakes in the Greco-Roman world, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.47, 4.13, 55; 12.43, 58; 14.27, 15.22; Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*, Augustus 47, Tiberius 8, 48, 74, Caligula 37, Claudias 22, Nero 20, 48, Galba 18, Vespasian 17; Jos. *Ant.* 15:121-22, 142; *War* 1:370-3, 377-8; 380-1; 4:285-7.

[290] Crossan (1995), 195; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.

Even if we regard Matthew's report of the six phenomena that occurred after Jesus' death as a poetic device, something which Crossan grants, Crossan's hypothesis that Matthew was thinking of the harrowing of hell is not necessarily supported.[291] Since Virgil before him and Dio Cassius afterward use a similar device, Matthew may simply be emphasizing that a great king has died. If he has one or more of the Jewish texts in mind, he may be proclaiming that the day of the Lord has come. God has once again turned his back on Israel in judgment for their disobedience and has left them for even greater punishment which would be realized in the very near future. Moreover, Crossan and Borg themselves note a major difference from the harrowing of hell in Matthew 27:52-53: "The saints are liberated by God's earthquake, not Jesus's presence, and they do not appear with him in resurrection, but only without him after his resurrection."[292] They suggest that Matthew is making a difficult attempt to fit the harrowing of hell into the resurrection narrative he had borrowed from Mark.[293] However, given the absence of any evidence of reasonable strength for the harrowing of hell theme in the earliest Christian literature, this may be a bit of a strain.[294] It seems best to regard this difficult text in Matthew as a poetic device added to communicate that the Son of God had died and that impending judgment awaits Israel.

If some or all of the phenomena reported at Jesus' death are poetic devices, we may rightly ask whether Jesus' resurrection is not more of the same. At least two observations prove helpful in providing an answer. As previously stated regarding metaphor, there is no indication that the early Christians interpreted Jesus' resurrection in a metaphorical or poetic sense to the exclusion of it being a literal event that had occurred to his corpse. Indeed, that a literal bodily resurrection was the primary intended interpretation seems clear. Moreover, if Jesus' resurrection was meant to be interpreted as a poetic metaphor, why is it that no known Christian opponent criticized the early Christians or their opponents for misunderstanding poetry as history? Why was there no known correction from any of the early Christian leaders to this effect? The early opponents proposed that Jesus survived death, his body was stolen, the witnesses were unreliable, and that the disciples hallucinated. These are all answers to claims of a literal bodily resurrection. Accordingly, interpreting the phenomena at Jesus' death as poetry does not lend support to interpreting Jesus' bodily resurrection as nothing more than a poetic or symbolic device.

5.5.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Crossan's hypothesis (CsH) by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation.

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[291] Crossan (1995), 220; Borg and Crossan (2006), 148, 150.
[292] Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.
[293] Borg and Crossan (2006), 176.
[294] The authenticity of the text has also been questioned. Evans in Stewart, ed. (2006) denies that the short passage in Matt. 27:51b-52b "has any claim to authenticity" and believes that it may be a "late-first or early-second-century scribal gloss" that attempts "to justify the Easter appearances of Jesus as resurrection, in the sense that Jesus and several other saints were the 'first fruits' of the general resurrection" as Paul understood Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:23 (195).

1) *Explanatory Scope*. CsH nicely accounts for all of the historical bedrock we have identified. It grants Jesus' death by crucifixion and accounts for the experiences and beliefs of Paul and the disciples as psychological phenomena and/or exegetical interpretations. Therefore, CsH passes this criterion and matches GH and LH in this area.

2) *Explanatory Power*. Similar to GH and LH, CsH pushes Paul's conversion experience in order to make it fit. Crossan proposes that Paul's vision occurred while in a trance and provides supporting arguments from psychology that explain how trances may occur when brain chemistry is altered. Cultural training and expectation are responsible for the content of the experience. Since Paul would have been familiar with the beliefs of the early Christians, Crossan thinks that Paul's vision while in a trance is responsible for abandoning his present convictions and promoting precisely what he had so vehemently opposed. Yet, it is precisely because of his cultural training and expectations pertaining to God, his favor of Judaism, and his cursing of Jesus who was rightfully executed by being hung on a tree that we would have expected the content of Paul's vision to have opposed rather than supported the Christian view. Crossan provides no reasons for why Paul's vision would have altered his view of the Christians and their beliefs.

   Crossan contends that the appearances in the resurrection narratives are "profoundly political" and "have nothing whatsoever to do with ecstatic experiences or entranced revelations," but are instead interested in "authority, power, leadership, and priority." He notes the awkward syntax of Luke 24:33-35, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon," arguing that it is deliberate in order to inform the others that "Peter's witness preempts theirs." However, as previously discussed, many scholars explain the awkward syntax by identifying the statement as belonging to oral tradition: the hint that it is foreign to the narrative and the hint of Christological interest.[295] Oral tradition fits more nicely as an explanation than Crossan's proposal that an awkward syntax was introduced deliberately in order to flag Peter's authority as taking priority over that belonging to the community. We may note several places where differing syntax results from the inclusion of oral tradition but we do not observe it occurring elsewhere in the sense Crossan proposes.[296] And we may ask why Luke did not simply narrate an appearance to Peter if he was attempting to emphasize Peter's authority. Further reasons for rejecting Crossan's proposal that the appearances were meant to legitimatize Church authority have been previously discussed.[297]

   Carl Braaten writes,

> We have seen that despite the form-critical consensus that the whole of the New Testament is written from the perspective of the resurrection, such non-biblical factors as a naturalistic view of history and an existentialist concept of faith have intervened to obstruct the path from exegesis to dogmatics, so that theologians will *freely invent*

[295] See chapter 3.2.3.4.b.
[296] 1 Cor. 15:3-7; Rom. 1:3b-4; 1 Tim. 3:16.
[297] See chapter 4.3.2.2.

> *interpretations that run counter to the plain sense of what is written in the New Testament and conveyed by the apostolic tradition*.[298]

Wedderburn takes an approach similar to Crossan, proposing that *resurrection* was "just a vivid way of expressing the power and the vitality of these experiences."[299] However, unlike Crossan, he admits that his interpretation "goes beyond anything that any of the New Testament writers actually say, however much I may take them as a starting-point. Indeed they may at many points contradict my arguments."[300] Crossan, however, appears clueless to this weakness in his own work.

Although the harrowing of hell is what most strongly persuades Crossan to go with metaphor, it is nowhere to be found in our earliest known sources. Crossan musters support by assigning a *possible* interpretation to a mid-second century text, an interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18 that goes against the emerging consensus (plausibility), and the strange text in Matthew 27:52-53 for which not only is a superior interpretation available, but if interpreted as Crossan does, has Matthew contradicting himself pertaining to his rendition of Jesus' resurrection. CsH is severely lacking in explanatory power and certainly trails VH in this regard.

3) *Plausibility*. Is CsH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? Crossan's portrait of the historical Jesus relies very heavily upon a chancy use of numerous sources regarded as late, of dubious value, and even nonexistent by a large majority of scholars. Crossan bases his reconstruction of the earliest resurrection narrative on a hypothetical source he dates before Paul (despite the fact that it is far more extraordinary than multiple sources he regards as later) and that has been redacted and may be detected most accurately in a single source of uncertain origin and character and which is partially preserved in only a single late manuscript. While scholars must remain open to new ways of approaching a variety of issues, Crossan's approach is unsound given our discussion of sources in chapter three. We must always keep in mind that *possible* is not interchangeable with *probable*. CsH is less plausible than VH.

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. Although CsH *a priori* excludes an interventionist view of God (i.e., theism), Crossan provides a defense of his worldview and, thus, does not fall prey to an *ad hoc* component in this respect. However, CsH employs psychohistory, which is purely conjectural. Since CsH lacks an explanation for how Paul's "entranced revelation" came to have its pro-Christian content, one

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[298] Braaten (1999), 149, ital. mine. See also Caird (1980): "Literary critics have wisely warned us against the intentional fallacy, the error of supposing that a writer meant something other than he has actually written" (61). Craffert and Botha (2003) criticize Crossan's approach: "[I]f our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic?" (20-21).
[299] Wedderburn (1999), 147-48.
[300] Wedderburn (1999), 103-04. Wedderburn sees himself as exercising similar freedoms taken by the early Church fathers. It is remarkable, then, that he even criticizes McDonald for taking the very same liberty. In his assessment of McDonald's interpretation of the experience of the Emmaus disciples, which bears similarities with Crossan's, he writes, "This sounds impressive, but on sober reflection one is left with the suspicion that the author's rhetoric has taken flight away from the text and has left the evangelist himself far behind" (255n66).

senses the presence of a *fudge factor* that can be manipulated however one desires in order to gain a lot of leeway. His appeal that second-century *Peter* made use of a hypothetical *Cross Gospel* is without a scrap of external support and lacks solid internal evidence. While Crossan assigns many of the *Thomas* logia a date that predates the canonical Gospels, contending that the former are less extraordinary and less theologically adorned, he ignores the same principle when it comes to *Peter* for which CsH is almost completely dependent. One senses in this arbitrary use of method that either a salvage operation is taking place or Crossan is taking a dream vacation where he is free from the requirements of sober historiography.[301] The *ad hoc* quality of CsH is quite strong. It is certainly more *ad hoc* than VH and perhaps even more so than GH and LH. It, thus, fails this criterion.

5) *Illumination*. If true, CsH provides illumination pertaining to the extent that the ancients could create purely symbolic stories which they cast as historical events. Accordingly, CsH passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, CsH passes two (explanatory scope, illumination) and fails three (explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*). It is important to observe that CsH passes only one of the four most important criteria.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P

[301] Johnson (1996) refers to Crossan's approach as "flights of fancy rather than sober historiography" (100); Perkins (2007): is founded on "a very thin collection of actual textual evidence and a great deal of speculative reconstruction" (125); Wright (2003): they are "based on nothing more than elaborate guesswork. We simply do not know very much about the early church, and certainly not enough to make the kind of guesses that are on offer in this area. When tradition-historical study (the examination of hypothetical stages by which the written gospels came into existence) builds castles in the air, the ordinary historian need not feel a second-class citizen for refusing to rent space in them" (19; cf. 20).

5.6. Pieter F. Craffert

5.6.1. Description of Craffert's View.

5.6.1.1. Introductory Comments. Pieter Craffert is a professor at the University of South Africa and employs the social sciences perhaps more than any of the others we have assessed. He asserts that the state of historical Jesus research primarily involves two basic traditional approaches. The first approach understands the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event. Craffert sees four problems with this view. Members of this camp are guilty of circular reasoning: The resurrection narratives serve as proof for the unique eschatological event of Jesus' resurrection and, thus, can be trusted.[302] Second, historical method becomes a moot act if it is assumed that God can intervene whenever he desires and do whatever he wants and that some can experience authentic revelations not readily observed by others.[303] But Craffert's two major objections are ethical and theological in nature. In the presence of abundant parallels in the modern world and antiquity, it is morally wrong to claim that the Christian traditions about Jesus' resurrection are historically accurate while miracle traditions in other religions are not. "It is not against the acceptance of supernaturalism as such, but against the special pleading for the one instance in history."[304] The theological objection concerns the fact that historians must employ their worldview when adjudicating on the historicity of a miracle claim. What one thinks about Jesus heavily depends upon what one thinks about God.[305] Theist Christian historians will tend to regard the Gospel reports as historical while historians who are atheists will not.

The other traditional approach understands the reports of Jesus' resurrection as a literary creation.[306] Craffert and co-author Pieter J. J. Botha ask whether an approach as offered by Crossan (i.e., the resurrection is a parable) is equally valid to or more plausible than other approaches.

> Asked differently, if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic? Cultural sensitivity not only invites all sorts of possibilities, but also makes some possibilities plausible—especially when considered within the setting of cultural realities.[307]

Craffert likewise applies his ethical and theological objections to those in this camp. He views those scholars on the left who write off the biblical stories "merely as mythological creations or creedal statements" as being equally disrespectful to "those people for whom the stories were part of reality."[308] Theologically, he accuses members of the New Quest of being guided by a metaphysics that *a priori* excludes

[302] Craffert (1989), 334.
[303] Craffert (2002), 97.
[304] Craffert (2003), 367, also 366; cf. Craffert (1989), 342; Craffert and Botha (2005), 21. See also Borg and Crossan (2006), 218-19n18 and Lindars (1986), 91.
[305] Craffert (2003), 367; Craffert and Botha (2005), 21.
[306] Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.
[307] Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.
[308] Craffert (2003), 368.

the possibility of God revealing himself in Jesus who was a miracle-worker and who rose from the dead.[309]

Craffert recognizes that the major factor influencing conclusions in the debate over Jesus' resurrection concerns worldview.

> [L]et us set the record straight that the real issue in historical Jesus research is not about textual evidence (or the lack of evidence) about these aspects. How many early texts do you need to confirm Jesus' virginal birth or resurrection? The real issue is philosophical in nature, or if you like, about world-views and perceptions of reality.[310]

Consequently, as in most other areas of historical Jesus research, current scholarship is divided in their conclusions pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. It either assumes that a supernatural event occurred or that the narratives were invented creating symbols for a reality that did not include a divine miracle.[311] According to Craffert, both of the traditional approaches just discussed share in common a lack of attention to cultural events. Their approach is the same but they differ pertaining to whether one believes that a supernatural event has occurred involving Jesus.[312]

Craffert proposes a different approach: the social scientific approach with a postmodernist view of history. This approach

> tries to avoid the application of modernist criteria of what is real, to all other people and stories. It strives to be post-modernist in that it accepts that there is more than one cultural system or view of reality. . . . In fact, it radically takes seriously the insight that *reality* is a systems phenomenon. Within this perspective, the elements of the stories lose their *mysterious* or *supernatural* character or their exotic flavour when it is realised that they properly belong in a different cultural system. They become *natural* human phenomena in specific cultural systems which can be appreciated as such.[313]

> The new historiography is part of the intellectual movement or new consciousness in Western thinking which is broadly speaking known as post modernism. It is, on the one hand, characterised by a reaction against ontological monism and, on the other hand, a defence of multiple world-views. . . . Opposed to the acceptance of a fixed register of reality, this implies the acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism[314]. . . . On the other hand, it accepts that each world-view is an expression of reality and therefore, that more than one world-view or view of reality is valid.[315]

[309] Craffert (1989), 342; Craffert (2002), 100; Craffert (2003), 366.
[310] Craffert (2003), 365; cf. Craffert (2002), 95, 97; Craffert (1989), 343, 337; Habermas in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 126.
[311] Craffert and Botha (2005), 19.
[312] Craffert (2003), 343.
[313] Craffert (2003), 369.
[314] Craffert and Botha (2005), 13.
[315] Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.

Craffert and Botha describe *cultural realities*. Some things exist ontologically but only because there is widespread agreement on the matter within human institutions. *Cultural realities* cannot be captured with language that merely describes their physical and chemical makeup. One cannot use physical and chemical descriptions to provide an adequate description of a restaurant, waiter, and table, a marriage, the government, soul flights by shamans, or demon possession. One must include meanings imported by the cultural context in which they appear.[316] Money exists in two senses. Observer-independent qualities include its physical and chemical makeup (e.g., colored paper and/or small metal objects that are perhaps flat and round) while observer-dependent qualities include the value, meaning, and roles assigned them by individuals or institutions (e.g., a paper $10 USD is worth more than a paper $1 USD or a metal Euro).[317] "The most important implication following from this is that events or phenomena can be real without being 'out there.'"[318]

Turning to the Gospels, Craffert and Botha assert

> Of the events reported in the gospels and ascribed to the life of Jesus, a very large part consists of *cultural events* which are being experienced and which belonged to their specific cultural system (they, therefore, are objectively there without being ontologically objective—they cannot be photographed or analyzed by physical or chemical analyses). Treating such events and phenomena as if they belong to the category of hard biographical data is an instance of what is called the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.[319]

In order to conduct a responsible historical investigation, historians must be able to view the reported events both from the perspective of those in the ancient context in which it appears as well as in their own modern context. In an investigation pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, Craffert contends that historians must determine what the subjects claimed or thought had occurred then compare those with their own experience in modern culture. In this manner, historians may do justice to their sources while attempting to provide an "adequate interpretation" of the event.[320] However, since there are multiple realities allowed within a postmodern approach, determining what actually occurred (i.e., the traditional understanding of historicity) becomes "highly complex" and "problematic," since multiple conclusions will always be present. Consequently, future discussions of historicity must involve "cultural dialogue, negotiation and criticism."[321]

In Craffert's approach, he claims to be less interested in determining whether a reported event occurred as he is in trying "to understand what could possibly have happened." For this he does not operate by the principle that historians "should remain free of preconceptions and assumptions" and merely paint a portrait of the past

[316] Craffert and Botha (2005), 16; cf. 19.
[317] Craffert and Botha (2005), 15.
[318] Craffert and Botha (2005), 17; cf. 15.
[319] Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.
[320] Craffert (1989), 338, 343; Craffert (2003), 369.
[321] Craffert and Botha (2005), 18.

based on facts that were mined from the literature.[322] Instead he will employ the principle of analogy.[323]

5.6.1.2. Case Study: Jesus' Walking on Water

Craffert and Botha provide an example of his approach applied to Jesus' walking on water. In agreement with Bruce J. Malina, they see a few things going on in this nature miracle.[324] It was nighttime, the disciples were exhausted, sleep-deprived, and afraid in the storm. They entered an Altered State of Consciousness or ASC, which resulted in a collective vision with "somatic, visual and auditory elements": They saw Jesus walking on water. This collective vision made sense to them given similar stories in their era where Yahwah walked on and trampled the sea (Hab 3:15) and Poseidon (Lat. Neptune) traveled across the sea on his sea creatures.[325] Moreover, there are "a number of heroes in the Greco-Roman literature who were associated with sea-walking while the idea is also found in literature on dream interpretation."[326]

Craffert asserts that from a modern perspective the experiences of the disciples *seeing* Jesus walk on water were observer dependent. He interprets them occurring within an ASC. Craffert and Botha think it "very probable" that the disciples experienced a vision they believed was Jesus walking on the Sea.[327] The cultural event occurred, that is, they had a vision they interpreted according to their horizon or religious system. They accepted this event as part of reality but from Craffert's post-modern perspective, the interpretation of the disciples may not be preferred. "[O]ntologically subjective experiences need not be taken as evidence for ontologically objective events. . . . [an] ASC experience within such a cultural setting as that of the first-century Mediterranean world need not be read as a report about someone actually walking on H_2O on the Sea of Galilee. A culturally sensitive reading does not exclude cross-cultural dialogue and criticism."[328] In other words, one does not stop with what the disciples believed about the experience, but interprets what occurred within the framework of their own worldview. Of most importance, however, is not whether this suggestion is actually correct, but that the door has been opened to encourage additional possibilities for describing events in the Gospels via the social scientific method.[329]

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[322] Craffert (1989), 337.
[323] Craffert (1989), 343.
[324] B. J. Malina, "Assessing the historicity of Jesus' walking on the sea: Insights from cross-cultural social psychology" in Chilton and Evans (1999), 351-71.
[325] Craffert and Botha (2005), 9-10. For this example they rely on the work of Cotter (1998), 148-63.
[326] Craffert and Botha (2005), 10-11.
[327] Craffert and Botha (2005), 19.
[328] Craffert and Botha (2005), 19-20. Borg and Crossan (2006) appear to be in agreement (207).
[329] Craffert and Botha (2005), 11; cf. Craffert (1989), 344n4. Although I have a strong suspicion—perhaps unwarranted—that by ASC Craffert and Botha are thinking of a natural psychological disorder such as a hallucination or delusion, I desire not to read more into their words than may be intended. After all, they may personally believe this was the nature of the ASCs but are being commendably reserved in their judgment. I will proceed as though they would qualify as an ASC a vision in which the ontological Jesus appeared but in which no one other than the person experiencing the vision could see. Also see Borg and Crossan (2006): "it is important to emphasize that not all visions are hallucinations. They can be disclosures of reality" (207).

5.6.1.3. Social Scientific Approach Applied to the Resurrection of Jesus

Craffert asserts that the social scientific approach rejects the claim that the early resurrection faith originated from the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and seeks "to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated."[330] Given their first-century worldview, what did the early Christians mean when they claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead?[331]

For those living in the ancient Mediterranean world, "visions, dreams, apparitions and the like" were "typical and normal" experiences which they regarded as "literal and real." The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus "belong to these phenomena." When the disciples saw the body of the risen Jesus in a vision they believed "they were experiencing reality," even though that reality did not require a transformation of Jesus' corpse.[332]

Since Craffert's goal is "to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated,"[333]
the portrayal of Jesus in the resurrection narratives as eating with his disciples and being touched by them presents a challenge to which he answers:

> Human brains do not need external stimuli in order to create physical or material visionary bodies. Therefore, the fact that his followers could identify him and that they experienced him in bodily form as eating, speaking and walking is no argument in favour of any physical, material body.[334]

Although the early Christians interpreted their experiences of the risen Jesus as viewer-independent ontological events where the bodily raised Jesus appeared and conversed with them, modern scholars may view them as ASC experiences. This complicates answering the historicity question: Did the resurrection of Jesus actually occur?

> [The answer] hinges on the 'it' in the question: 'did **it** actually happen'? If the 'it' (e.g. a vision) is taken in its ancient setting, the answer can be, yes, it actually happened! But it can also be taken in a comparative setting (for example, as an ASC experience), and the answer can also be, yes, it actually happened! If the 'it' is taken in a sense of misplaced concreteness—as a reference to a *supernatural event*, the answer should be no, as no such an event is being reported![335]

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[330] Craffert (1989), 340; cf. Craffert (2002), 90.
[331] Craffert (1989), 339-40.
[332] Craffert (2002), 98, 99-100.
[333] Craffert (1989), 340; cf. Craffert (2002), 90.
[334] Craffert (2002), 101; cf. Borg and Crossan (2006): "visions can involve not only seeing (apparition) and hearing (audition), but even a tactile dimension, as dreams sometimes do. Thus a story in which Jesus invites his followers to touch him or is seen to eat does not intrinsically point away from a vision" (207).
[335] Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19, bold and italics in original.

Craffert contends that his proposal does "justice to the literal meaning of the sources within their own cultural system, but also has the support of research in the neurosciences and transpersonal anthropology."[336] It is, therefore, "cross-cultural."

A Summary of Craffert's Hypothesis (CfH)

- CfH is postmodern, which accepts the validity of "multiple realities" and "radical pluralism."[337]
- Events and objects have two qualities: Viewer-independent qualities can be described in physical and chemical terms while viewer-dependent qualities are infused by the culture. A tree may be described in biological terms (i.e., viewer-independent) or it may be described as a *shelter* (i.e., viewer-dependent). Both qualities are present when an event is experienced. Thus, it is a "cultural event" and, thus, natural. Historians must be able to distinguish between viewer-independent and viewer-dependent qualities.
- Historians need to be fully cognizant of how the ancient subjects interpreted events as they explain the same events from the perspective of modern culture.
- The disciples were in an altered state of consciousness (ASC) when they experienced an appearance to them of the risen Jesus. For those living in that culture, visions and dreams (ASCs) were normal events that were regarded as real. Thus, when they experienced Jesus appearing to them in a subjective vision, they judged it as an ontological appearance of a physical Jesus, although Jesus' corpse still lay in the grave.
- The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus occurred, not in an ontologically objective sense as the Gospels are typically interpreted as portraying, but in a subjective sense. They believed strongly that Jesus had appeared to them in an ontologically subjective sense, that is, in a vision. It was real but incapable of being captured by a video camera.[338]
- Did the resurrection of Jesus actually occur? If we regard the appearances of Jesus as visions that were subjective (i.e., viewer-dependent) experiences with or without an ontological reality, we may answer in the affirmative. If we regard the appearances of Jesus as visions that were objective (i.e., viewer-independent) experiences with an ontological reality, we must answer in the negative.
- CfH should be preferred, since it honors the integrity of the texts and the beliefs of the ancients while drawing upon the social sciences for modern insights pertaining to the nature of the events.

5.6.2. Analysis and Concerns

Craffert provides a proposal unique among the six we are assessing. He combines a postmodern element with a use of the social sciences. Drawing on the work of John Pilch, Craffert provides a fresh look at Jesus' post-resurrection appearances.[339] Even in critique, Philip H. Wiebe acknowledges that Pilch has offered new challenges pertaining to identifying the nature of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances that are

[336] Craffert (2002), 97.
[337] Craffert and Botha (2005), 13, 14.
[338] Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.
[339] Pilch ("Appearances," 1998).

not fully resolved.[340] Thus, we are indebted to Craffert for his work on the subject. Nonetheless, there are a number of concerns we must address prior to weighing CfH.

5.6.2.1. 'Straw Man' Argument

Craffert is guilty of employing a 'straw man' argument. He charges traditionalists of being guilty of circular reasoning: The resurrection narratives serve as proof for the unique eschatological event of Jesus' resurrection and, thus, can be trusted.[341] I am unaware of any scholar arguing in this manner in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While a number of conservative Christian scholars embrace a methodical credulity toward the New Testament literature, they do not argue for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection in the manner suggested by Craffert. However, this misstep has no impact on Craffert's overall arguments and conclusions. So, we may move along without further comment.

5.6.2.2. Postmodernism

Craffert's appeal to a postmodern approach to history is troublesome. Although this approach may be somewhat new to biblical scholars, it is not new to historians outside of the community of biblical scholars. As noted earlier (1.2.7), debates over realist and postmodern approaches to historical research have been debated among philosophers of history throughout the past few decades, resulting in the overwhelming majority of historians identifying themselves as realists. Unfortunately, as noted in the Introduction, few biblical scholars have had any formal training in the philosophy of history and historical method or show evidence in their bibliographies of a familiarity with the literature on these subjects by professional historians. As a result, they often find themselves entering debates on these issues long after similar debates have occurred among historians outside the community of biblical scholars.

Craffert is obviously not a radical postmodernist who denies a past, any hopes of knowing it, or the truth about events. Consequently, his hypothesis does not suffer from all of the problems inherent in such a position.[342] In fact, although Craffert's language is very postmodern, he is somewhat modernist in his practice. This creates inconsistencies. For example, he promotes the "acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism," asserting that "more than one world-view or view of reality is valid."[343] But it is a select "radical pluralism," since it *a priori* excludes hypotheses including supernatural events.[344] Thus, in practice, Craffert does not acknowledge multiple realities but rather multiple ways of understanding an experience. Realist historians readily grant that much.

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[340] P. H. Wiebe, "Altered States of Consciousness and New Testament Interpretation of Post-Resurrection Appearances," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* (2001). This article may be accessed online at http://www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/4-4.htm. No page numbers are provided.
[341] Craffert (1989), 334. This is his first objection against those who interpret Jesus' resurrection as a historical event.
[342] See chapter 1.2.7.
[343] Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.
[344] Craffert (2003), 369; Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19.

He claims that his proposal "radically takes seriously the insight that *reality* is a systems phenomenon."[345] This, too, bespeaks of postmodern thought. I am in agreement to an extent that reality may be classified as a "systems phenomenon," if we limit that reality to *viewer-dependent* events. However, it is not the same with *viewer-independent* events. One who creates ontological reality is divine. When humans think they can, they are deluded.

5.6.2.3. Naturalistic Bias

Craffert's social scientific approach *a priori* requires a natural explanation and excludes those that are supernatural. Because historical facts are not vacuous of interpretation,

> [W]e are forced to set up hypotheses based upon assumptions and knowledge about human behaviour to interpret the data. . . . [T]hat forces us to accept that when the origins of resurrection faith are being considered, we are dealing with some kind of human construction. No attempt at explaining the origins of resurrection faith is without these two aspects.[346]

The question we may ask is *whose assumptions and knowledge* about human behavior are we to use for interpreting the data? Must we settle for psychohistories, such as those proposed by Goulder and Lüdemann, that are conjectures composed of compounded speculations without any direct evidence and are often built upon a foundation of metaphysical naturalism?[347] Historians are not chained to using a psychology that is stacked against the supernatural in order to obtain purely natural conclusions in their historical work.[348] They need to go beyond psychological conjectures and employ method carefully.

In critique of Crossan, Craffert and Botha ask "if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which symbolic stories can be told about any topic?"[349] We agree but rephrase the question slightly and ask Craffert "if our ethnocentric lenses exclude most cultural options from their time, is it responsible historiography to fall back onto our own way of seeing the world within which stories employing naturalistic conjectures can be told about any topic?" In requiring a natural explanation, Craffert's approach does precisely what he and Botha chide Crossan of doing. However, given Craffert's objections to entertaining a miracle hypothesis, the end result will always be the same: a natural explanation.[350]

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[345] Craffert (2003), 369.
[346] Craffert (1989), 333.
[347] Johnson (1996) reminds us of our observations pertaining to GH and LH: Explanations provided using the social sciences "are sometimes suggestive but rarely probative" (42).
[348] Craffert (2003) asserts that when *reality* is regarded as a systems phenomenon, "the elements of the stories lose their . . . supernatural character . . . [and] become *natural* human phenomena" (369). In terms of the disciples' encounters of the risen Jesus, I agree that the *seeing*, whether ocular or hallucinatory, is natural. However, if the resurrected Jesus appeared to them in an objective reality, that changes things. If within an ordinary state of consciousness they touched an ontologically physical Jesus, it was a natural action applied to a physical but supernatural being. Craffert's attempt to exclude this possibility is nothing more than a bias against such an interpretation.
[349] Craffert and Botha (2005), 20-21.
[350] The ethical and theological objections discussed below in section 5.6.2.5.

In the 2006 theme issue of *History and Theory* that focused on "Religion and History," Brad Gregory objects to a traditional (i.e., religious) confessional history because it "often privileges and seeks sympathetically to understand a given tradition at the expense of explaining others in reductionist terms."[351] He goes on to note that recent historians of Christianity

> have turned to theories of religion drawn from the modern social sciences (most often sociology, anthropology, or psychology) or the humanities (sometimes philosophy, and more recently, literary criticism or cultural theory), in an effort to treat all traditions with even-handed neutrality. Yet at the same time, however well-intentioned, this move is deeply problematic: the means and the end are mismatched, most fundamentally because the assumptions embedded in such theories are almost never impartial or neutral with respect to religion as such, however unprejudiced they might be with respect to any particular religious tradition. The result is not a neutral or objective account of what religion really is, still less a means by which to understand what religion means to its believer-practitioners. Rather, the results yield *differently* biased accounts that reflect the secular assumptions underpinning the theories.[352]

Gregory goes on to refer to a "*secular confessional history*" that is simply an antithesis of the old *traditional confessional history*. Historians abiding by it "leave no room for the *reality* of the content of religious claims . . . Consequently, spirituality, for example, can only be approached through secular psychological categories. . . . Put bluntly, the underlying beliefs of the modern social sciences and humanities are metaphysically naturalist and culturally relativist, and consequently contend that religion is *and can only be* a human construction."[353] In the end, Gregory writes, "It seems incumbent on scholars of religion to proceed as if the religious beliefs of their subjects might be true, a possibility that a metaphysically neutral methodology leaves open."[354]

Craffert refers to the principle of analogy as "one of the basic principles of all social scientific study."[355] It implies that *ad hoc* divine interventions in nature that produce events with special historical significance do not occur. We apply what we experience in the present as a guide to understanding the past. Because we do not allow excuses such as 'The Devil made me do it' in the present, we also do not grant the validity of similar claims in ancient sources.[356] He acknowledges that "this blade cuts both ways. Thus the question is not whether, but on what grounds, certain possibilities are excluded or included. The standards of everyday life are an indispensable criterion for a historian to a priori exclude certain possibilities. For that reason the historical study of the New Testament will have to include a debate on 20th century world-views."[357] Since we have already discussed a few of the more serious

[351] Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion" (2006), 135.
[352] Gregory (2006), 136.
[353] Gregory (2006), 136-37. See Craffert (1989), 333.
[354] Gregory (2006), 147.
[355] Craffert (1989), 342.
[356] Craffert (1989), 342.
[357] Craffert (1989), 343.

drawbacks to an unqualified usage of the principle of analogy, here we can only affirm Craffert's observation that *worldview plays a large part when using analogy*.[358]

Craffert is concerned that historical method becomes a moot act if it is assumed that God can intervene whenever he desires and do whatever he wants and that some can experience authentic revelations not readily observed by others.[359] However, openness to the historicity of an ancient miracle claim does not necessarily render one credulous and susceptible to all sorts of superstition. Considerations of genre, the demand for quality evidence, and methodological controls are important for all claims to historicity. In principle, a historian of Jesus might conclude that the resurrection hypothesis warrants a judgment of historicity while simultaneously concluding that certain elements in the Gospel narratives were added as encomium or were created while knowing only the historical kernel that Jesus had healed a blind person.

5.6.2.4. Altered State of Consciousness (ASC)

Although Craffert and Botha propose that an ASC can account for the 'cultural event' of Jesus' walking on water, a supernatural explanation can account equally well for the same event. The fact that it was nighttime and that the disciples were exhausted, sleep-deprived, and afraid in the storm could imply that they entered an ASC, but it could just as easily be suggested that their fear overcame their dullness of mind and their mental awareness reached an all-time heightened state when they saw Jesus walking on water. Realizing that all of them were seeing the same thing, they knew it was neither a dream nor a hallucination. This objective experience made sense to them given similar stories in their era where Yahweh walked on and trampled the sea (Hab. 3:15). They then came to have a greater understanding of who Jesus had been claiming to be: deity.

The point is that while the proposal that ASCs explain the 'cultural event' of Jesus' walk on the sea is one possible explanation, it is by no means required, since the incident can be explained as a 'cultural event' in different terms employing a different judgment pertaining to the ontological reality of what occurred. In fact, this latter explanation has the benefit of fulfilling the criterion of illumination, since it provides a reason for how the earliest Christians came to believe Jesus was divine, a question that has perplexed major scholars of Christology.[360]

Craffert and Botha differentiate between hard and soft biographical data:

> Controlling the elements, experiencing spirit possession, controlling and commanding spirits, miraculous healings, special births and the like, are stories which make sense in many traditional cultural systems and particularly in a shamanic world-view. These can all be considered soft biographical features. Hard biographical information refers to the when, where and what of a social personage such as details of place and time of birth and death, parents, family members and friends, place of residence, occupation and, in so far as they can be determined, important specific events in a person's life which are observer independent. In a literate and bureaucratic society such information

[358] See chapter 2.2.2.
[359] Craffert (2002), 97.
[360] See Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005), 205.

> can normally be obtained by any interested party from documents such as birth-, christening- and death certificates, from educational reports and other documentary databases. Provided that a full record of data is available and collected, the same picture of hard biographical information can be drawn by any independent researcher by comparing sources, determining the most authentic and weeding out the corrupted documents.[361]

Hard biographical data pertains to legal documents and reports of somewhat mundane events. Soft biographical data pertains to descriptions of 'cultural events.' Craffert and Botha then make the following contention:

> It is clear that in terms of the distinction between hard and soft biographical data, which exist in all cultural systems, that there never was any hard biographical evidence for Jesus' walking on the water. The only evidence is of the soft biographical nature—that is, evidence from observer dependent reports about a real cultural event by the disciples. Unless the reports are misread for their cultural nature as if they were conveying hard biographical data, there is no evidence to claim that Jesus of Nazareth actually walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee. For this reason the position that it is an actual instance of a report about a supernatural event, need not be seriously entertained.[362]

When Craffert and Botha define Jesus' stroll on the water as soft biographical data, they are claiming to know ahead of time that the event did not take place in space-time as reported. This, of course, is metaphysics, not history.

Craffert and Botha contend that their approach does more justice to the texts than Crossan's *symbolic parable* hypothesis. While I am in agreement with them on that point, I will add that their contention that we should assume an event occurred when the text reports one can come back to haunt them. What are we to make of the other Gospel miracle stories? How are we to account for the feeding of the five thousand? Did Jesus hypnotize the crowd to believe they were eating and being filled? What about the turning of water into wine? Was this also the result of a hypnotic act on those present? How about the healing of the blind and the lepers? Were they also

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[361] Craffert and Botha (2005), 17.

[362] Craffert and Botha (2005), 21. In support of viewing Jesus' walk on the sea as a cultural event, they cite the work of Cotter (1998) as providing a number of examples of others walking on water. However, Cotter states that, of all the reports, walking on the sea belongs only to the Jewish God (160). Poseidon rides across the sea atop his sea-beasts (Homer, *Iliad* 13.27-29). This idea that Poseidon rides across the sea appears to have been widely known in antiquity. Xerxes (486-465 BC) and Caligula (c. AD 39) built bridges across a large body of water in order to cross as a deity (see Cotter [1998], 155-59). Caligula sought to outdo Xerxes, building a bridge of about 3.5 Roman miles or just under 3.5 modern miles (158). On Xerxes, see Dio Chrysostom, *Third Discourse on Kingship* 30-31. For Caligula, see Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, Gaius Caligula, and Josephus, *Ant.* 19:6. In addition to Cotter's examples, we may add Homer's deity Erichthonius who runs over water or overtop a cornfield (Homer, *Illiad* 20.226). Lucian refers to this example as poetry (*How to Write History* 8). In respect to interpretations of dreams involving walking on water, the lone example is provided by Artemidorus. The interpretations appear arbitrary. For example, if a man dreams of walking on water prior to sailing, his safety is being foretold. If a man is involved in a lawsuit, he will win if he dreams of walking on water. If a woman dreams of walking on water, she will live her life as a prostitute (Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 3.16). In no known case did the one dreaming believe he or she had actually walked on water.

hypnotized or healed psychosomatically? If the group of disciples experienced a collective hallucination of Jesus walking on water, what did Jesus himself think of the event? Was he there and did he inform them that he had been in the boat the whole time? Did he later inform them that he was never there or allow his followers to believe that he was? Especially problematic is Jesus' raising of the dead: Lazarus, the widow's son, and Jairus's daughter. Did Jesus place his followers in a trance in order to convince them that he was raising Lazarus? And what happened to Lazarus? Is the Lazarus in John 12 the same person who had died in John 11? If so, how did Lazarus and his family come to believe he was dead prior to Jesus' arrival? Or did Jesus convince someone to pose as Lazarus after the event, subsequently convince everyone else that the poser was Lazarus, and arrange for the corpse to be stolen? Jesus becomes an extraordinary hypnotist, magician, and imposter who surrounded himself with thousands of amazingly gullible folk.

The ASC hypothesis of Craffert and Botha asks too much of us. It seems much easier to propose, if one wishes to be skeptical that supernatural events occurred, that the stories were urban legends that quickly developed, were redacted with theological spins, and were then passed along to others.

5.6.2.5. The Appearances

Although the concept of resurrection in the first century is debatable, the more important question concerns how the earliest Christians interpreted *resurrection*. Craffert himself agrees and adds that historians must do justice to their sources in the process.[363] He contends that the concept of *resurrection* did not necessarily involve a corpse.[364]

> Human brains do not need external stimuli in order to create physical or material visionary bodies. Therefore, the fact that his followers could identify him and that they experienced him in bodily form as eating, speaking and walking is no argument in favour of any physical, material body.[365]

Craffert and Botha go even further. They accuse those holding that Jesus' post-resurrection bodily appearances could have been photographed of committing the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*, since the Gospels are not even reporting an event of such nature.[366]

We might agree with Craffert if only some appearances to individuals had been reported. In that case, enough ambiguity is present. That there are numerous group appearances, not only in the resurrection narratives but also in the *keryma* preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, is damaging to Craffert's proposal. And we need not forget that the resurrection narratives likewise tell of an empty tomb from which Jesus' corpse went missing. Can Craffert present any credible reports of a group of individuals all of whom were convinced they were at the same time engaged in mutually interactive activities such as speaking with, eating with, walking with, and touching an individual who is not actually there in an ontologically objective sense?

[363] Craffert (1989), 338.
[364] Craffert (2002), 98.
[365] Craffert (2002), 101.
[366] Craffert and Botha (2005), 17, 18-19.

The resurrection narratives and Paul are unquestionably more at home with a bodily resurrection involving a corpse than an ASC. Craffert does not do justice to the texts as he imagines.

Craffert contends that Pilch "has shown that the appearances of the resurrected Jesus can be seen as typical and normal experiences in alternate states of consciousness [ASC]. Within the cultural system of the ancient Mediterranean world, it was customary and common to have visionary experiences of a variety of kinds. The experiences of Jesus after his death belong to these phenomena."[367]

In reply to Pilch, Wiebe examined more than thirty reports of ASC experiences he received from those who had experienced them.[368] He compares them with OSC experiences (ordinary state of consciousness), listing ten qualities that are typically though not always absent in an ASC. The probability increases that the experience is an OSC as more of the following qualities are fulfilled:

1. Objects disappear when we close our eyes.
2. Solid objects are not occupying space simultaneously occupied by other objects.
3. Our normal senses mesh. For example, in ASCs it is common to hear words spoken while the lips of the person do not move.
4. Solid, complete, moving, colored objects are generally seen, whereas in ASCs they are usually transparent or incomplete.
5. Objects continue to be viewed even after the viewer turns away and looks back at the original spot.
6. Others present also report seeing something very similar at the same location and time (for example, a group experience).
7. The ontologically objective domain of the experience remains the same.
8. Ontological effects correspond with the experience. For example, a woman who went into a trance for three hours in full view of others during a church worship service dreamed of Jesus giving her a goblet full of wine and instructing her to drink. She did. Upon waking, her breath smelled of wine.
9. The experience was not induced by attempts to manipulate the senses.
10. Those having the experiences are able to comment on the experience to others present while they are occurring.

Although the New Testament literature does not provide enough details that may identify the appearances with each of the above, a number of the ten qualities fit. For example, we may see 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the resurrection narratives when Jesus appears to others. This suggests that the disciples' encounters with the risen Jesus were OSCs. Wiebe concludes that ASCs may appropriately describe other kinds of experiences reported in the New Testament, but they are inadequate for assisting us in our understanding the disciples' encounters of the risen Jesus.

I also think it quite presumptuous of Craffert to assume that the early Christians did not think they were encountering the risen Jesus in space-time, lending further evidence that they were experiencing ASCs.

[367] Craffert (2002), 98.
[368] Wiebe (2001).

> Therefore, *seeing* Jesus' resurrected body in a vision or a dream, was for first-century Mediterranean people part of their 'reality'. They could seriously believe that when seeing Jesus' resurrected body in a vision, they were experiencing 'reality' and therefore, experiencing the resurrected Jesus.[369]

Accordingly, those who interpret their encounters with Jesus as a supernatural event are guilty of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, since "no such an event is being reported!"[370]

Perhaps the earliest Christians thought about the nature of their experiences more than Craffert imagines. This is what we find in the texts. They believed that God occasionally communicated to them through dreams and visions.[371] Paul experienced at least one vision he knew did not belong to physical reality (Acts 9:12). However, on another occasion the experience was so real in nature that he could not distinguish ordinary from alternate realities (2 Cor. 12:1-4). In Acts 12:6-12, Peter came to realize that what he had initially thought was occurring in a dream was actually an ontological or ordinary reality. If the New Testament literature accurately reports the events, which Craffert's approach assumes, the early Christians appear to have reflected on their experiences, understanding that there were differences between dreams, visions, and ontological reality in an objective and ordinary sense while believing all of them were real.[372]

What then may be said of Craffert's two objections to understanding the resurrection appearances in a literal sense? He regards it as immoral for the biblical scholar to grant the biblical accounts a privileged position, accepting as historical biblical claims of extraordinary events while rejecting similar claims in non-Christian religions. We observed that Crossan made this similar objection in his third concern. However, for Craffert, it likewise applies to scholars like Crossan who, in writing off the biblical stories as mythological creations, are being "equally disrespectful (ethnocentric) to those people for whom the stories were part of reality."[373]

Craffert's *ethical* objection is merited if the historian *a priori* grants the relevant New Testament literature a privileged position by presupposing it is correct and that all of the others are not or if we knew beforehand that the religious claims in all religious literature are mistaken. But the former has not been made in the present investigation and the latter is not known. Historians can be open to miracle claims in a variety of religious traditions and assess their veracity according to an application of careful historical method while applying a deliberate and sustained effort to manage their horizon during the exercise. If the Christian reports of Jesus' resurrection are actually true, Craffert's charge of "special pleading for pro-Christian or indirect rationalism" is

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[369] Craffert (2002), 9, cf. 101.
[370] Craffert and Botha (2005), 18-19; cf. 17.
[371] See Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19; Acts 9:10; 10:10-16.
[372] *Although beyond our historical bedrock*, I have previously argued that Paul taught that resurrection involves the revivification of a transformed corpse and that this assertion more likely than not is precisely what the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. The point to be made here is, if ASCs were the actual cause of the appearances and the early Church leaders could distinguish between ASCs and ontological events in ordinary reality, they did not *need* to say, "Jesus rose bodily and the tomb was empty." In fact, there is no reason to believe they would have made such a claim about Jesus had they thought they had experienced an ASC.
[373] Craffert (2003), 368.

misguided.[374] Consequently, Craffert's *ethical* objection is invalid pertaining to this present investigation. The *ethical* objection shows no interest in what may be factually true. It is more of an emotional appeal.

Craffert's second objection against a literal interpretation of the reports of Jesus' resurrection is a *theological* one. There are many views about God. One may not even believe there is a God. If God exists, is his relation to the universe one of transcendence (e.g., theism, deism) or immanence (e.g., pantheism)? The literal view of Jesus' resurrection requires a certain view of God being correct, which cannot be known. Craffert charges some as being guided by a pantheistic view of God. Thus, "the precondition for this discussion is an acknowledgement from *both sides* that the other's image of God has an equal right of presentation."[375]

We agree that all sides have an equal right to present and defend their views. But granting others the right to have, present, and defend a view is not the same as acknowledging those views as being equally valid as one's own, as Craffert and Botha would have us do.[376] They claim that a literal view of Jesus' resurrection requires theism; but since scholars cannot agree on a certain view of God, RH cannot be seriously entertained. However, as I argued in my assessment of Ehrman's objection, this is to do history backward: rejecting a historical conclusion because of its theological implications. Jesus' resurrection might indeed imply or entail theism, but one need not presuppose theism in order to investigate the historical question of Jesus' resurrection. Rather, one might first bracket the question of theism with the understanding that if the resurrection of Jesus is historically validated that would have to be considered strong evidence for theism.[377]

As noted with Ehrman, historians have concluded that Carloman died in AD 771 after he had co-ruled the Roman Empire with his brother Charlemagne with whom he had been at odds. However, historians are not confident about how he died: Did he die of natural causes or did Charlemagne have him murdered? Likewise, historians may conclude that Jesus rose from the dead without adjudicating on who or what raised him. Otherwise, the philosophical and theological presuppositions of historians may lead them to historical conclusions prior to an examination of the data.

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[374] Craffert (2003), 367.

[375] Craffert (2003), 367. I know of no other tradition about a religious leader of whom it can be *demonstrated* that he claimed to be here by God's choice, had a message for us from God, performed deeds that were absolutely jaw-dropping, and whose return from the dead was reported by individuals and groups, by those who had followed and those who had fought him, all of whom so sincerely believed that he had appeared to them that they were willing to wager their souls and put their lives on the line for it. Not all religious stories are equal. Why should a story like the resurrection of Jesus, which has a significant amount of historical evidence in its favor, be filed together with stories in other religious traditions for which solid supporting evidence is missing or for which there are probable naturalistic reasons for rejecting their overall claims? For example, clear reports of postmortem appearances of certain gods of the mystery religions all postdate the reports of Jesus' resurrection and may, therefore, be said to have borrowed from them in order to compete with the growing religion.

[376] Craffert and Botha (2005), 14.

[377] See chapter 2.5.3.

5.6.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of Craffert's hypothesis (CfH) employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation.

1) *Explanatory Scope*. CfH accounts nicely for all of the historical bedrock we have identified, assuming Jesus' death by crucifixion and regarding the experiences of the disciples as psychological phenomena referred to as "cultural events." However, no attempt is made to explain the appearance to Paul who would not have been in the same state of mind as the disciples whom he was apparently hunting. Therefore, CfH trails other hypotheses in its explanatory scope.

2) *Explanatory Power*. Similar to GH, LH, and CsH, CfH nicely explains Jesus' death by crucifixion but proposes interpretations that clearly run contrary to the plain sense of the texts. For example, CfH proposes that the canonical Gospel texts do not state that the disciples thought that when Jesus walked on water that he had appeared to them in an objective sense within ordinary reality. Instead, the disciples all thought that these events occurred in an alternate reality, that is, their minds were elsewhere and so was Jesus. This is essentially what occurred with the resurrection appearances. This does violence to the texts, which are quite clear that the tomb was empty because Jesus had been resurrected bodily and could be touched in ordinary reality.[378] Moreover, Wiebe has shown that ASCs are inadequate as explanations for the post-resurrection appearances. CfH fails in its explanatory power.

3) *Plausibility*. Is CfH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? CfH appeals to a postmodern approach to history, which the community of modern historians has largely rejected. Moreover, if we understand the appearance to the disciples as ASCs involving encounters with the ontological Jesus, CfH has plausibility since we would expect them to be convinced of the veridicality of the events. Because our historical bedrock makes no claims pertaining to Jesus' post-resurrection state, an ASC involving an ontological Jesus is no different than RH, since in both the ontological Jesus is alive and appeared to his disciples and Paul. Since I suspect that Craffert would have no part in identifying CfH with RH, I will discard interpreting him as allowing an ASC with an ontological Jesus. If we regard the ASC as a natural event with no ontological Jesus appearing, we would not expect for Paul to have experienced an ASC that was positive in nature toward Christianity and that would result in his conversion and an ASC experienced simultaneously by a group suffers the same challenges as a group hallucination, which have been addressed earlier.[379] Although CfH and VH are both implausible in terms of not being implied by Paul's conversion experience of the risen Jesus, CfH has additional plausibility challenges and, thus, trails VH in this regard.

[378] This observation is confirmed by our examination of Paul's view on resurrection, which held to a revivification of a transformed corpse and more likely than not is precisely what the Jerusalem apostles were teaching. Again, I want to be careful to acknowledge that Paul's view of Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred to his corpse is not part of our historical bedrock.
[379] See n72 above.

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. CfH employs psychohistory, which is purely conjectural, and, thus, possesses a strong *ad hoc* component. It *a priori* rules out a supernatural cause on the basis of naturalistic assumptions pertaining to human behavior and, thus, carries an additional *ad hoc* component. In contrast, VH makes no appeal to non-evidenced facts, although, like CfH, it *a priori* excludes the Resurrection hypothesis. Since CfH is more *ad hoc* than VH, it fails this criterion.

5) *Illumination*. As with GH and LH, if true, CfH provides illumination pertaining to numerous ancient religious experiences and, thus, passes this criterion.

Of the five criteria, CfH passes one (illumination) and fails to fulfill every one of the most important criteria. Moreover, we observed a number of concerns that cast further doubt on CfH.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	F	P	P	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P
CfH	F	F	F	F	P

5.7. The Resurrection Hypothesis

5.7.1. Description of the Resurrection View. The final hypothesis we will examine is the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead (RH). Perhaps the earliest assertion of the post-Easter Church was "God raised Jesus from the dead." What did the earliest Christians mean when they proclaimed that God had raised Jesus? The answer has and continues to be debated. At present, Wright's work on the matter stands as the proposal that must be answered by those taking a contrary position.[380] He concludes that when the early Christians claimed that Jesus had been resurrected, they meant that his corpse had been revivified and transformed. Even so, widespread agreement on the matter is absent.

I see no reason for scholars to hesitate in drawing their own conclusions on the matter and proceeding accordingly. However, since the method we have employed throughout this investigation has been to proceed solely with the historical bedrock unless there is a need to do otherwise, we will continue to restrict ourselves. If a hypothesis cannot account for the relevant historical bedrock, it is dead in its tracks. Since the historical bedrock makes no statement pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection appearances, we must choose how we shall define the Resurrection hypothesis (RH). We could make a choice between an objective vision (RH-V), that is, Jesus ontologically appeared to others in a manner not perceived by the physical senses (i.e., an actual appearance occurred outside of space-time), and Jesus' appearance in his revivified corpse that was seen with ordinary vision (RH-B; "B" for bodily). The former could not have been videotaped while the latter could have been. Because neither of these interpretations belongs to historical bedrock, we will not choose between them in the present research. Since the claim that it was *God* who raised Jesus is incapable of verification, we will not make any claims pertaining to the cause of the event other than it must have been supernatural. Accordingly, I herein define the Resurrection Hypothesis as follows: *Following a supernatural event of an indeterminate nature and cause, Jesus appeared to a number of people, in individual and group settings and to friends and foes, in no less than an objective vision and perhaps within ordinary vision in his bodily raised corpse.* In this sense, we are true to our method of considering only the historical bedrock while allowing for a range of specific possibilities. Where appropriate, we will also assess RH in terms of both RH-V and RH-B in order to eliminate an aspect of ambiguity.

[380] Wright (2003). Nickelsburg (2006) regretfully does not give Wright's work the attention it deserves. He mentions the works of Wright (2003) and Segal (2004) only in passing and explains the reason is that he has a different approach: "Perhaps the root of the difference lies in our presuppositions. I began with an openness to diversity and was suspicious of whether a belief in bodily resurrection was present if it was not either explicit or intertextually implied . . . I felt that the burden of proof lay with the person who posited a bodily resurrection" (5). We have adopted *methodical neutrality* where the burden of proof lay with the person making any claim. This is especially relevant since the definition of resurrection in pre-Christian Judaism is a topic unto itself with varied opinions. Accordingly, a definition of resurrection that is non-physical in nature is not a default position as Nickelsburg apparently thinks.

5.7.2. Analysis and Concerns

5.7.2.1. The Challenge of Legend

Legend emerged rapidly in antiquity. Lucian reports that while sailing down a river, Aristobulus handed Alexander the Great a narrative of combat between Porus and Alexander that he had just written. Alexander was so disgusted by the specific deeds of valor and achievements too great to be true, that he threw the book into the river and told Aristobulus that he should do the same with him.[381] When Lucian informed Cronius of Perigrinus's suicide, he added that he had conveyed the details without embellishment. However, he stated that he would dress them up for the dullards.[382]

Lucian adds that he was not the only one to propagate urban legend pertaining to that event.

> On my return to the festival, I came upon a grey-haired man whose face, I assure you, inspired confidence in addition to his beard and his general air of consequence, telling all about Proteus, and how, since his cremation, he had beheld him in white raiment a little while ago, and had just now left him walking about cheerfully in the Portico of the Seven Voices, wearing a garland of wild olive. Then on top if it all he put the vulture, swearing that he himself had seen it flying up out of the pyre, when I myself had just previously let it fly to ridicule fools and dullards.[383]

This shows both how quickly urban legend could develop and how credulous some could be.[384]

Seneca noted that historians were often guilty of reporting incredible events in order to win approval. He adds that "Some [historians] are credulous, some are negligent, on some falsehood creeps unawares. . . . What the whole tribe has in common is this: it does not think its own work can achieve approval and popularity unless it sprinkles that work with falsehood."[385] After a lengthy discussion on accuracy and falsehood in ancient historiography and rhetoric, Byrskog comments,

> It seems likely, generally speaking, that the apparent paradox between the rhetoricians [sic.] emphasis on truth, on the one hand, and their effort to produce extensive elaboration, on the other hand, had to do with the requirement that the basic material—the *fundamenta*—should be true while its elaboration—its *exaedificatio*—should be plausible.[386]

Our discussion of Gospel genre in chapter three also revealed that ancient biographers were allowed certain literary freedoms, although they took these to varying

[381] Lucian, "How to Write History," 12.
[382] Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 39. English translation by Harmon (1936), 45. See 5.5.2.4 above for the entire citation.
[383] Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 40. English translation by Harmon (1936), 45, 47.
[384] Crossley (2005) observes that "the rapid emergence of miraculous and legendary traditions surrounding pagan figures, such as Alexander or Augustus, even within their own life times . . . was one of the few points of agreement at the resurrection BNTC discussion" (181, 181n39).
[385] Seneca the Younger (*QN* 7.16.1-2). English translation by Byrskog (2002), 201.
[386] Byrskog (2002), 213.

degrees.[387] Some like Suetonius exercised minimal liberties while others like Appian have been "severely censured for want of accuracy in details."[388]

Given this challenge, it is most important to identify and adequately account for the historical bedrock, which "can be recovered even from the most deplorable of our tertiary sources."[389] Moreover, the presence of legend, differences, and errors does not warrant wholesale rejection of a report. "Myths about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy abound, but Kennedy was in fact shot by somebody."[390]

Despite any varying insecurities we may have in relation to the early Christian sources, many of these sources still yield valuable data relevant to our investigation. We have identified historical bedrock that is both strongly supported and acknowledged by a nearly universal and heterogeneous consensus of scholars. That is important, since we must be careful not to throw away the baby with the bath water. The historical bedrock is clear and firm and must be accounted for adequately by any serious hypothesis.

5.7.2.2. Occam's Razor

We earlier noted Goulder's assertion that a natural explanation that can account for the known data should be preferred over a supernatural explanation given Occam's Razor, which states that the hypothesis importing fewer assumptions is simpler and, thus, preferable. Accordingly, Goulder disposes of RH since it must presuppose God.[391] But this move possesses a number of difficulties.

First, Goulder *a priori* excludes the supernatural so that historians are not duped by superstition. But this move undermines the value of carefully applied method. Not only have we discussed and made public the specific methodological procedures employed in the historiography to be written in the present investigation, we have also formed criteria for identifying a miracle. Together these two steps severely hinder a credulous acceptance of a miracle claim.[392] Moreover, this move of Goulder unfairly excludes any possibility of a competing hypothesis prior to an examination of it. One could similarly—and wrongly in my opinion—argue that psychological explanations such as those employed by Goulder should be *a priori* excluded so that historians do not fall prey to the dangers of psychohistory. which is often wrong. Since modern psychologists often find it difficult to correctly diagnose patients sitting in front of them who can be questioned extensively, non-professionals such as Goulder, Lüdemann, Crossan, and Craffert are far more likely to misdiagnose those who lived two thousand years ago in a foreign culture.

Second, the often unbridled fantasy present in Goulder's psychohistory is no more helpful than superstition for historians serious about determining the fate of Jesus. While we certainly want to avoid a "god of the gaps" component in any hypothesis,

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[387] See chapter 3.2.1.
[388] Appian, *Roman History*, Volume I, Horace White, translator (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), xi.
[389] Sherwin-White (1963), 186.
[390] Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 127-28.
[391] See section 5.3.3, less *ad hoc* criterion above.
[392] See chapter 1.2-3, chapter 2.4, and chapter 4.2.1-2.

the "naturalism of the gaps" components within GH, LH, CsH, and CfH are no better. We should not grant a privileged position to a hypothesis employing "naturalism of the gaps" arguments over a hypothesis possessing a supernatural component if the latter is superior in its ability to fulfill the criteria for the best explanation and the historical bedrock occurs in a context that is charged with religious significance.

Third, if RH turns out to be the best explanation, Goulder's *a priori* exclusion of it would actually prohibit him (and those following his method) from knowing the past.

Fourth, while RH is open to the existence of the supernatural including God, it does not presuppose it. As we commented in our discussion of Ehrman, the historian could carefully examine the data and context of a miracle claim and adjudicate on whether it was a historical event. If a particular miracle claim fulfills the criteria for the best explanation and there is adequate reason for awarding its historicity, the historical conclusion may have theological implications. If a historical conclusion leads to a theological or supernatural implication, the historian is on safe ground. It is when the theological *or anti-theological* motivations of historians guide their historical conclusions that trouble is almost guaranteed.[393] On the other hand, GH draws presupposes at least five conjectures: Peter had a hallucination, the groups experienced "communal delusions," Paul entertained secret doubts about Judaism and Christianity, Paul and the Jerusalem apostles had contradictory beliefs pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection, and the empty tomb and reports of bodily appearances were later invented.

In our previous discussion of criteria for the best explanation, we observed that historical events often have multiple causes. For this reason, the criterion of simplicity or Occam's Razor may be inadequate. Although it can accommodate multiple sub-hypotheses—which should please Goulder—the "less *ad hoc*" criterion looks for the hypothesis with the *least number of non-evidenced assumptions*.[394] It is obvious that RH is far superior to GH, LH, CsH, and CfH in this regard.

5.7.2.3. Not Enough Evidence

Jesus' resurrection will never be established via historical method with the degree of certainty desired by many of the faithful. The provisional quality of historical knowledge, given our limited data and the presence of interpretation by the ancient authors, limits the amount of certainty attainable. However, as we observed in chapter one, this limitation is not unique to early Christian claims but applies to all historical knowledge. Neither will there ever be widespread agreement on the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead, since the disparity of horizons among historians creates a gridlock, shattering any hopes of achieving a consensus.

We wish there was more. It would be nice to possess greater knowledge about our sources, such as earlier reports about the authors of our four canonical Gospels. It would also be nice to have a few documents dating to the period between the 30s and 60s written by Roman and Jewish authorities describing their take on the events that

[393] See chapter 2.5.3.
[394] See chapter 1.3.2, letter d.

led up to Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, and the claims of the earliest Christians after these events.

Of course, the absence of additional desirable sources is not an argument against RH, since the same may be desired in reference to any hypothesis. The question is whether the evidence is adequate enough for building a respectable hypothesis. We are fortunate that the historical bedrock in our collection provides a substantial foundation on which historians may work. It has been noted that there were no eyewitnesses to the actual event of Jesus' resurrection. We only have reports of an empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. This is not as sobering as some may think. Davis observes that the inference in the matter of Jesus' resurrection is quite strong: "If you saw me today with my hair a certain length and then you saw me next week with much shorter hair, you would be with your rights in concluding that I had had a haircut, even if you did not see the event occur."[395]

5.7.2.4. Deficient Sources

Ehrman argues that the canonical Gospels are poor sources that prevent historians from discovering what actually happened to Jesus. He supports his position by contending that they were not written by eyewitnesses, were late since they were written 35-65 years after Jesus' death, and contain propaganda that itself was altered during various stages of transmission resulting in numerous differences. Furthermore, no extra-biblical sources mention Jesus until approximately 80 years after his death. In short, Ehrman argues that the Gospels are neither contemporary, disinterested, nor consistent.[396]

There are numerous problems with Ehrman's contentions. He complains that the New Testament Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses. Bracketing this discussion where a number of scholars have taken a contrary position,[397] this challenge is not unique to the New Testament literature. No surviving account of the life of Alexander the Great was written by an eyewitness. Tacitus and Suetonius were not eyewitnesses to the majority of the events about which they wrote. Nevertheless, historians remain confident that they are able to recover the past to varying degrees without ever knowing who their sources were.[398] Moreover, while virtually all agree that Mark and Luke were not written by eyewitnesses, many scholars hold that they preserve eyewitness testimony to varying degrees.

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[395] Davis (1999), page 4 of 11, accessed online.
[396] Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 10-11.
[397] See Bauckham (2006) and Byrskog (2000). Also see chapter 3.2.1 above.
[398] Barrera (2001) contends that historians need not know the authorship of a document in order to use it with value in their investigation (203). Answering the contention of Fasolt (2006, 23) that Paul's letter to the Roman church is helpful as a historical source "only on the assumption that it was written by Saint Paul," Cladis (2006) writes, "This is going to be news to countless social historians of the religions of the ancient Mediterranean basin who investigate archaeological and textual work without always knowing the specifics of the exact agents involved. Indeed, these historians are investigating the society that shaped the agents, even if they do not know most of the agents' names (and all that this means). They collect, analyze, and interpret evidence from a variety of sources—monuments and tombs, literary texts and shopping lists— in order to learn something important about the socio-historical circumstances in which people, like Paul, lived, moved, and had their being. The historian of antiquity, then, can learn much about the past from the 'Letter to the Romans' whether or not that text was actually written by Paul" (100).

Ehrman complains that all of the canonical Gospels were written 35-65 years after Jesus and that Jesus does not appear in "any non-canonical pagan source until 80 years after his death. So clearly he didn't make a big impact on the pagan world." However, Josephus mentions Jesus within 60-65 years rather than Ehrman's 80 years.[399] Moreover, when compared with written sources of other historical figures and events, 35-65 years is a relatively short period. Augustus is generally regarded as Rome's greatest emperor. There are seven chief sources used by historians to write a history of Augustus. Three of the seven are contemporary with Augustus: two cover Augustus until age 19-20 while the third is a funeral inscription that may have been composed during Augustus' lifetime. A fourth source writes from 50-110 years after the death of Augustus and the final three write from 100-200 years after his death.[400] Therefore, it is remarkable that four biographies of Jesus were written within 35-65 years of his death.[401] Furthermore, oral tradition is peppered throughout the New Testament writings, including the Gospels. For example, creeds, hymns, oral formulas, and the Acts sermon summaries contain very early tradition, some of which goes back to the earliest stages of the post-Easter church.

The lacking plethora of non-Christian contemporary sources on Jesus is not unique. Only three sources on Augustus have survived that are contemporary with him, only one of which reports his adulthood.[402] The Roman emperor Tiberius was a contemporary of Jesus. The number of *non-Christian* sources who mention Tiberius within 150 years of his life is equal to the number of *non-Christian* sources who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life. If we add Christian sources, the Jesus:Tiberius ratio goes from 9:9 to at least 42:10.[403] In addition, the purpose of writing heavily influences what authors do and do not write about and they write according to where their interests lead them. Christian writers said very little about their Roman lords and the Romans said very little about the Christians. Moreover, if

[399] Ehrman may correctly reply that Josephus was not pagan and, thus, cannot be counted. But we would then ask why he uses "pagan" as a qualifier rather than "non-Christian," noting that such a distinction appears to dodge the non-Christian source who mentions Jesus within his prescribed time period.

[400] In his contribution on Augustus in *De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors*, Garrett Fagan lists the following as the "chief ancient sources for the life of Augustus": Appian (+100-150), Dio (+175-200), Cicero (contemporary, but dies when Octavius [Augustus] is 20 years old), Nicolaus of Damascus (contemporary, but little information provided and stops when Octavius is 19 years old), Plutarch (+50-110), Suetonius (+100-115), and Augustus' funerary inscription (contemporary). Augustus was probably largely responsible for his funerary inscription *Deeds of the Divine Augustus*, which is less than 4,000 words and offers a sketch of his accomplishments as Emperor. Garrett Fagan is associate professor of classics and ancient Mediterranean studies at Penn State University. His article on Augustus may be accessed at http://www.roman-emperors.org/auggie.htm (accessed on August 26, 2006). See also Yamauchi in Millard, Hoffmeier, Baker, eds. (1994), 26, cited in chapter one (n241).

[401] Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) himself grants that this is the view of "almost all scholars" (57). See chapter 3, n24.

[402] We may note that Nicolaus and Suetonius may have used Augustus' *De Vita Sua* as one of their sources, thus pushing the date of their information even earlier. Biblical criticism postulates other sources of Jesus' life that are earlier than the canonical Gospels such as *Q*, *M*, and *L*. In Luke 1:1-3, the author reports that "many" others had compiled narrative accounts of Jesus prior to his own. Most scholars date Luke's Gospel to c. AD 85 or within 55 years of the death of Jesus and, thus, these "many" others are even earlier. Paul who writes between AD 49-65 is likewise familiar with traditions on the life of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

[403] Habermas and Licona (2004), 126-28.

the early church believed that Jesus' eschatological return was imminent, we might expect a lack of motivation at that time for writing more on his historical life.

Ehrman notes the non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels. Granted, but these sources are later than the canonical Gospels and most if not all of them are much later. We must wonder why Ehrman raises this objection, since elsewhere he concedes that "if historians want to know what Jesus said and did they are more or less constrained to use the New Testament Gospels as their principal sources. Let me emphasize that this is not for religious or theological reasons . . . It is for historical reasons, pure and simple."[404] He also asserts that "the noncanonical Gospels are of greater importance for understanding the diversity of Christianity in the second and third and later centuries than for knowing about the writings of the earliest Christians."[405]

Ehrman complains that the canonical Gospels contain propaganda. The Gospel of John reports, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."[406] There can be no question that the Evangelists have the agenda of presenting a particular portrait of Jesus to their readers and teaching a message they wish for them to believe and act upon. However, this does not warrant the conclusion that their content is mistaken. Many historians write with a purpose to convince and persuade to their particular viewpoint. Grant asserts that Caesar's "*Gallic War* is among the most potent works of propaganda ever written."[407] Yet, he adds, "[i]t is extremely hard to fault him on facts."[408] Pertaining to his book *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, Lüdemann writes, "Its aim was to prove the nonhistoricity of the resurrection of Jesus and simultaneously to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly."[409] Similarly, Richard Dawkins writes, "If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down."[410] Would Ehrman encourage others to distrust these books because Lüdemann and Dawkins had agendas that are propagandistic in nature when writing them? One has to analyze the arguments provided.

Propaganda can and is employed in malevolent ways. It can be used to swindle money from others for the benefit of the propagandist. However, propaganda is not necessarily bad. When Jewish historians write on the Holocaust they want the world to know of the atrocities suffered by the victims so that it never happens again. When African-American historians write on slavery in the United States and the severe discrimination of blacks that continued long after American slavery was abolished they want others to know what they and/or their ancestors endured with the objective

[404] Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 229.
[405] Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 221. See also Meier (1991), 118.
[406] John 20:30-31.
[407] Grant (1970), 190.
[408] Grant (1970), 188. Grant comments that an "occasional distortion or exaggeration might well pass unchallenged. But downright lies could all too easily be caught out; because, after all, Caesar was by no means the only Roman who wrote home from the Gallic campaigns—and eventually returned home, too" (188).
[409] Lüdemann (2004), 7.
[410] Dawkins (2007), 5.

that blacks will be treated fairly.[411] Thus, propaganda can actually be good *and* true. When it comes to the reports in the Gospels, in theory there could be a good reason for the bias of the Evangelists: they were convinced of the truth of their story. And those who have something to gain or lose may recall events better than a disinterested observer.[412]

Ehrman claims that the stories of Jesus were altered during their transmission, accounting for the irreconcilable differences among them in the Gospels. He offers a few examples, such as the day and time in which Jesus died. The Gospel of John (John) reports that it was at noon on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, whereas Mark's Gospel (Mark) says it was at 9am after the Passover meal was eaten. Did Jesus carry his cross the entire way as John states or did Simon of Cyrene carry it part of the way as in the Synoptics? When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, did Mary go alone or were other women with her? What did they see when they got to the tomb: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)? Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? He adds that there are also non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels.

While this objection is no red herring, it is not as strong as Ehrman thinks. Responsible method requires that historians take genre into consideration.[413] It was noted above that there is now somewhat of a consensus among contemporary biblical scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bioi*) and that this genre offered biographers a great deal of flexibility to rearrange material, invent speeches to communicate the teachings, philosophy, political beliefs of the subject, and often included encomium.[414]

One may notice some of these liberties in Luke's account of Jesus' trial confession. Mark and Matthew report that the high priest asked Jesus if he is the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus affirms not only that he is both but that he is the apocalyptic Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7 who will be seated at God's right hand and who will come on the clouds of heaven. For this claim, the high priest and other leaders charge Jesus of blaspheming and condemn him to be executed.[415] Luke's report differs slightly and reads as follows: The Council asked Jesus if he is the Messiah. Jesus replied that even if he confessed to being the Messiah they would not believe. Nevertheless, he assures them that, as the apocalyptic Son of Man, he will be seated at God's right. The Jewish leaders reply with a question: "Are you claiming then to be God's Son?" Jesus replies in the affirmative and the Jewish leaders proceed to take

[411] Finley (1965) notes that Herodotus and Thucydides changed the way history was written by not only placing the events they described in time rather than the distant gray past, but by also providing a secular analysis that introduced and elevated politics (300-01). Although not religiously biased, Thucydides had political bias. Tacitus had an aristocratic bias and was convinced that moralizing was the "highest function" of history (*Ann.* 3.65), although he claims to be "far removed" from partiality (1.1).
[412] Byrskog (2002), 165-66. Accordingly, M. Martin's (1991) objection that the eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus were friends and disciples and so were not objective observers (76) carries limited weight.
[413] Willitts (2005): The idea of "historicity" must be "both appropriate to the genre and elastic enough to allow for the selective nature of historical narrative." Therefore, latitude for narrative is given to the Gospels in their reporting (107).
[414] See chapter 3.2.1.
[415] Mark 14:61-64; Matt. 26:63-66.

him before Pilate.[416] The difference is easily explained. Matthew and Mark are writing to Jews who have a robust understanding of the apocalyptic Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7 and known in the *Similitudes of Enoch*.[417] However, Luke is writing to a Gentile individual or Gentile audience who may not understand the full implications behind Jesus' claim to be the apocalyptic Son of Man or the Council's charge of "blasphemy." Therefore, Luke may be focusing on the Son of God feature of Jesus' confession, in order to communicate Jesus' high claim to divinity, since Gentiles would have understood the claim more clearly in those terms. If the historical Jesus made such a claim, Mark and Matthew are probably much closer to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, since Jesus the Jew was talking to an audience of Jewish leaders. However, Luke's redaction enables him to communicate more clearly with his Gentile reader(s) what Jesus confessed about himself. Words that precisely replicate what the subject said are good but can only be properly understood within their context.[418]

The voice (*ipsissima vox*) of the subject is equally valid. Even numerous conservative scholars maintain that redaction was a practice of John who also rearranges the traditions in order to theologize.[419] F. F. Bruce asserted that John paraphrased the words of Jesus in the same dramatic and powerful manner that Shakespeare paraphrased Mark Antony's speech in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus.*[420] In John's Gospel, we are often hearing Jesus' voice (*ipsissima vox*) rather than his actual words.[421] Accordingly, when analyzing *bioi* historians should focus more on identifying the historical core in the narratives. This is not unique to *bioi* but applies to history where the subject is not an individual. Thucydides is regarded as one of antiquity's finest historians and is known for his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Finley writes, "History 'contained the truth', and for Thucydides that meant that it was unnecessary to invent as the poets did. But it was also impossible merely to record what happened. It is necessary to compose speeches which would lay bare the appropriate arguments (appropriate in Thucydides' judgment) on both sides on an issue."[422] In the second century AD, Lucian stated this was a standard practice.[423] Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob

[416] Luke 22:66-71.
[417] It is uncertain when the Similitudes were written. Sometime between the end of Jesus' life and the end of the first century is probable. However, a more precise date of writing cannot be made with confidence at this time.
[418] Likewise, John did not sacrifice the historical essence behind the cleansing of the Temple, although he moved it in time in order to make a point. See John 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-17; Matt. 21:10-13; Luke 19:41-46.
[419] Keener (2003) notes how, instead of placing Jesus' overturning of the temple tables at the end of his ministry, John places the event at the beginning but especially mentions the Passover in relation to it so that this Passover event "frames Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel" (518).
[420] Bruce (1983), 15-17.
[421] Blomberg (2001), 61. See also Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in Wilkins and Moreland, eds. (1995), 73-99. Witherington (*John*, 1995) declares that it is not "a matter of this evangelist's trying to deceive the listener about who is saying what. In various respects he is just following normal operating procedures of writing an ancient biography, in which, since there were no footnotes, all commentary was put in the text along with the source material." The Evangelist "feels free to recast the Jesus tradition into his own style" (101). Keener (2003) argues that John belongs to the category of *bioi* and adds that "all scholars acknowledge *some* adaptation and conformity with Johannine idiom" (52). See also R. Brown (1997), 363-64, 371 and Burridge (2005) who argues that John's Gospel presents a "high-flying perspective" of Jesus (135-63) and belongs to *bioi* ([2004], 250-51).
[422] Finley (1965), 302.
[423] Lucian, *How to Write History* 58-59.

warn that "Professional historians are most acutely aware of this temptation to sacrifice accuracy to the goals of glorification or lesson-teaching." However, they add that we all have the urge to relate our past to a sort of morality and that complete accuracy is difficult to attain even when it is our aim.[424] We must be careful not to condemn the ancients for not acting according to our modern conventions. Accordingly, Ehrman's argument does not adequately take genre into account.

Nearly all of Ehrman's examples specific to the resurrection of Jesus are quite easily reconciled even apart from the issue of genre. Did Mary go alone or were other women with her? Matthew, Mark, and Luke report that a small group of women went to the tomb. John focuses on Mary and she appears to speak for the others. In 20:1 it is Mary who visits the tomb but in the following verse she announces to the disciples, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and *we* do not know where they laid him." It is doubtful that this is a literary plural, since in verse 18 Mary returns from the tomb after Jesus' appearance to her and announces to the disciples, "*I* saw the Lord." Luke makes a similar move in his Gospel. When the women report the empty tomb and the message of the angels, Peter responds by running to the tomb (24:12). It appears that Luke did not intend to exclude others who may have accompanied Peter on his tomb visit, since only a few verses later Luke reports that more than one of the disciples went to the tomb (24:24; ἀπῆλθόν τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον).

What did they see upon arriving at the tomb: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)? This is also easily resolved when one considers that an angel was sometimes referred to as a man.[425] Indeed, we observe Luke doing this in his resurrection narrative. He first refers to the "two men" at the empty tomb, then eleven verses later calls them "angels." White or shining clothes in the New Testament are often the mark of a heavenly visitation.[426] Whether there were one or two angels at the tomb has some difficulty but can possibly be resolved by understanding that the focus of the Evangelist is on the one speaking at the moment as we just observed regarding the initial visits to the tomb by Mary and Peter. Although not mentioned by Ehrman, we may note that the angel speaks while *sitting* on the large stone he moved away from the tomb (Matthew), speaks while *sitting* inside of the tomb (Mark), two speak while *standing* inside of the tomb (Luke), and while no angels are there on the first visit, there are two *sitting* inside the tomb at the second visit (John). Time compression may account for the one visit reported by the Synoptics[427] and they may have altered details for economy, convenience, or due to faulty memories. Discrepancies among peripheral details do not necessitate wholesale invention.[428] It

[424] Appleby, Hunt, Jacob (1994), 307.
[425] In Tobit 5:5, 7, 10 the angel is addressed as "Young man." See also Luke 24:4, 23; Acts 1:10; 10:30.
[426] Matt. 28:3; Mark 9:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; 10:30. Also see Dan. 7:9.
[427] It is clear that Luke employs telescoping. In his Gospel, all of the appearances and the ascension occur on Easter. However, in his sequel Acts, he reports that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of 40 days (1:3).
[428] A few years ago, John P. Meier communicated to me via email that he was working on volume four in his *Marginal Jew* series and that the topic would be the self-understanding of Jesus. Around the same time I had communicated briefly with James D. G. Dunn regarding his new volume *Jesus Remembered*, in which he devoted a significant portion to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. In a subsequent conversation with a friend I communicated that *Dunn* was working on a new book and that the topic would be the resurrection of Jesus. It was an embarrassing moment when I recognized my error. What was true was that a prominent historian of Jesus was working on a new book. On another occasion, I recalled watching Baltimore Oriole baseball pitcher Jim Palmer hit an 'inside the park'

is also possible that the angels were added as a literary device on the part of the Evangelists indicating their belief that a divine activity had occurred.[429] Such a move would be entirely acceptable within the conventions of ancient biography. If this is the case, arguing over the number of angels misses the point the authors seek to make.

Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? We have already address this above and observed that it need not at all be problematic.[430]

It is important to note that all of the discrepancies between the Gospels usually cited appear in the peripheral details rather than at the core of the stories.[431] Moreover, discrepancies between accounts do not require that they are all mistaken. Recall that *Titanic* survivors offered contradictory testimonies pertaining to whether the *Titanic* went down intact or broke in two just prior to sinking. Until recently, historians were warranted in having only limited confidence in their conclusions concerning this detail. However, none of them doubted the core of the story itself that the *Titanic* had sunk.[432] Thucydides was aware of differences in extant reports pertaining to the Peloponnesian War. He wrestled with these. However, since Thucydides himself had participated in the War, the discrepancies would never have suggested to him that the War had not taken place or that the outcome was different.[433]

Luke Timothy Johnson draws attention to the challenge of knowing the historical Socrates even though we have reports about him from three of his contemporaries. Aristophanes was a critic of Socrates while Xenophon and Plato were personal students who wrote of him shortly after his death. Xenophon recalled his table talk, his teachings, and his defense. Yet his reports of Socrates' table talk and defense differ from those provided by Plato. We probably will never know with assurance the precise details.[434] However, this does not prevent historians from arriving at broader conclusions pertaining to Socrates.

Historian Paul Maier offers the following comment concerning discrepancies in the Gospels:

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homerun on television when I was much younger. Years later I had the opportunity to speak personally with Palmer during which time I asked him how he felt when he hit that homerun. He replied that he was a slow runner and never hit an 'inside the park' homerun. However, he had hit a number of homers. Once again, my memory had failed me in the details. I had taken a feat that was much rarer in the 1970s than today—a pitcher hitting a homerun—and had unconsciously embellished it over time. What is true is that Jim Palmer hit a homerun that day. (Allison [*Resurrection Jesus*, 2005] notes a similar failure on his part [235n140].) This failure of accuracy in my memory is quite sobering to me. However, I find some encouragement in Apply, Hunt, Jacob (1994) who write of us moderns, "all people are the historians of their own lives and know something of the urge to point their past toward a useful moral precept. Even when people have no motive to bend history in a particular direction, they have difficulty getting it straight" (307).

[429] This is the suggestion of R. Brown (1993), 129, 156, 260. Contra is Bauckham (2002), 304.

[430] See chapter 4.3.2.3.

[431] Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 7.

[432] Allison ("Explaining," 2005) writes, "To show that there are legendary elements in the accounts [of the empty tomb] is not to discredit those accounts entirely. . . . Myths about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy abound, but Kennedy was in fact shot by somebody" (127-28). See also R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 10.

[433] Thucydides, *Histories* 1.22.1-3.

[434] L. T. Johnson (1996), 106.

> It is no service either to Christianity or to honesty to gloss over these discrepancies, or, as is incredibly done in some circles, to deny that they exist. . . . On the other hand, some critical scholars are equally mistaken in seeking to use these inconsistencies as some kind of proof that the resurrection did not take place, for this is an illogical use of evidence. The earliest sources telling of the great fire of Rome, for example, offer far more serious conflicts on who or what started the blaze and how far it spread, some claiming that the whole city was scorched while others insist that only three sectors were reduced to ash. Yet the fire itself is historical: it actually happened.[435]

In agreement is historian Michael Grant:

> Certainly, there are all those discrepancies between one Gospel and another. But we do not deny that an event ever took place just because pagan historians such as, for example, Livy and Polybius, happen to have described it in differing terms.[436]

According to Ehrman, historians look for desirable witnesses that include eyewitness accounts, multiple independent accounts, consistent and corroborative accounts, and unbiased or disinterested accounts. In his debate with Ehrman, Craig noted that Ehrman's "wish list is so idealistic as to be practically irrelevant to the work of the practicing historian."[437] He adds that

> Compared to the sources for Greco-Roman history, the Gospels stand head and shoulders above what Greco-Roman historians have to work with, which are usually hundreds of years after the events they record, usually involve very few eyewitnesses, and are usually told by people that are completely biased. And yet Greco-Roman historians reconstruct the course of history of the ancient world.[438]

Accordingly, the question we will need to ask is whether the sources available to contemporary historians are adequate for learning what happened to Jesus, especially regarding what happened to him after his death. I am not here attempting to argue that the canonical Gospels are, for the most part, reliable sources; only that Ehrman's attempts to argue to the contrary are very poor.

The most important observation is that, despite the hesitations of Ehrman and others toward the canonical Gospels, they regard them as reliable enough to obtain solid historical bedrock, some of which is relevant to our present investigation. In fact, Ehrman grants all three facts that belong to our relevant historical bedrock.

1. *Jesus died by crucifixion*. Ehrman: "One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate."[439]

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[435] Maier (1991), 180.
[436] Grant (1977), 200. See also Gwynne (2000), 10 and Sherwin-White (1963), 187-88.
[437] Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 18. Ehrman (2000) himself refers to a "wish list" for historians (139).
[438] Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 37.
[439] Ehrman (2000), 162; cf. Ehrman (2008), 235, 261-62.

2. *Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them*. Ehrman: "It is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name; one of them, the apostle Paul, claims quite plainly to have seen Jesus alive after his death"; "These people also claim to have seen him alive afterwards."[440]

3. *Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after a personal experience that he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him*. Ehrman: "there is no doubt that [Paul] believed that he saw Jesus' real but glorified body raised from the dead."[441]

If Ehrman's salvage operations of the canonical literature yield the very historical bedrock employed in RH, it is useless for him to continue proclaiming the unreliability of the Gospels as an argument against RH. Such efforts serve only to undermine his own conclusions. He must instead attack the historical method upon which RH is built.

5.7.3. Weighing the Hypothesis

We will now assess the strength of RH by employing the five criteria for selecting the best explanation discussed in chapter one.

1) *Explanatory Scope*. RH (RH-V and RH-B) nicely accounts for all of the historical bedrock we have identified. It grants Jesus' death by crucifixion and accounts for the experiences and beliefs of the disciples and Paul. Therefore, RH passes this criterion, since it matches and does not trail other hypotheses (i.e., GH, LH, and CsH) in its explanatory scope.

2) *Explanatory Power*. RH (RH-V and RH-B) explains all of our historical bedrock without any strain whatsoever. Indeed, if the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are interpreted as seeing Jesus' resurrected body with normal vision (RH-B), this is in accord with the plain sense of the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels. So, RH-B exceeds RH-V in its explanatory power. RH is also far superior to VH in its explanatory power. While RH has no trouble at all explaining all of our relevant historical bedrock, ambiguity and unanswered questions abound in VH. As I noted in my assessment of VH, when Vermes speaks of "visions" and "apparitions" he does not specify whether these were hallucinations, delusions, or actual appearances of Jesus in some form to others. Neither does he specify who had the experiences nor what happened to Paul that led him to conclude that the risen Jesus had appeared to him. And we are left wondering how the tomb that had contained Jesus' corpse had become empty (which VH grants). Although the empty tomb is not part of the relevant historical bedrock, it is easily accommodated by RH-B, whereas RH-V will have difficulty.

3) *Plausibility*. Is RH implied by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than other hypotheses? Since RH requires a supernatural cause of some sort, it

[440] Ehrman (2008), 282; Ehrman (2000), 178.
[441] Ehrman (2008), 301.

has implications that may affect one's horizon. Since we are bracketing the question of worldview in relation to RH, it is difficult to name widely accepted truths that imply the truth of RH. In order to illustrate this point, let us presuppose for the moment that supernaturalism is false. In this case, we can conclude that RH is implausible, since it is certainly not implied by other accepted truths, namely that supernaturalism is false. Conversely, let us presuppose for the moment that supernaturalism is true or that God or some supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus from the dead. In this case, we can conclude that RH is very plausible, since it is certainly implied by the accepted truth that a supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus. The challenge, of course, is that historians do not know these things.[442] So they should neither presuppose supernaturalism nor *a priori* exclude it. Instead, they should examine the evidence without prejudice in either direction and select the best explanation of the relevant historical bedrock, which is accomplished by weighing hypotheses according to which best meets the five criteria for the best explanation.

One may claim that RH lacks plausibility, since it is generally accepted that the dead do not return to life. However, what is generally accepted is that the dead do not return to life *by natural causes*. RH and the early Christians have not asserted that Jesus returned to life by natural causes but by a supernatural one. In fact, the statement could be turned around as follows: If a supernatural being wanted to raise Jesus from the dead, RH is the most plausible explanation for the relevant historical bedrock. Thus, I reiterate the importance of historians bracketing their worldviews during an investigation of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. If we bracket our worldviews, we have no *a priori* reason for rendering RH as plausible. However, in chapter two we discussed the role of context in identifying a miracle or distinguishing one from an anomaly.[443] An event may be said to be a miracle when it (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. In chapter four we observed that this context exists in relation to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus performed acts that he and many others regarded as miracles and exorcisms, and believed that he had a special relationship with God who had chosen him to usher in his eschatological kingdom. While we will not presuppose God's existence, it is hard to ignore that our relevant historical bedrock exists without the broader context of Jesus' ministry that contains additional bedrock that is charged with religious significance. In other words, given the historical bedrock of Jesus' beliefs about himself and the deeds he performed that awed the crowd, his resurrection is implied by our three facts relevant to Jesus' fate if God exists. If the event occurred, it was a miracle. On the other hand, RH (RH-V and RH-B) is not implausible since it does not appear to be in tension with other conclusions supported by strong evidence held firmly and widely. Thus, RH is has some degree of plausibility.[444]

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[442] While debates over God's existence are far from over, if RH is the best explanation of the historical bedrock the case for supernaturalism and even theism is strengthened and the cases for metaphysical naturalism and atheism are weakened. One might argue that belief in God is not widely held. But on what basis could such a statement be made? Theism is quite prevalent and crosses multiple cultures.

[443] See chapter 2.4.

[444] Some propose that Jesus' resurrection (as RH-V or RH-B) nicely accounts for the explosion of the Christian Church despite trying circumstances. I must admit to failing for some time to recognize the

This brings us to the question of how RH compares in its plausibility to competing hypotheses. Since VH is the most plausible of the five previous hypotheses we have examined, we will compare RH with it. VH is not implied by Paul's

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value of this observation, despite its being offered by a few highly respected scholars. See Burridge and Gould (2004), 7, 45; L. T. Johnson (1996), 136, 139; Witherington (2006), 11. Wedderburn (1999) acknowledges the "dramatic recovery [of the Christian movement] from what had seemed like a crushing defeat [in Jesus' execution]." He asserts that whatever happened to turn things around "is the historical kernel of the Christian faith" (47). (But Wedderburn is agnostic regarding Jesus' resurrection.) My initial hesitation was due to the fact that every major world religion had some cause that catapulted it into success, none of which required a supernatural intervention. But O'Collins (Easter Faith, 2003) makes an observation that challenged my pause: "Gautama passed most of his long life teaching the way of enlightenment. The Chinese sage Confucius also spent years spreading his wisdom and attracting disciples, until he died and was buried with great pomp outside of Kufow. A wealthy wife and then military victories helped Muhammed to gather followers and propagate his teaching. As the recognized prophet of Arabia, he died in Medina and was buried there. In these three instances we can point to publicly verifiable causes which furthered the spread, respectively, of Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam: the long careers of the founders, financial resources, and success in battle. In the case of Christianity, the founder enjoyed none of these advantages: his public career was extremely short, he lacked military and financial support, and his life ended in humiliating failure and a disgraceful death on a cross. After all this, the subsequent propagation of the message of universal salvation in his name remains an enigmatic puzzle unless we admit a cause (the resurrection) adequate to account for the affect" (40). Yet I am still hesitant. After all, one may claim that the Christian Church struggled until Constantine had a vision that he interpreted as a portent from Jesus for the military victory he experienced shortly thereafter. Once Rome had embraced the Church, there was no need for a supernatural cause to explain its spread.

We may imagine a few scenarios in which RH may be either significantly damaged or even disconfirmed. Let us suppose that while digging around in Jerusalem, future archaeologists discover an early letter from the high priest Caiaphas to a synagogue official in Damascus. This letter explained that Saul had recently experienced a major rift with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that opened him up to Christianity. Caiaphas had ordered him to arrest and imprison a favored family member who had become a Christian. When Saul refused, Caiaphas publicly defrocked him and had one of Saul's colleagues and rivals do the job, who executed his orders with swiftness and brutality. Humiliated and angered, Saul took a few of his assistants and fled to Damascus. While on their way, he informed his assistants of a dream he had experienced the previous night in which Jesus had appeared to him. Shortly after arriving in Damascus, he sought out the Christians, joined them, and changed his name to Paul. Since Paul may be said to be the strongest brick in RH's foundation, the discovery of such a letter, if deemed authentic, would hurt RH possibly beyond repair. On the other hand, RH would be significantly strengthened if an official Roman document was discovered that demonstrated the presence of historical kernels in the Acts of Pilate. While the possibilities of such documents being discovered are intriguing, they may never have existed. Moreover, to the extent that RH fulfills the criteria for the best explanation and historicity, there is a corresponding unlikelihood that it will be disconfirmed. In other words, as the probability of RH increases, the likelihood decreases that there will ever be found disconfirming evidence. Thus, the mere possibility of such documents surfacing should not prevent us from moving ahead with an adjudication based on the actual evidence in our hands. If a future team of highly regarded archaeologists actually discovered the bones of Jesus, RH-V would not be impacted whereas RH-B would be disconfirmed.

Michael Martin (1998) contends that "the believer in Jesus' alleged resurrection must give reasons to suppose that it can probably not be explained by any unknown laws of nature. Since presumably not all laws have been discovered, this seems difficult to do" (74). But Swinburne (2003) answers, "We have to some extent good evidence about what are the laws of nature, and some of them are so well established and account for so many data that any modifications to them which we could suggest to account for the odd counter-instance would be so clumsy and ad hoc as to upset the whole structure of science" (23). It is not what we do not know from science that gives us pause relating to the resurrection of Jesus. What we do know from it gives us great reservation in waiting for a natural explanation unveiled by new scientific discoveries. Martin is certainly guilty here of appealing to a naturalism of the gaps.

conversion, at least if we are referring to natural events behind the apparitions and empty tomb, since we would not expect that a persecutor of the Church would have the same sort of experience as Jesus' disciples who had promoted it. This is a significant deficiency of VH since the appearance to Paul is part of the historical bedrock and is ignored by VH. While RH possesses a bit of plausibility, VH possesses some implausibility in reference to the relevant historical bedrock. Consequently, VH trails RH in its plausibility.

4) *Less* Ad Hoc. The only sense in which RH may be charged with being *ad hoc* is that it requires a view of reality that allows for the supernatural. However, we have already addressed the matter above (5.7.2.b) and found it to be without merit. I have neither presupposed nor *a priori* excluded God or supernaturalism but take a position of openness. It is worth observing that naturalism, especially metaphysical naturalism, is no less a philosophical construct than supernaturalism and theism.[445] And even if I am completely mistaken, RH must be judged according to whether it exceeds any *ad hoc* element in competing hypotheses. In my assessment of previous hypotheses, I concluded that GH, LH, CsH, and CfH have strong *ad hoc* elements.[446] VH is the superior to them. However, its *a priori* exclusion of RH seems to be somewhat of an *ad hoc* component, regarding it as "extreme" and requiring "blind faith." But this fault in VH does not prohibit others from assessing RH. In my judgment, VH and RH are equal in lacking *ad hoc* elements and are certainly less *ad hoc* than the four other hypotheses we have assessed.[447] I will, therefore, assign both a passing grade.

5) *Illumination*. A hypothesis fulfills this criterion when it provides a possible solution to other problems while not confusing other areas held with confidence. RH, if true, actually provides historians with a solution to a question that has frustrated them. There is amazement over the devotion of the earliest Christians toward Jesus, which was to such an extent that they felt obligated even to worship him.[448] How did this devotion come about, especially when it would certainly seem blasphemous to do so? There are no hints of any Jews who believed the Messiah was divine. Since many Jews believed in the general resurrection on the final day, neither would being resurrected require the conclusion that the one resurrected was a divine figure.[449] What then was the catalyst of such devotion to

[445] During a conference I attended in Marietta, Georgia, on February 3-4, 2006, naturalistic evolution and intelligent design were debated by leading proponents from both sides. Michael Ruse, a prominent philosopher of science who is an agnostic, stated his complete commitment to the occurrence of biological evolution by natural causes and then added that such a belief requires a "metaphysical commitment" and "an act of faith."

[446] Johnson (1996): "Not only has critical scholarship generated multiple and conflicting hypotheses, but these can be considered, in their own way, just as 'mythic' as the one they seek to supplant" (103).

[447] McCullagh's (1984, 21) assertion that RH is less plausible and more *ad hoc* than alternative explanations is thus unfounded. He states that "[f]or a hypothesis to be implausible, our present knowledge of the world must imply that it is probably false" (27). But no such knowledge exists pertaining to RH. As we observed with the plausibility criterion, it is generally accepted that humans do not return from the dead by natural causes. However, it is not a generally accepted truth that God cannot raise someone from the dead, which was the precise claim made by the early Christians.

[448] Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005), 205; Phillips (1998), 246.

[449] Wright in Stewart, ed. (2006), 38-39. Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005) regards the resurrection of Jesus as one of the major causes behind high christology (206).

Jesus? Hurtado regards this as "perhaps the most puzzling and most notable feature of the earliest Christian treatment of the figure of Jesus."[450]

I would like to suggest that, whether explicitly or implicitly, Jesus claimed divinity for himself during his earthly ministry in a manner similar to what is reported in the canonical Gospels. After he rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, any doubts they may have had concerning the truth of those claims dissolved. Granted, Jesus' claims to divinity in the canonical Gospels are typically regarded as inauthentic. But this conclusion is reached by presupposing that the high Christology we find among the early Christians existed *only* in the post-Easter Church.[451] Furthermore, the Gospels present Jesus making divine claims in so many ways and in such varied contexts that attributing all of these indications to the creativity of the Evangelists or their sources stretches credulity. Remove that presupposition and grant the unique event of Jesus' resurrection and the high Christology present among the earliest Christians loses its perplexity as the puzzle pieces come together quite nicely. Illumination is a bonus criterion and RH certainly fulfills it.

	Scope	Power	Plaus.	Less *ad hoc*	Illum.
VH	F	F	F	P	-
GH	P	F	F	F	P
LH	P	F	F	F	P
CsH	P	F	F	F	P
CfH	F	F	F	F	P
RH	P	P	P	P	P

Here we see that RH comes in first place and is the only hypothesis to fulfill all five criteria. RH is not only superior to the competing hypotheses examined, it outdistances them by a significant margin. RH explains all of the relevant historical bedrock without breaking a sweat, while all of the others but VH go to great pains to explain it with only limited success. VH actually gives up in the process.

Assessing the strength of the others compared to one another is not so clear at first glance. Recall that I adopted McCullagh's prioritization of the weightiest criteria: (1) plausibility, (2) explanatory scope and explanatory power, (3) less *ad hoc*, (4) illumination.[452] With this in mind, we can observe that RH is likewise the only hypothesis to fulfill all of the weightiest criteria, while CfH is the only of the six that could not fulfill a single one of these criteria and finds itself trailing the others. VH likewise fulfills only one criterion. But the less *ad hoc* criterion fulfilled by VH is weightier than the illumination criterion fulfilled by CfH. We also observed that GH, LH, and CsH are superior to VH in their explanatory scope while VH is less *ad hoc* than the three of them. If we stopped here, GH, LH, and CsH would be superior to VH. However, we must keep in mind that the above chart reflects the final analysis. Prior to assessing RH, we observed that VH is more plausible than GH, LH, and CsH and plausibility is a weightier criterion than explanatory scope. Consequently, VH

[450] Hurtado ("Jesus' Resurrection," 2005), 205.
[451] We see this move clearly demonstrated by Barrett (1967), 25-26 and Dunn (2003), 723.
[452] See chapter 1.3.2.

excels over GH, LH, and CsH in criteria within the first and third weightiest categories (plausibility, less *ad hoc*) whereas it is inferior to them in the second and fourth (explanatory scope/power, illumination). Of the six hypotheses we have examined, I, therefore, place VH in second place, while GH, LH, and CsH are tied for third, and CfH in fourth. This is interesting because it informs us that an agnostic position (i.e., "What happened to Jesus and what led his disciples and Paul to conclude that he had risen from the dead and appeared to them remain anomalies.") is superior to a number of attempts to explain the historical bedrock in natural terms.

5.8 Summary and Conclusions

We have examined six hypotheses according to the methodology discussed in greater length in the preceding chapters and outlined at the beginning of this chapter. We judged that five of the hypotheses are very weak and quite problematic while the Resurrection hypothesis fulfills all five criteria for the best explanation—the only of the six to do so—and outdistances all of the competing hypotheses we examined by a significant margin.[453] Accordingly, we are warranted in placing it on our spectrum of historical certainty at "very certain."[454] The only legitimate reasons for rejecting the Resurrection hypothesis are philosophical and theological in nature: if supernaturalism is false or a non-Christian religion is exclusively true.[455] However, if one brackets the question of worldview, neither presupposing nor *a priori* excluding supernaturalism, and examines the data, the historical conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead follows.

The powerful presence of horizons has an extraordinary influence on scholars. For some Christians, no amount of disconfirming evidence would ever be sufficient to convince them that Jesus did not rise from the dead. The converse is likewise true: For some, no amount of evidence for Jesus' resurrection would convince them that it was an event in the past.[456] Although neither position is reasonable, it seems to me that those in the latter group as well as those who are simply unconvinced by the historical case for Jesus' resurrection could acknowledge that naturalistic explanations are flawed and that the Resurrection hypothesis is quite good on strictly historical

[453] Habermas (2003), 14. Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for the Resurrection" in Davis, Kendall, O'Collins, eds. (1998), 201. Accordingly, Watson's (1987) claim that belief in Jesus' resurrection cannot be founded upon evidence (366) is mistaken and Tucker's (2004) claim that naturalistic hypotheses are superior is uninformed (99-100).
[454] See chapter 1.3.4.
[455] Or a naturalistic hypothesis we have not examined turns out equally strong or stronger than RH.
[456] In some instances, it appears that any explanation other than Jesus' resurrection will do, no matter how problematic it may be. Davis (2006) offers a review and critique of *The Empty Tomb* by Price and Lowder (2005). Most of the contributors in this volume are hypercritical and advance hypotheses such as that Jesus may not have died on the cross or may not have even existed or that Paul did not write 1 Cor. 15:3-11. Davis comments, "One aspect of the desperation of which I speak is a methodological procedure that unites the essays in *TET*. I would describe it as having three steps: (1) suggesting naturalistic hypothesis which, if true, explain some aspects of the New Testament accounts of the resurrection of Jesus; (2) embrace all biblical or extrabiblical ancient texts, phrases, hints, or textual variants that can be interpreted as supporting the hypothesis; and (3) reject all the other biblical texts as late, or patently false, or apologetically motivated, or legendary" (62). Statements by atheist philosopher Michael Martin (1991) are revealing: "It is not inconceivable that on very rare occasions someone being restored to life has no natural or supernatural cause" (76); "I admit that some events could occur without any cause" (87); "[E]ven if the resurrection of Jesus was justified by the evidence, it would not support the belief that the Christian God exists and that Jesus is the Son of God" (100).

grounds, yet choose to withhold belief.[457] This seems to me to be a more honest and respectable position than to run wild with imaginative constructions and call it *history*.[458]

A good critical scholar must account for the facts with integrity, even when he finds his conclusion in tension with his desired outcome. Long before John Adams became the second U.S. President, in 1770 he was a respected lawyer in New England where the Boston Massacre had just occurred. No lawyers would defend the British soldiers involved for fear of the American public, which had now grown even stronger in its anti-British sentiments. But Adams believed that everyone was entitled to a fair trial. He took the case, the public turned against him and he lost more than half of his clients. In a courtroom that was described as crowded and "electrical," Adams argued that the soldiers were innocent and that anti-British sentiments could lead to the execution of innocent men. He then added, "Facts are stubborn things and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictums of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."[459] A similar axiom is applicable to historians interested in answering the "prize puzzle of New Testament research." No matter how much one may loathe the idea that Jesus rose from the dead and fantasize about other outcomes, the historical bedrock remains the same and resists misuse when prudent method administers reasonable controls.

Fortunately, many modern skeptical scholars have opted for a higher road. Habermas has given more attention to naturalistic hypotheses than perhaps anyone.[460] He observes that the rejection of naturalistic hypotheses is not exclusively found among Christian scholars but is widespread: "Intriguingly, this more recent rejection is not confined to any one school of thought. Theologians holding a wide range of positions often agree in dismissing all of these naturalistic theories as untenable."[461] Vermes may be placed in this category.

I am contending, however, that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock. Since it fulfills all five of the criteria for the best explanation and outdistances competing hypotheses by a significant margin in their ability to fulfill the same criteria, the historian is warranted in regarding Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred in the past. Questions pertaining to the cause behind the event (i.e., who or what raised Jesus), the mechanism behind the event (i.e., how precisely was it accomplished), and the precise nature of Jesus' resurrected state are beyond the reach of historians.

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[457] With Vermes, a few others who have concluded that they do not know what happened on Easter are Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 350; cf. Allison ("Explaining," 2005), 132; Carnley (1987), 61, 89; Dunn (2003), 876-77; Gwynne (2000), 21; Segal (2004), 477; Smit (1998), 17; Wedderburn (1999), 96-98, 217-18. While an atheist, Flew asserted that one can be rational in believing Jesus rose from the dead. Now a deist, Flew still rejects the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. See Ankerberg (2005), 22.

[458] Caird (1980): "We can respect the genuine agnostic who is content to live in doubt because he considers the evidence inadequate for belief, but not the spurious agnostic who prefers fantasy to evidence" (60-61).

[459] D. McCullough (2001), 65-68; *Legal Papers of John Adams*, III, 269.

[460] See Habermas ("Resurrection Claims," 1989); Habermas ("Explaining," 2001); Habermas ("The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses," 2001); Habermas ("Replies," 2001); Habermas and Licona (2004), 81-181; Habermas in Stewart, ed. (2006).

[461] Habermas (2003), 14; cf. 15.

There can be no doubt that many will be unimpressed with my conclusion. After all, is it is not just another road manipulated in its construction in order to arrive at the same desired destination numerous Christian scholars have already reached? The same, of course, may be said of any new book written on Jesus' resurrection and that comes to the conclusion that he did not, in fact, rise from the dead. I have laid out my method in a manner anyone can view, worked hard at managing my bias, and weighed hypotheses according to how well they account for items regarded as facts by a nearly universal and heterogeneous majority of scholars. Thus, it would be insufficient to scoff at my conclusions and write them off with a single brush stroke: "He manipulated the exercise so that it produced the results he desired." My method and its application throughout must be critically assessed.

In spite of my efforts to manage my horizon, maintain a strict adherence to method, and arrive at a sound conclusion, I find myself having some doubts related to the integrity and results of this investigation. Have I been overly critical of naturalistic hypotheses while unconsciously turning my head away from data difficult for RH to handle? Have I unfairly manipulated the process to my advantage? Have I forced the results? Rather than feeling relief that RH is the best explanation, I find myself skeptical that the tools of historical research can produce reliable results. But I suspect this is simply Cartesian anxiety and perhaps a lingering effect of my conscious and enduring efforts to manage my horizon rather than an indication of the deficiency of method. The persistent practice of seeking to identify my biases and abiding suspicion of their controlling influence to the point of frequent agony over the past several years is not turned off by the flick of a switch or placing a period at the end of this dissertation.

I am fully aware that I would have been tougher on RH and perhaps easier on the other proposals considered herein had I possessed an animus against Christianity. I would have been more creative in my attempts to strengthen those naturalistic hypotheses we have considered. Irrespective of my shortcomings, I take comfort that a few of the owners of the naturalistic hypotheses we have considered have the animus I lack and are indeed motivated to come up with a plausible hypothesis that is superior to RH. We have assessed six hypotheses using a method over which we have deliberated. Accordingly, although imperfect, there are a number of controls in the approach we have taken. And that gives me further comfort.

I also concede that we have only weighed a limited number of naturalistic explanations. Although these are representative of a majority of naturalistic positions offered today, others that are far different and worthy of examination may remain.[462] It must also be admitted that there are times when a prudent assessment of all of the available evidence can point to the wrong conclusion. We have all made decisions

[462] Although not a natural hypothesis, the recent proposal by Dale Allison is perhaps the best challenge at present to RH-B. See Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 198-375. I would like to note that I reviewed this book for RBL and moderated a panel discussion in which he defended his hypothesis against the criticisms offered by three other panelists present: William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, and Stephen Davis. This panel discussion was a joint event of EPS and AAR and took place in San Diego on November 17, 2007. Allison maintains that an ontologically living Jesus probably appeared to his disciples in some manner after his death. While judging the empty tomb as more probable than not, he does not think that Jesus rose bodily and was the cause of its vacancy.

that turned out being mistaken after careful consideration of the data and all known options at the time. Accordingly, we must always hold our conclusions provisionally.

If the resurrection of Jesus is the "prize puzzle of New Testament research,"[463] it is my hope that this dissertation has contributed toward making the puzzle solution a little clearer.

[463] Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005), 200.