The resurrection revived: a critical examination

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Chapter 1

1 WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE?

1.1 It’s the end of the world, and we’re loving it

Why has the resurrection once again become the centre point of a new storm brewing in both popular and academic culture? And why should this current resurrection debate be given priority and analysed anew? Because the combination of the realisation of death and human beings’ need to interpret its mysteries, presents one of the most consistently featured problems in the history of religions. A problem whose intensity has reached fever pitch in the last decade, but then not only in the history of religions:

There's a powerful scene near the end of “The Road” – the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel – where a father and son huddle together under soulless skies on a desolate, nameless beach littered with whale and human skeletons. They have finally reached the coast after traversing by foot a post-apocalyptic landscape fraught with unspeakable dangers, toils, and snares. The boy, about 10, has never seen the sea. "What's on the other side?" he asks. "Nothing", replies his father, suffering from malnutrition and weakness after fending off all sorts of evils. All along he has encouraged his son to maintain hope – to "carry the fire" – but has slowly lost his own. The boy, who believes there's still goodness somewhere in their dark and dying world, looks out to the sea and says: "There must be something". Wanting to keep his son's hope alive, the man relents: "Maybe there's a father and his son, and they're sitting on the beach too". Like McCarthy's 2006 book, the film is both depressing and redeeming; it depicts one of the most loving father-son relationships to appear on the big screen. And this particular scene speaks volumes for all of us asking a universal question – *what's on the other side?*

This question is innate to human experience, and Hollywood knows it – as evidenced by the spate of spiritually themed films to debut after the blockbuster success of “The Passion of the Christ” in 2004. In a fear-filled world where war, terrorism, and economic collapse bring the question of death (and the afterlife) to the fore, the film industry has delivered ever more stories to fuel the question – though not always providing answers. Also, people are asking, perhaps more than ever, what happens after we die – whether by natural causes or because of some cataclysmic event like war, terrorism, earthquakes, teen-idol vampires, hell-bent robots, wandering zombies; whatever. When “2012” came out in November 2009, *The Fresno Bee* asked scholars and religious leaders what to make of moviegoers' fascination with the end times. Margaret Gonsoulin, a sociology professor at California State University, speculated that it reflected a hunger for meaning in anxiety-ridden times: "They want to know about the future", she told the *Bee*. But there's far more at work here. Brett McCracken, a critic for *Christianity Today Movies*, wrote for *Relevant* that we are "compelled" to watch these films because "[t]here is in each of us an innate sense of justice – a sense that all of us probably deserve calamity or worse. When an act of God is on display, we marvel at what we suspect (perhaps hope) is his sovereignty at work, wrathful and terrible though it may be". So, while Depression-era moviegoers sought escape; moviegoers during the most recent recession want both to escape and to see films *about* escape – even bleak and scary ones – into another world; the afterlife, the "other side”.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says that “God has placed eternity in our hearts” (3:11); implying that we are divinely wired to wonder what comes next. And in that wondering, we are acutely aware of our own mortality – whether our death comes by natural causes or because of the end of the world. The films discussed here feed that fascination – a fascination that runs as high in Christians as in anyone else (look no further than the *Left Behind* series, which has sold more than 65 million copies). "In difficult times, our restlessness for more comes to the surface", Richard J Mouw (president of Fuller Theological Seminary) told *Christianity Today*, "these are difficult days, and it should not

surprise us that yearnings for eternity – for a final resolution of all the struggle with good and evil – will come to the fore".

1.2 The problem with the resurrection

Though it has become evident that the perceived threats of the modern world have heightened people's awareness of the idea of the end-time and of what the hereafter holds; it is not necessarily as evident to precisely what hereafter people are referring. This is problematic because resurrection and immortality can be different in critical ways, and it can be profoundly misleading to subsume them under some simplistic master category (such as "afterlife" or "life after death"). Thus, more careful definitions are needed here: "resurrection" must be defined as an eschatological event that, though it is expected to occur in history, will transform and redeem history and open onto a barely imaginable world beyond anything that preceded it. Although we are used to calling it a "doctrine", resurrection is actually (at its source) a prophetic vision, serving as a key element in the expectation that God will redeem the tragedies of history – not just for the few who survive till the end, but for all who have lived (rightly); relayed by necessity into mythopoetic language (Levenson 2006:20). This expectation of an eschatological resurrection coexists easily with immortality, as long as the latter is defined as the state of those who have died and await their restoration into embodiment (i.e. into full human existence). It can also coexist easily with immortality understood as the invulnerability to a second death of those who will be raised and rewarded with eternal life.

But, if immortality is defined in connection with an indestructible core of the self that death cannot threaten (and may even liberate), then resurrection and immortality are at odds; as that version of immortality does not look forward to a new creation in a miraculous end-time, but backward to the original creation when God either made humankind deathless or granted it the capacity to re-acquire a lost immortality (Levenson 2006:21). Seen in this way, human beings already have all they need to

survive death in this spirit/soul that is immortal, or can be made so through the practice of ethics and morality. This understanding has created a powerful current in the modern world, a current replacing the idea of resurrection with the abovementioned (more problematic) idea of immortality, mainly in order to bring religious affirmations into accord with science (which in this case means into accord with what Kass [1994:34] calls "reductive biology [that] seem[s] to most scientists to vindicate their mechanistic and materialistic presuppositions"). Now, in the context of the resurrection, the above statement could produce certain questions worth studying (Mulder 2006:203-204):

- Can the bodily resurrection "evolve"? And if the answer is yes, then how?
- If it is accepted that there are no absolutes, how can the bodily resurrection of Jesus be regarded as a meta-narrative and an absolute?

Another problem to be kept in mind when studying the resurrection is the fact that, as an unlikely and inexplicable reversal of a universal event of nature, resurrection surely qualifies as a miracle; which also makes it glaringly vulnerable to the powerful critique that has been levelled against the very idea of miracles over the past three and a half centuries – resurrection violates the laws of nature and has never been reproduced under laboratory conditions. To this can be added the suspicions of psychologists (learned and popular alike) that the source of all belief in an afterlife lies in the fear of death and the fantasy associated with it that death is only temporary; and the extraordinary advances that have been made in the life sciences in recent decades, giving further impetus to the impression that human beings are unable to transcend their physical base (Dembski 1999:25-31). Interesting to note here is that an embrace of corporealism can actually be seen as incompatible with human consciousness and free will; for "if the activities of the living are being [understood only] in terms of the motions of inanimate matter" (Levenson 2006:12), then the experience of subjectivity and moral choice is an illusion – for that would mean that the decisions people make, the very

consciousness they experience, and the perceptions of transcendence that they have are all in that case only really being reconfigurations of the underlying matter to which their being reduces (Barr 1999:48, 50).

2 MAYBE THERE'S A FATHER AND HIS SON

2.1 The Son resurrected/on "the other side"

This popular fascination with the end, with death, and with what (if anything) lies beyond it, has almost automatically also influenced the theme and the direction of academic work – especially in the theological field and the possible answers it can give to the world's dilemma. For, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jesus and his resurrection continue to captivate the attention of scholars:

> Indeed, as far as Christological research is concerned, the resurrection of Jesus became one of the most profoundly studied issues in Christology that this century has experienced; the published material both comprehensive and intensive.
>
> Osborne 1997:7

But his attraction is not limited to the pious, non-believers also study him; leading to a research arc from extreme sceptics asserting he is a myth to the orthodox claiming him deity, and everyone who falls between these two positions – offering enough portraits of him to fill a gallery. But, whether Jesus was mythical, mortal, or immortal; and whether it was he or those who wrote about him who are responsible for the phenomenon; few (if any) other historical figures have received the attention Jesus and his (alleged) resurrection has.

Why the resurrection specifically? Well, apart from the fact that the power of the resurrection of the dead is certainly a solution to the human fear of death (our "ultimate other"; Bynum 1995:43-51); because it is the belief that the ancient writers themselves chose as definitive – as the crucial test; as a marker for declaring other people in and out of their communities (Setzer 2004a:6). So, on the one hand, modern religious thinkers cannot deny the extraordinary advances that science has made in identifying

the physical components of life; on the other hand, the very basis of their religious commitment – of moral judgement itself – collapses if they identify life wholly with its physical components (Levenson 2006:13).

Complicating the matter (and any study of the subject) is the fact that there is no direct and steady (and without detours) unfolding of the doctrine of the resurrection over time – it was a conviction that took shape in different times and places; in confrontation with other cultures; in response to outside events; and as a result of internal developments. This meant that streams of belief in the resurrection of the body ran side by side with belief in the immortality of the soul, and often mingled – one did not replace the other over time. For this reason it has become commonplace in the field of New Testament studies to say that early Christianity was diverse; with debates taking place within larger contemporary discourses about religious pluralism and Christian identity; and then speaking in terms of pluralities – of communities, Christologies, and Judaisms in the 1st century C E (Bauer 1996). But, although the theme of diversity emerges regularly in scholarly discussions about Jesus, the debates themselves tend to be somewhat two-sided, often built upon recurring dichotomies and characterised by stark choices (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:35).

> Most historical Jesus scholars assume that the Gospels have overcooked their portrait of Jesus, and that the church's Trinitarian theology wildly exceeds anything Jesus thought about himself and anything the evangelists believed. These scholars pursue a Jesus who is less than or different from or more primitive than what the Gospels teach and the church believes. There is no reason to do historical Jesus studies – to probe "what Jesus was really like" – if the Gospels are accurate and the church's beliefs are justified. There are only two reasons to engage in historical Jesus studies: first, to see if the church got him right; and second, if the church

> did not, to find the Jesus who is more authentic than the church's Jesus.
>
> McKnight 2010:2

> Of particular importance is the experience of fragmentation which is increasingly affecting our apprehension of what it means to be a subject, and how we conceive of our subjectivity.
>
> Arnal 1997:310

So perhaps these dichotomies persist because they are doing work that we do not sufficiently recognise – namely that it is possible to isolate a scholarly practice, such as literary analysis, from the rhetorical strategies and ideological interests of Biblical studies in general. Here it becomes especially important to remember that reconstructing Christian origins is never only about reconstructing Christian origins; it is also quite conversant with (and relevant to) contemporary debates about Christian identity and religious and cultural diversity:

> Christians are actively engaged in sorting through the rich archives of myths, teachings, and attitudes that have defined their religion, trying to locate the symbols that may constructively address the problems of our time.
>
> Mack 1993:254

This includes engagement with the Christian tradition's view of Jesus as diverse, which has implications for seeing (and authorising) contemporary Christianity as diverse (e.g. Crossan 1994:200). Allison (1997:45) describes the problematic nature of the times as follows:

> If in the past we have tended to find too much unity in the early church, perhaps now, as citizens of a pluralistic and fragmented

> society, we are going too far the other way. One may even wonder whether for its first decade or two early Christianity was not the complex thing modern scholars imagine, but instead a very small movement with a few recognisable leaders who, as Paul tells us, agreed on quite a bit.

2.2 Approaching the resurrection

> The question that many of us in the discipline must ask is this: Can theology or Christology or, more importantly, faith itself be connected to the vicissitudes of historical research and results ... We must be willing to ask, Whose Jesus will we trust? Will it be that of the evangelists and the apostles? Will it be that of the church – the creedal, orthodox Jesus? Will it be the latest proposal from a brilliant historian? Or will it be our own consensus based on modern-day historical scholarship?
>
> McKnight 2010:3

With the above in mind, an informed analysis of the resurrection debate is necessary – more strongly put, it is essential; no matter how difficult it might be (De Mey 1998:246-273) – to analyse the different strata of understanding as it relates to current resurrection research by studying several moments in the Western tradition in which the doctrine of the bodily resurrection was debated, challenged, and redefined; not necessarily focusing on the formulation of doctrine as such, but rather on the ways in which these theologians and philosophers argue – thus situating these debates in the context of changing attitudes towards bodies (living and dead); changing ideas about the soul; the emergence of new eschatological places (e.g. purgatory); and fundamental shifts in the concepts of time and self. It is here that the linguistic trappings of a text are often more telling than the explicit arguments made in it – the idea sometimes elaborated on, sometimes betrayed, by the specific metaphors that clothe them.

It is exactly for this reason that it is so important to start with the texts before us and to follow *their* metaphorical connections; rather than choosing a modern theoretical construct that predetermines what the context is and for what (Bynum 1995:xvi-xvii). Thus, any consideration given to gender or power, birth or burial, money or food are made in an effort to situate the debates being studied; and then only because the authors slip easily into using analogies drawn from these aspects of human experience at points of tension, confusion, fallacy, self-contradiction, or absurdity. At this point it is interesting to note that, even though (almost without exception) the literature pertaining to Jesus' resurrection has been written by Biblical scholars and philosophers; a very many varied and differentiated conclusions have been and are still being reached.

This begs the following questions: Could a reason for these still varied conclusions on the subject be that those writing on it are not equipped for the task of analysing and interpreting history and historical method? Have Biblical scholars and philosophers received the same training in philosophy of history, and historical method as their cousins (i.e. professional historians) outside of the community of Biblical scholars and philosophers? How do these historians of non-religious matters go about their work? Would an application of their approach lead us closer to solving the puzzle?

In order to be able to begin answering this question, one of this study's main objectives is to learn and apply the approach of historians – outside of the community of Biblical scholars – to the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead; thus providing interaction with philosophers of history related to hermeneutical and methodological considerations, and then applying this knowledge to an investigation into the resurrection of Jesus. This may allow us as Biblical scholars to learn from the discussions among philosophers of history; in this way avoiding repeating the work of others, allowing us to focus on new areas.

These epistemological challenges have brought about the realisation that the claim of ethical neutrality in historical-critical methodology serves as insulation from ethical accountability for interpretations, and as a denial of perspectival contributions of people who clearly articulate their location and interest (Patte 1995:17-21).

> Professional historians are not bloodless templates passively registering the facts: we actively and imaginatively project. Our rationality cannot be extricated from our sentiments and feelings, our hopes and fears, our hunches and ambitions ... Maybe we have unthinkingly reduced biography [of Jesus] to autobiography.
>
> Allison 2009:20

But, if we accept that interpretation does not happen in a vacuum, that we are all shaped by our social locations, contexts, experiences, and commitments; then we are confronted with ethical questions, especially when keeping in mind that:

> What has been mentioned before in a text may become an indexed feature of the co-text of a later utterance; at the same time, it is part of the situation-specific common background [context] knowledge participants may rely on in the production and interpretation of future activities.
>
> Auer 1996:18-19

“Why is any history constructed as it is? Whose interests are served by any historical account? What material effect does this historical account have on people’s lives, and what effects does it continue to have (Burnett 2000:111)? What are the effects of our interpretations of these histories? Whose interests have been and are being served in the texts and in our interpretations” (Patte 1995:114-115)? Clearly, this is a problem that is in need of a critical evaluation of its many different origins, dimensions, understandings, implications, promulgators, and critics. The method proposed here is a

combination of *historiography* with an *ethics of understanding* – for I believed that, with this combination, we can be more assured of covering all the different facets of the phenomenon called “resurrection”.

3 THE WAY FORWARD

3.1 Historically speaking

A study of the resurrection and the texts propounding it reveals that it is an innately historical concept – it "concerns quests *about* history and questions *of* history" (White 1978:81), and it can be described as "representations of past events, usually texts" (Tucker 2004:1). But for the effective study of history the discipline of *historiography* needs to be understood and applied. *Historiography* is both philosophy *and* method, and can be defined as the “history of the philosophy of history” or as “writings about the past” (Licona 2008:16); in which historians concern themselves with attempting to establish criteria for identifying what is true in a correspondence sense, striving to formulate a description that corresponds to what occurred.

Yet our knowledge of the past may not mirror reality precisely (have/be in one-to-one correspondence with the details), meaning that that we cannot be certain that a particular description of the past corresponds precisely with the past (e.g. it is certainly incomplete). Because of this gap, historians need to be willing to settle for a conclusion that is more modest, one that speaks of plausibility or probability based on the available data. They do this with the use of *Correspondence theory (*the view enjoying the greatest acceptance at present); a theory in which history is described as knowable, and some hypotheses as truer than others in a correspondence sense (Licona 2008: 60).

We also assume that a person with reasonable intelligence, a mature horizon, and properly functioning senses will have accurate perceptions. This is seen to be possible because, even though historical descriptions do present a blurred picture, portions of the image are still quite sharp; and because, even though we as human beings perceive the world directly through our senses, these descriptions of the world around us must still correspond to their conditions to be true – insofar as our descriptions achieve this

(and does not contradict it), they reflect truth (Licona 2008:58). When weighing hypotheses, two general methods (Licona 2008:73-80), have been shown to work:

3.1.1 Arguments to the best explanation

These arguments make inferences and weigh hypotheses according to specific criteria; with the hypothesis that best meets the criteria being preferred. The criteria most often used are:

- Explanatory scope – the quantity of facts accounted for by a hypothesis; the hypothesis that includes the most relevant data = the hypothesis with greatest explanatory scope.
- Explanatory power – the quality of the explanation of the facts; the hypothesis that explains the data with the least amount of effort, vagueness, and ambiguity = the hypothesis with greater explanatory power.
- Plausibility – the hypothesis must be implied to a greater degree and by a greater variety of accepted truths (i.e. background knowledge) than other hypotheses.
- Less *ad hoc* – a hypothesis possesses an *ad hoc* component when it enlists non-evidenced assumptions; that is, goes beyond what is already known (Miller 1992:11). This criterion has also been referred to as the criterion of *simplicity*, referring to fewer presuppositions rather than combined factors.
- Illumination – when a hypothesis provides a possible solution to other problems, while not confusing other areas held with confidence.

Though it is important to remember that not all these criteria hold equal weight; it should also be pointed out that historians using these criteria to get at the best explanation should still weigh each hypothesis according to how well it meets all five of these criteria – the hypothesis fulfilling the most criteria, especially the more weighty ones (e.g. McCullagh [1984:28] lists plausibility as the most important criteria, followed by explanatory scope and power, followed by less *ad hoc*), is to be preferred. These

arguments to the best explanation are guided by inference, and can sometimes even be superior to being an eyewitness to an event (Meyer 1979:88-92).

3.1.2 Arguments from statistical inference

These arguments are sometimes useful to historians, and can be a more reliable tool in the hands of the historian than arguments to the best explanation (McCullagh 1984:45). But, in order for these statistical inferences to yield reliable conclusions, they must take into account *all* relevant data. In most cases where statistical inference arguments are employed, the historian has extensive data whereby he/she can conclude that, for example, X occurs a certain percentage of the time, or when A is present (McCullagh 1984:52). So, if the historian knows all possible hypotheses that could account for all of the extant data, he/she may employ a statistical argument that has a reciprocal relationship between the competing hypotheses. Unfortunately, *all* possible hypotheses are seldom known in historical inquiry, and assigning mathematical probabilities to a hypothesis usually involves a great amount of subjectivity in historical inquiry (Licona 2008:79).

Still, philosophers and scientists often employ Bayes' Theorem for estimating the probability that a condition exists (or existed), given the extant data; even though many scholars are doubtful that this theorem can be employed effectively with most historical hypotheses, as "it is often not at all clear what value should be given to the prior probability" (Bartholomew 2000:34). McCullagh (1984:46-47; 57-58) writes that "virtually no historian has used it, and even if any wished to do so he/she would probably find it difficult as it requires information which is often hard to obtain"; Tucker (2005:381) asserts that "it is unclear if and how [Bayes' Theorem] can be worked out in practice…", as "…the aggregation of all probabilities requires more evidence than is usually available about particular historical contexts…". Bartholomew (2000:252-253) notes that two difficulties exist for Bayes' Theorem – first, we can never be certain that our inventory of hypotheses is complete; and second, we have to take into account the important role of prior probability and the severe limitations of judgements based only

on likelihoods. Thus, "…there is no calculus by which we can accumulate evidence and so arrive at a final answer"; and yet, "…though the use of formal probability arguments cannot deliver all that the theory promises, there is no reason for ignoring what it can tell us" (Bartholomew 2000:253).

3.2 Seeing things differently

This study wants to address both the different questions and analyses of the debate by asking: What if we see things differently? What if we were to look from a different perspective? What if we were to ask a different set of questions? In order for this to be possible, we need to develop an *ethics of interpretation* (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:2) – a study attending to both the *way* that interpretation is done, encompassing:

- An investigation of what we do and how we do it using *method* (the way in which data is viewed, weighed, contextualised, and tested) as a means toward achieving greater objectivity (by reducing the amount of control the horizons of historians have on their research; Licona 2008:32-36), revisiting the foundation of their views (including the nature of truth itself).
- A set of ethically-grounded interpretive practices – accounting for *all* the relevant *historical bedrock* (facts that are so strongly evidenced that they are considered by the majority of scholars to be virtually indisputable) on which any legitimate hypothesis should be built, in this way placing a check on the explanatory narratives that can be constructed (McCullagh 1984:236); making your horizon and the methods you employ for achieving results as *clear* and as *public* as possible (meaning they are open to scrutiny); then consciously detaching yourself as far as possible from your own biases by being "willing to part with the way tradition and conventional wisdom say things are…the way you would prefer them to be, and be ready to accept the way things really are" (Hoover 2000:127-128).

- A process by which we evaluate our ethics and practices; and the *effects* of our interpretations, in this way invoking the relationship between the individual and the "other" (Patte 1995:14); enlisting the help of *peer pressure* to act as a check on possible biases, in so doing minimising the impact of your horizon; but also taking peer pressure to the next level by submitting your ideas to *unsympathetic experts*, as they are certain to have a different hypothesis (and therefore a motivation to locate weaknesses in competing hypotheses; or, as McCullagh [1984:236] says, "one can be reasonably sure that historical descriptions which have won the approval of unsympathetic or impartial expert critics are not biased, but are well justified and merit belief").

So, instead of asking the expected questions (e.g. "What is eschatology?"), this study aims to ask: What interests and frameworks inform the questions we ask and the way in which we interpret our sources? How does scholarship echo (and even participate in) contemporary public discourses about Christian identity? The use of the tools of historical-criticism within a larger framework is suggested, wherein the "meaning of the Bible and the meaning-making of Biblical studies" (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2000:ix) will be attended to through three intersecting practices (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:12) – *critical reflexivity*, complemented by the use of the two related practices of *textual re-reading* and *public debate*:

- *Critical reflexivity*; not only asking what our patterns of interpretation are (the analysis of interpretive practices), but also what their effects are (the ethical evaluation of the results of the interpretation; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1999:196-197); therefore moving back and forth between investigating how we read, and analysing how our readings shape (and are shaped) by our current contexts (e.g. debates about Christian identity in a diverse world). Important to note from the outset is its tendency to unmask the discipline and the exegete as socially located – "If our perspectives shape our interpretations, how do we adjudicate

between readings? What makes my reading preferable to any others" (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:14)?

- *Textual re-reading*; including (1) evaluating the effectiveness of dominant readings of a text, and (2) arguing for the plausibility of alternative readings.
- The practice of *public debates*; in other words ongoing methodological, historical, and textual investigations – and then not only as a rarefied scholarly discipline, but as a part of the ongoing public discourse; in this way both paying attention to the public character and context of scholarly discourse, as well as intentionally entering into the conversation.

However, these are not methodical steps in a linear progression, they are mutually interacting practices that draw on (and shape) each other. But it does mean that, through the use of these practices, we will not be lulled into thinking that we engage a text apart from contemporary rhetorical trends; raising new possibilities for the way in which we historically reconstruct the Jesus movement (and its relationship to other groups within Israel) and allowing us to enter into the public debate about Jesus and eschatology in a way that takes the ethical possibilities and consequences of our reconstructions of Christian origins and identity seriously.

Chapter 2

1 THE RESURRECTION IN BROAD STROKES

Since most of our information about the past comes to us in the form of texts, we must ask how these should be approached. Bracketing genre considerations, *methodical credulity* views texts as being reliable; unless they possess indicators that they should be regarded otherwise (i.e. internal contradictions, states of affairs described that contradict existing data and manufacture new and misleading data in order to promote the author's cause). But this could lay some unwanted landmines – ancient historians could also lie, spin, and embellish like any modern historian; and genre questions are not always easily answered because of the distance in time and horizon. Accordingly, only when the intention, method, and integrity of the author are understood does *credulity* function as the best method (Licona 2008:62).

2 ANCIENT TRADITIONS REVISITED

We have to resist the powerful temptation to assimilate the evidence about Israelite religion that the Hebrew Bible provides uncritically to the patterns of the antecedent and neighbouring cultures (patterns that are themselves more varied and less clear than we might wish); in doing so we can avoid the more extreme speculations about the role of the dead in the lives of their kin that have abounded among Biblical scholars in recent years (Levenson 2006:57). But, just as Biblical exegetes need to remember that Israelite religion was a larger and more variegated phenomenon than the Hebrew Bible authorises, so scholars of Ancient Near Eastern religion need to remember that the Biblical authors make a selection out of a larger repertory of religious forms with criteria of their own in order to propound patterns of religious beliefs and patterns with an integrity of their own (Levenson 2006:58).

2.1 Agreeing to agree?!

In the field of Biblical studies, renowned for its deficit of basic agreement and the depth of its controversies, one cannot but be impressed by the longevity and breadth of the consensus about the early Israelite notion of life after death – or rather, that there was none; that "everyone who dies goes to *Sheol* just as he, if everything happens in the normal way, is put into the grave" (Pedersen 1991:461). The irony is that it is an axiom that the Hebrew Bible contains little to no mention of the afterlife – the healing of nature (including healing from nature's worst affliction/infirmity – death) had long played a major role in both Canaanite and Israelite theology (Levenson 2006:xii); so much so that

> The expectation of the resurrection of the dead was a weight-bearing beam in the edifice of rabbinic Judaism ... central to two major and inseparable elements of rabbinic Judaism, the rabbi's vision of redemption and their understanding of Jewish peoplehood.
>
> Levenson 2006:x

Jewish apocalyptic just focused this expectation of a miraculous reversal onto the expected end-time. But, in doing so, Jewish apocalyptic linked up with a number of other aspects of Judaism already ancient when it first appeared. So, though some scholars conclude that ancient Israel must have rejected such beliefs, the picture is murkier; as Friedman and Overton (2000:36) put it, the Biblical silence on the afterlife is really more of a whisper. In fact, the literature of the Second Temple period – both Hellenistic and Roman – presents a vast and memorable array of responses to this problem (Elledge 2006:1), a diversity in pre-rabbinic and non-rabbinic thought on death and life (and the "organic connections between earlier and later visions of redemptions") that should not be underestimated nor missed (Levenson 2006:xiii). Cavallin (1974:23-165) once cited over thirty distinct ancient writings that contain significant reflection upon this topic, from the traditions in the Hebrew Bible to the advent of the Rabbis. This

means that the resurrection of the dead did not appear as a sudden/jarring innovation of Second Temple Judaism, but instead developed slowly and unevenly over the preceding centuries; growing out of the convergence of a number of Biblical themes, drawing

> Most centrally on the long-standing conviction that God would yet again prove faithful to his promises of life for his people and that he had the stupendous might it would take to do so.
>
> Levenson 2006:xii-xiii

2.2 Resurrection seen nationally

Keeping in mind that metaphors cannot communicate if they have nothing to do with the way people think and live, and given the thoroughly social and relational character of life and death in the Hebrew Bible, it becomes clear that the well-being of Israel could never be detached from the relationship of the nation (and its subsidiary kin groups) to its Deity, so much so that classical Judaism actually insisted upon the resurrection as a defining tenet of the community, for "without the restoration of the people Israel, a flesh and blood people, God's promises to them remained unfulfilled, and the world remained unredeemed" (Levenson 2006:x). In fact, several bodies of evidence – material and literary – suggest that "the classical Jewish doctrine of resurrection ... represents a belief that death will be – miraculously, supernaturally, graciously – *overcome* (Levenson 2006:x)"; thus finding its place within a larger vision, not of the continuation of the world, but of its redemption. Proof of the existence (no, the thriving) of these ideas of redemption, life after death, resurrection and restoration can be found in:

- Archaeological finds from the Iron Age suggest the existence of ancestor cults, or at least the belief in some form of afterlife for the deceased – seen in the belief in a post-mortem fulfilment for those who die in a state of blessing, realised in the form of the happy continuation of the family of which they were, and forever

remain, a generational link. This belief linked into the belief that promises can be fulfilled even after those to whom they have been promised have died ... because the lives of ancestors and descendants were inextricably connected, through for example miraculous fertility or the return of lost children (see e.g. Bloch-Smith 1992; and Levenson 2006:46-48, 51, 83, 119; Gn 28:1-4; Is 43:1-8; 44:1-5; 54:1-10; Jr 31:15-17; Ezk 34:32).

- Necromancy and divination are regularly condemned, without being declared ineffective – the need to suppress these practices testifies to their presence in Israel (see e.g. Levenson 2006: 51-55; Lv 19:26; 20:6; Dt 18:11; 1 Sm 28:2; 2 Ki 23:24; and Is 8:19).
- Three resuscitation stories show that death can be overcome, even if only temporarily (1 Ki 17; 2 Ki 4; and 13:20-21).
- A chain of associations suggesting that the Temple was also thought to be an antidote to death, the place where God has ordained the blessing of eternal life (Levenson 2006:92), giving a kind of immortality to those who dwell there in innocence, purity, and trust – the miraculous spring in the Temple, the healing and rejuvenating waters it puts forth (e.g. Ps 133; Ezk 47:1-12), the supernatural trees and other new life that it miraculously and unexpectedly produces (e.g. Ps 52:10; Pr 3:18; Ezk 31:2-9), the place where God's protective care is manifest and tangible (e.g. Ps 36:6-11; 133). Thus, longing for the Temple can also represent a longing for immortality; and to journey to the Temple is to move toward redemption, to leave the parched land of wasting and death for the fountain of life and the revival and rejuvenation it dispenses (Levenson 2006:92).
- More importantly, very real descriptive apocalyptic images and ideas (also surrounding the resurrection) actually appear in several places:
    - Angels function both as military chieftains of the angelic armies, defending Israel and fighting on their behalf; and as advocates and accusers of the righteous (Ezk 37:1-15; Job 1-2; Is 25:8; Dn 7-12; and Zch 3).
    - Several Old Testament passages referring to a book that contains the names of the righteous, also known as "the Book of Life" as it is a register

of those who will survive God's judgement and live as citizens of the New Jerusalem (Ps 69:28; Is 4:2-6; and Ml 3:16-17).

- The motifs of the division between the righteous and the wicked, and the rescue and restoration (resurrection) of these righteous as acts of divine judgement – adjudicating the specific injustices and vindicating the righteous, whilst punishing the wicked (Is 24-27; Jr 30; and Dn 12).

These traditions, remarkably diverse in their respective notions – of resurrection, immortality, and related concepts – are historically significant in their own right: they often reflect sophisticated theological attempts to come to terms with a world in which God and human fortunes clash violently (Elledge 2006:2). So, though it is true that evidence for the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible is certainly sparse compared to the surrounding cultures in Egypt and Mesopotamia; the presence of shadowy suggestions of ancestor veneration, burial practices that imply an afterlife, and the vivid descriptions of the resurrection (whether as poetical or literal hope) in texts of different date and provenance suggest a deliberate (and only partially successful) suppression of a cult of the dead in Israel (see e.g. Friedman &Overton 2000:49-56; Mendenhall 1992:67-81; and Segal 1997:91-92) – and, while Persian and Canaanite thought can be said to have played a role, "the essential idea is nevertheless found in Israel itself" (Martin-Achard 1960:221). Like creation, resurrection is a pre-eminently *super*natural act, a miraculous reversal of the course of nature. Through it, God transforms death – nature's last word – into a prelude to his own new act of creation, namely the re-creation of human beings in a form that is bodily, yet immune to the vulnerabilities and ravages of biological life. Thus both recapitulating and transcending the creation of humanity – the miracle of the end-time restores the miracle of the beginning (Levenson 2006:6). As Martin-Achard (1992:5.683-684) rightly puts it: "The resurrection of the dead, that is, of the body, is etched within the logic of Old Testament concepts".

Here it should also be kept in mind that no idea is ever borrowed as a undifferentiated whole (even if the idea is foreign in origin; Setzer 2004a:10), so it is only logical to state

that it must have spoken to historical exigencies and resonated with the internal developments and deeper convictions of the Israelite people – in order for it to become popular. Thus, it is safe to say that the idea of the resurrection is implicit in both the Hebrew Bible's notion of God as the Creator of life and the ultimate victor over death (Levenson 2006:xi), in the unified nature of the human being as a body enlivened by breath, and in their belief in Israel's origin in God and their preservation as a nation through his efforts and before him (a theme that became a paradigm for national restoration).

2.2.1 These dry bones

These different ideas and visions of the restoration of Israel as a nation later became connected to the oldest vision of resurrection in the Hebrew Bible – Ezekiel 37:1-14 – a symbolic representation in which national recovery and restoration is significantly brought about by the resurrection of dead and despondent Israel from their graves, in order to return to the land God had indefeasibly promised them. In this description we find the best approximation to the developed doctrine of a general resurrection to be found in Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism (as well as in early Christianity); the reversal of national death anticipating (but not quite yet approximating) the end-time resurrection that appears later in Jewish history. Though both the exact time that Israel translated the use of the resurrection as a metaphor for national restoration into the hope for resurrection of the body, and exactly how much foreign elements formed part of the mix, is unclear; the essential ingredients for this hope were, in a sense, always present in:

- the affirmation of God's power;
- God's favour towards Israel; and
- the image of death as God's enemy (Setzer 2004a:11).

What we do know is that this understanding of the resurrection first appears explicitly in 2 Maccabees 7, and 12:43-45; and Daniel 12; making it safe to say that it was apparent

by the time of the confrontation with Hellenism and the Maccabean revolt – especially when considering the fact that texts referring to the afterlife multiply after the 2nd century B C E, producing a rich collection around the turn of the era. Moreover, beyond their own intrinsic value, they also provided the ground and nutriment for both early Christian and rabbinical faith that God raises the dead. In this sense, these traditions from the Second Temple period have left an enduring impression upon the history of religions in the West far beyond their own time – attesting to their priceless contribution and abiding relevance (Elledge 2006:2).

2.3 The injustice of persecution

The theme of the reward for the righteous at some future time was thus implanted in Israel's consciousness, to be drawn on at a later date if and when a religious need should arise. This need would arise in the Hasidic community, because of the serious and existential theological problem presented by the persecution and death of many Hasidic Jews – these Jews had died precisely because they had wilfully chosen to obey the Torah (1 Macc 1:50, 60-63; 2 Macc 6-7); thus their piety was the cause of their death. Conversely, the Hellenising Jews had saved their lives by what the Hasidic Jews considered to be a gross disobedience of the Torah. So it seemed that piety caused death, whilst disobedience led to life; thus confounding the standard Israelite canons of justice and retribution (Nickelsburg 2006:32) – in contrast to the prophet's promise in Third Isaiah, the Hasidic Jews were being slaughtered (instead of living long lives in Jerusalem); and, though some of the Hellenisers had already died, their bodies were not lying in full site in the Valley of Hinnom. This led to the belief that these prophesies could only come true (and the injustices of the present life be adjudicated) if the dead were to come to life – making resurrection to either life or punishment the seeming answer to this problem by asserting that suffering need not indicate divine disfavour (Levenson 2006:8; e.g. Is 56:2, 4, 6; 58:2; 59:15; 65:8-9, 13, 15, 22; 65:4, 11; and 66:3, 5, 14, 17); the expression of which is a mix of images of bodily and spiritual survival and

revivification, with many of these ideas of the afterlife not fully spelled out. Yet we should not expect definitions in materials that are poetic, and often apocalyptic.

Thus, the idea of a double resurrection was a conclusion drawn from the Jews understanding of Scripture and their belief that God would keep his word (Nickelsburg 2006:36). But, as images of the resurrection started surfacing in various texts, the linked concept of the immortality of the soul – apart from the body – also started appearing as the reward for the righteous. A brief survey of the literary evidence for Jewish faith in a/the future life reveals multiple basic options for belief in life beyond death, indicated by basic lexical patterns that recur within this literary evidence (Elledge 2006:5) from the 2nd century B C E through to the 1st century C E and exhibiting a range of understandings of the afterlife:

- Fairly explicit claims of bodily resurrection appear in texts like: 1 Enoch 10; 16-17; 21-22; 25; 37-39; 51; 61-62; 81-82; 91-93; 100; 102-104; the Testament of Moses 9; 1 Baruch 4:17-29; 2 Baruch 49-51; 2 Maccabees 6:12-17, 26; 7:6, 9, 11, 14, 22-23, 27-29, 36; 12; 14:45-46; 1 Maccabees 2; 4Q521, and the *Sibylline Oracle* 4 – scattered statements observing and describing the resting places and future abodes of the dead; some implying a resurrection of the righteous dead from the grave into the heavens, where they will shine forth among the celestial luminaries and angelic beings. Almost all of these texts also accentuate the notions of retribution, with the righteous having the prerogative of executing judgement (imprisonment in fire and annihilation in darkness, e.g. the Wisdom of Solomon 3:9-10; 1 Enoch 22:10-11; 46; 62-63; 2 Macc 9; 1 Macc 6; 4 Ez 7:36); and reward (various rewards, including restoration, protection from punishments, joy, and elevation to heavenly status, e.g. the Wisdom of Solomon 3:3-8, 11-12; 13-15; 1 En 22:9; and 4 Ez 7:39-42, 97, 125).
- A mix of concepts of resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul appear in 1 Enoch 91 and 103, 1QH 7:17-25; 11:19-23; 14:29-35; 19:10-23; 4Q358-388;

391; 4Q521; 4 Ezra 7:36-37, 75, 78, 80, 85, 97; 8:52-54; 2 Baruch 44:15; 49:2; 50:2; 51:2, 10-12; and *Pseudo-Phocylides.*

- Ambiguity prevails in works that, nevertheless, imply resurrection – like the "Book of the Watchers" in 1 Enoch; The Testament of Judah 25; the Psalms of Solomon; the Testament of Benjamin 10; and *CD* 2:7-12.
- Whereas vindication of the righteous through the immortality of the soul awaits the just in Jubilees 23:17-31; 4 Maccabees 1:9, 13, 19, 30; 2:6, 24; 6:27-31; 7:3, 16-23; 9:1, 22-24; 11:12, 20; 12:18; 13:1, 13, 15, 17; 14:5-7; 15:3; 16:1, 13, 25; 17:12, 15-19; 18:1-4, 23; the Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-6:21; and the works of Philo (e.g. *Gig* 12-15; *Post* 39; *Migr* 9; *Opif* 134-135).

Within these broad categories, certain sub-categories or sub-themes actually emerge, like:

- Translation into angelic beings, by way of exaltation into the ranks of the "the sons of God", the angelic attendants in the court of the heavenly king (e.g. 1 En 39; 80:6; 108; Sir 43:8-9; the Testament of Moses 10; 2 Bar 51:10; 1 QS xi; and 1QH xi; xiv).
- Determinism and saving knowledge (e.g. 1QS 2:4-9; 4:11-14; 4Q416; and *CD* 2:7-8).
- Resurrection as a reward for martyrdom (e.g. 2 Macc 7).

2.4 Qumran and the absence of death's malady

The published Scrolls of Qumran – originating in about the same time frame as the texts mentioned above – are remarkable in that they contain not a single passage that can be interpreted with absolute certainty as a reference to resurrection or immortality (Ringgren 1963:148). This lack of references becomes truly remarkable when keeping the following in mind:

- Apocalyptic theology pervades the scrolls (Cross 1961:76-78, 198-206).

- Both Josephus and Hippolytus attribute to the Essenes a belief in resurrection and/or immortality (Black 1961:187-191; and Smith 1958:273-293).
- Copies of Daniel, Jubilees, and 1 Enoch 1-36 and 91-94 have been found at Qumran (Nickelsburg 2006:179 n.1).

Why does such a large collection of apocalyptic texts contain no clear reference to a belief in resurrection – a topic generally agreed to be integral to apocalyptic theology (Nickelsburg 2006:1)? As we have seen earlier, the belief in the resurrection (or its equivalent) was carried in certain forms or traditions; for the most part, apocalypses – which can be described as lengthy descriptions of the events leading up to and including the end time. Though certain sections of the Qumran commentaries and other exegetical writings do focus on the events of the last times, certain limitations still exclude the likelihood of (extended) references to resurrection or immortality (Nickelsburg 2006:180-181):

- The subjects discussed are limited to those suggested by the Biblical texts being commented upon.
- For the most part these exegetical writings describe the wickedness of the ungodly and the judgement that will overtake them (exceptions are 4Q161; 4Q164; and 4Q171).
- The exegetical comments are mainly concerned with identifying the events or persons of the Biblical text with certain events or persons in the sect's history; meaning that none of the commentaries contain detailed descriptions of events that are still in the future (according to the author's view).

The descriptions or statements that we do find about the coming salvation are usually no more than a sentence in length; implying that (for the most part) the published scrolls do not contain the kind of apocalyptic descriptions in which me might expect to find references to resurrection and immortality – as the Essenes understood it, the malady is

not present, therefore the remedy is not necessary. This paucity of apocalypses notwithstanding, much of the scroll material is shot through with the terminology and presuppositions of apocalyptic thinking (Cross 1961: 76-78, 198-206):

- In 1QH x:20-37 the author's enemies are set against God and were intent on taking the author's life because he was a true servant of God; he thanks God for having delivered him from his enemies, presupposing that this deliverance has already taken place.
- The language of exultation and light is used in 1QH xv:6-25 to describe God's strengthening of the believer in the face of tribulations, helping him to keep the covenant and in this way to be rescued from threatening death.
- Though the author of 1QH xii:5-xiii:4 is still awaiting the time of judgement – meaning that the time of evil has not yet ended, and that judgement and exaltation are still in the future – he does not mention the possibility of his death, making any reference to resurrection (or its equivalent) unnecessary.
- The persecution of one devoted to the service of the Lord, and his participation in the final apocalyptic battle, is described in 1QH xiii:20-xiv:vi; but the author does not imply that this persecution has led to death, nor does he suggest that it will.
- In 1QH xi:19-23 the blessings of the *eschaton* are already a reality for the author of this hymn – upon his entrance into the community he passes from the sphere of death into the realm of life; so, in the author's view, the decisive eschatological event has already happened and he is already sharing in the new life (a thought confirmed by 1QH xix:3-14, where the author already stands in the ranks of the angelic chorus and the renewal of creation has already begun).
- 1 QS iii:13-iv:26 (with parallel ideas to be found in the Wisdom of Solomon 1-5; *Didache* 1-6; *Barnabas* 18-20; *Doctrina Apostolorum* 1-5; and the "Mandates" in the *Sheppard of Hermas*) describes itself as a kind of catechism to be used in the instruction of the community; describing the various kinds of people, their deeds, and the result of these deeds – the righteous walk in the ways of the light, and the wicked in the ways of the darkness, with the spirits or angels as their guides

> along these paths; prompting humans to good or evil deeds. Life and death function as the blessing or curse, the reward or punishment, dispensed by God to those who obey or disobey the stipulations of his covenant.

We can thus conclude that, because of the Qumran community's lack of concern for suffering, persecution, and death, neither resurrection nor death is as much as mentioned. And that the coming judgement that the community does describe has a different function – the battle of the two spirits is already under way, and the human problem is not persecution but rather the present temptations and assaults of the evil spirits trying to lead one from the paths of righteousness. The judgement scene is in service of this covenant form (its final consummation being the destruction of evil), with the faithful passing fluidly from this-worldly blessings to eternal ones without stopping to mention death.

It has become evident that the Qumran materials do not treat the problems which other writings answer with the affirmation of a resurrection or an external life that is explicitly said to extend beyond death; as resurrection presupposes death, and the scrolls make no reference to a persecution unto death (which would require post-mortem vindication); nor do they speak of injustices and oppression in this life (that would need to be adjudicated after death).

2.5 The faith of the institution

2.5.1 The "plastered graves" on death and the afterlife

The first time resurrection appears as a doctrine, in other words as something by which others identify a certain group, is in the case of the Pharisees – as reported on by three different sets of sources (Josephus [*The Jewish War*; and *Jewish Antiquities*]; in both the Synoptics [e.g. Mk 2-3; 7:7-8, 16; 12:18-27 and parallels] and in Acts [4:1-2; 5:17-34; 15:5; 17:18, 31-32; 23:6-9; 24:14-15, 21; and 26:5-8, 22-23]; and in rabbinic literature [e.g. *'Abot de Rabbi Nathan B*, in Saldarini 1975]). Now, though our sources

are limited by their dating and tendentiousness, a striking agreement does emerge in the attributes they associate with the Pharisees (Setzer 2004a:35):

- A vast and impressive knowledge of Scripture.
- Their ability to interpret these Scriptures according to their own traditions (attributed to earlier teachers).
- Their punctiliousness in observance.
- Their authority with the people.
- Their understanding of God as powerful in human affairs, combined with their belief in an afterlife (that included resurrection from the dead for either reward or punishment).

It has been suggested that this preaching of the resurrection served in some way to shore up their influence and authority; forming part of a strategy that allowed them to negotiate a position as mediators between the Romans and the people (Saldarini 1988; 2001:284-285, 295-296). So, for the Pharisees and their successors, belief in the resurrection served as a useful tool in the symbolic construction of community (in a period of great social change). But to the people who looked to the Pharisees as their patrons or representatives it would have been shorthand for reassuring them of the continuing power of the God of Israel and of Scripture's story, as well as of their own eventual vindication. Here the idea of the resurrection has thus moved into the liturgy, the law, and the lore; becoming the tool for drawing a circle around those who are in and those who are out – thus marking the boundaries between groups.

2.5.2 The rabbinic Judaism of the *Diaspora*

Within their own theological universe and their understanding of Biblical interpretation, the rabbis found the idea of the resurrection in the Torah itself.

> In the Torah, promises can be fulfilled even after those to whom they have been promised have died ... because the lives of

> ancestors and descendants were inextricably connected in ways that modern people have enormous problems imagining.
>
> Levenson 2006:xi.

This thought is confirmed by the fact that, in both the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*, "epicurean" is used as shorthand for people who deny providence – defined as God's powerful work in the world (Setzer 2004b). Thus both documents still link resurrection, a correct understanding of Torah, an affirmation of God's power in the world, and ultimate justice – with the denial of justice being the assumption behind "epicurean" – as the authority behind their promotion of their own legitimacy as the correct interpreters of the Torah, and of their assumption of the right to pronounce judgement on the fate of different categories of people. So, as was the case with the Pharisees, in rabbinic Judaism resurrection also functions as part of a constellation of values constituting of God's power, a proper interpretation of Scripture, the legitimacy of certain groups as authorities for their community, and the promotion of a certain set of practices. This idea of (and belief in) resurrection also formed part of their daily worship – in "The Eighteen Benedictions", an ancient prayer that was to be said "three times each weekday, four times on Sabbaths, New Moons, and Festivals, and five times on the Day of Atonement" (implying that there was never a day; never a morning, never an afternoon, never an evening without it; Levenson 2006:3) – the second benediction endorses the idea of resurrection "repeatedly and emphatically" (Levenson 2006:3); seeing in God's revival of the dead "the outstanding and incomparable instance of God's insuperable might" (Levenson 2006:4).

By now, it should be clear that the idea of resurrection thoroughly pervaded the theological world of rabbinic Judaism, becoming a particularly hardy and visible symbol for several Jewish groups for more than two centuries – a symbol of Judaism's confidently expecting the justice of God to someday triumph in the lives of all who have ever lived, whether they will have survived to that end-point in history or not. The fact

that the idea of resurrection never stands by itself, but always carries with it several deeper associations and concepts, should also be clear at this point.

3 INTO A NEW AGE

We have now examined closely the various opinions and different sources for the beginning and development of the idea of the resurrection; and we have now come to what Christians believe to be the culmination point of all the different streams discussed above – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, in order to study and understand the death and resurrection of Jesus, we must decide how to approach the primary sources for the life of Jesus? The common view, up until only a decade ago, was that

> The gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him; and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners, who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand … supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so.
>
> Funk, Hoover and The Jesus Seminar 1993:4-5

But another consensus view of the Gospels has also emerged since those early 1990's: in 1992, Burridge published *What are the Gospels*, a book in which he questioned the (then dominant) view of the Gospels by arguing that they belong to the genre of Greco-Roman *bios* – and are thus historical in nature; a thesis that has been so influential that it has been praised for:

- Playing "a key role in establishing that the Gospels were read in the early centuries primarily as biographies"; affirming that Jesus' reputation as miracle-worker, his provocative action, his death, and his resurrection are events that

must be thoroughly dealt with if one is to understand who Jesus was and what his mission of the kingdom meant (McKnight 2005:347).

- Having "turned the tide of scholarly opinion" (Stanton on Burridge's thesis in Burridge 2004:ix) favourably towards the idea that, even if the Jesus now embedded in the Gospels is the “remembered” Jesus, that memory was solid when it came to the major events in the life of Jesus. This idea was further strengthened by Wright’s conclusion (1992:106) that “the closeness of the Gospels to the events they purport to describe is much closer than we have with many other works of antiquity”.

While this new consensus regarding Gospel genre, and the closeness of the reports to the events they purport to describe, can be cards in the hand of the historian employing methodical credulity; they are not enough to win the round, since other factors (such as redaction and authorship) are likewise players – *bioi* had a number of components they usually featured, and they did not need to employ every component; some biographers utilized certain components more frequently than others, thus sometimes making it difficult to distinguish history from *encomium* (Licona 2008:63); each biographer usually had an agenda behind writing, attempting to persuade readers to a certain way of thinking about the subject they were writing about – meaning that persuasion and factual integrity were not viewed as being mutually exclusive; it was not an either/or, but both (Byrskog 2002:223). Thus, flexibility was certainly a trait of *bioi*, although ancient historians had different views pertaining to the allowable extent to which liberties could be taken; obviously varying in the liberties they took pertaining to their use of embellishment and invention. Was ancient biography concerned with history? It is described as "a flexible genre having a strong relationship with history" (Burridge 2004:67); and the central difference between biography and history as being " … that the former focused on a single character whereas the latter included a broader range of events" (Keener 2003:1). So, "while biography tended to emphasise *encomium* … it was still firmly rooted in historical fact rather than literary fiction … they were actually concerned to communicate what they thought really happened" (Aune 1988:125).

3.1 Something old

Early Christian beliefs inherited and amplified the Jewish themes attached to the resurrection (as discussed above) in its understanding of Jesus' resurrection as a manifestation of God's power, and as a guarantee for the resurrection of believers (Setzer 2004a:19). Their belief sprang from the fertile soil of resurrection belief in 1st century C E Judaism; and, as was the case in Judaism, the belief in Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament is also understood and described in different ways – especially in its intensified apocalyptic form (Keck 1992:83-96). Interestingly, although Jesus' resurrection is at the heart of the earliest Christian belief in a general resurrection for the righteous, New Testament texts sometimes take great pains to link their belief to the broader Jewish belief in resurrection; in this way actually minimising the vast difference between a hope for the general resurrection of the righteous at some future point, and the belief that Jesus had already risen from the dead.

In this context it is important to remember that the saying "eschatological" is determined less by its content or its ideology than by its genealogy, pointing immediately to the larger issue at stake – in identifying the eschatological or non-eschatological roots of the resurrection tradition Jesus is anchored within a stream of ancient identity; thus locating Jesus in a particular social and/or intellectual framework – either Hellenistic philosophical discourse or Jewish Biblical eschatological or prophetic expectations (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:22-23).

3.2 Last disciple, first witness

When looking at the functioning of the resurrection as symbol and strategy in New Testament times, our findings in the Jewish materials are echoed by the use of most of the same elements (as were discussed above for the Jewish groups) are embedded in it; with the most important of these being its function as an anti-imperial program (Setzer 2004a:58). For Paul, belief in the resurrection is a necessary element in a whole set of realities that influence: the worth of his and others preaching; the worth of their faith and

the value of their lives and their disciplined way of living; the meaning of their living in danger and their potential martyrdom; as well as the fate of those believers that had already died. And to disbelieve the resurrection is to short-circuit the apocalyptic drama, thereby disrupting the process of liberation that began unfolding with Jesus death. In the last act of this apocalyptic drama all enemies – both human rulers (i.e. local and political powers) and cosmic elements – will be destroyed; even the final enemy – death – will be defeated through the resurrection of all believers. The resurrection – described by Paul (in especially 1 Corinthians) as the final proof that the pyramid of power has been overturned and an alternative society has emerged – thus becomes an open challenge to the power politics of Paul's day, as well as a prescription for an alternative society.

But, because Paul's hearers were better versed in the Greco-Roman idea of immortality apart from the body, his preaching of the resurrection made him a minority – the idea was, literally, "strange" to the people he was speaking to, and therefore had to be explained at length. For this reason we find more on the resurrection in Paul's writings than in any of the other New Testament writings. In his teaching and writing on the subject Paul constructs an alternative community and reality by: rejecting all that the present community and reality deems valuable (e.g. 1 Cor 1:18-24; Horsley 1997:242-252); describing the decline of both the present Greco-Roman culture and the political rulers of the current age as one that has already begun (e.g. 1 Cor 2:4-8); as well as envisioning its replacement by a process leading to glory and unimaginable things for those who love God and who understand his power. In this alternative reality, in this process, the death and resurrection of Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor 15:3-7) serve as the "final proof" of God's power and ultimate justice in his willingness and ability to give life to the dead. But, in the process described above, the mere survival of the *soul/spirit* would not be sufficient to prove God's victory over the political and cosmic powers of the ages – the survival of the *body* was needed for God to be ultimately victorious. For this reason – the existential importance of the body – Paul thinks of the body in terms of boundaries, and is more anxious about invasion and pollution; translated on a social level into fears about being subdued and controlled by more powerful outsiders.

This is also the reason why Paul and his fellow Christians experience the surrounding culture as hostile – because their bodies are threatened. Paul understands that, for him to maintain spiritual immortality alone would leave the pyramid of values in place; thus he is establishing a reversion of categories – lauding folly, weakness, and low status. In this way the resurrection of bodies from the dead becomes a powerful idea wielded by Paul against prevailing political and cultural assumptions (also see e.g. 1 Th 4:13-18; cf. Setzer 2004a:66). And, in asserting resurrection of the body in particular, Paul is actually overthrowing the accepted hierarchy – it would seem to his Gentile and pagan listeners that he is recommending that the strong submit to the weak (by teaching that the spirit will submit to the body in resurrection).

3.3 A new testament

Meier (2000:3-24) suggests that the resurrection was a genuine, but relatively marginal, part of Jesus' preaching because his apocalyptic message focused on the immediate arrival of the kingdom of God. Jesus' prediction of the heavenly banquet, alluded to in his prophecy at the Last Supper (Mk 14:25 and parallels), assumes resurrection; and, from what we have discussed so far, the idea of resurrection was already a given amongst the majority of Jews to whom Jesus preached.

So for Jesus, a Jew speaking in a Jewish context in the mid-1st century C E, the resurrection may have seemed relatively unremarkable; as it was a belief that most of his audience shared – an idea strengthened by the fact that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection clearly imply the same range of interpretation as has been discussed above – from exaggeratedly physicalist (stressing the materiality of Jesus' body; e.g. Lk 24:39, 41-43) to exaggeratedly spiritualist (underlining the radical transformation of the resurrected Christ; e.g. Lk 24:16-31, 36, 51; Jn 20:14, 19; and 21:4) – sometimes even existing side by side, as if to complement each other. In this context, it is both important and understandable to note that Jesus' defence of the resurrection, in his encounter with the Sadducees in Mark 12:18-27, is generally seen

as an anomaly, as it does not appear anywhere else as a central theme in his preaching. Despite this, Meier (2000:3-24) argues that the pericope does indeed go back to an event in Jesus' Jerusalem ministry – and thus that it is not an invention of the early church – because it does not serve Mark's apocalyptic theology, and because Mark otherwise shows no interest in the Sadducees or the question of the general resurrection.

In John we find a tension between a future and realised eschatology, with the latter predominating and pervading the author's references to resurrection and eternal life (Nickelsburg 2006:242) – death in the Johannine sense is not a possibility for the believer, who by virtue of his faith "has eternal life" and "does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life" (5:24; see also 3:18; 3:36; 6:47; and 11:25). This realisation is tied to Jesus' function as the "revealer" who brings life (e.g. Jn 1:4; 5:25, 28-29; and 11:17-44); a Christological version of the theology found in 1QH xi:19-36 and xix:3-11, and the Wisdom of Solomon 3:2-4.

The Christology of Hebrews is governed by a combination of the motifs of the descending and re-ascending Wisdom/*Logos*, and the pattern of suffering and vindication/exaltation (Heb 1:1-3; 5:5-10). Typical of the latter pattern (and in keeping with his dualistic worldview) the author employs none of the traditional verbs for resurrection in tandem with references to Jesus' suffering and death – instead he refers almost exclusively to Jesus' exaltation like John does (see e.g. Heb 1:3; 2:9; 4:14; 5:9; 7:26; 10:12; 12:2; and 13:20).

The New Testament's apocalypse begins with a commissioning vision in which the risen Christ commands John to write what he sees and hears (Rv 1-3; see also 22:10-16). Presumed throughout the book is not only Jesus' resurrection, but also his exaltation as "son of man", "messiah" (conveyed with the language of Ps 2:7-8; Is 11:4; Dn 10; Zch 12:10; 1 En 48; 62:2; and 4 Ezra 13:4, 10-11), and therefore "ruler"; in this sense returning to Daniel 7.

3.4 The Apostolic Fathers

3.4.1 Earliest inclinations

A smattering of references to resurrection appear in the Apostolic Fathers – occurring as a standard idea in homily (e.g. 1 *Clem* 25-27; *Barn* 21:1), doctrine (e.g. *Did* 16:6; *Barn* 5:6; *Mart Pol* 14:2; and *Smyrn* 3:1), and instruction (e.g. *Barn* 5:6; and *Did* 16:6). In these resurrection of the body is assumed, naturally and simply forming part of the hortatory, catechetical language throughout this literature. This also means that no sustained defence of the belief in resurrection appears which would have allowed us to reconstruct a set of opponents. Perkins (1984:334) suggests that this lack of outright controversy is the result of these authors inheriting Jewish-Christian traditions of resurrection – in other words linked to ultimate justice – and not yet having to face any thoroughgoing and organised opposition. But, while we cannot reconstruct any clearly-defined groups of opponents, two references in 2 *Clement* (9:1-5) and Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* (7:1) allude to some opposition to the belief in resurrection of the body. Since 2 *Clement* is generally assigned to the early to mid-second century, it forms another piece of evidence (together with 2 Tm 2:18, Justin, and Athenagoras) that resurrection of the body was an idea not shared by all Christians – his emphasis on "flesh" (the word repeated seven times in five verses) implies that someone is denying the role of the flesh in resurrection; he also links the resurrection of believers not to Jesus' resurrection, but to his incarnation. This formed part of a "general shift to the incarnation as the central image of salvation" (Perkins 1984:337). Like 2 *Clement*, Polycarp links resurrection to the incarnation; but he further links it to the death of Jesus and the correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching.

But these shadowy references do not permit a full-scale investigation of controversies and community reconstruction; all they do indicate is the existence of a climate where bodily resurrection was not universally believed – by the fact that their use of language was becoming more explicit (i.e. with more references to "flesh"). They also provide evidence of a growing orthodoxy that linked the bodily resurrection of believers to the

incarnation, the passion, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Pagels (1979:3-27) has argued that the physical resurrection of Jesus is essential to the establishment of apostolic authority in the early church (see also the work of Crossan 1994; 1998) – as only those closest to this one-time event (and their successors) could rightly claim legitimacy; from which it follows that the resurrection of believers is similarly linked to questions of authority and legitimacy. But, the belief in the resurrection of the body was not only linked to questions of authority; it was well on its way to becoming the litmus test for who belonged in the community, joining to issues of God's power as creator and who rightly interprets Jesus' teaching.

3.4.2 In dialogue with Justin

A hundred years after Paul, Justin – drawing on pagan and Christian arguments alike, and addressing multiple audiences – cites the belief in the resurrection of believers as the mark of a genuine Christian. Thus, an idea merely alluded to in the earlier Apostolic Fathers, has assumed definite form as a mark of orthodoxy (e.g. *Dail* 80:4-5). This becomes especially clear when keeping in mind that this is the first appearance of the term "resurrection of the flesh" – for, while the Apostolic Fathers did talk about "flesh" and "resurrection", they never put the two terms together (Setzer 2004a:75). For Justin, as for earlier Jews and Christians, resurrection of the dead (now flesh) is a conviction that carries with it other ideas: the demonstration of God's power (e.g. 1 *Apol* 19; and *Cels* 5:14) in resurrection as the other side of creation and the goodness of the created being; the demonstration of fidelity towards God and his teaching (e.g. *Dial* 80:3); loyalty connected to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as a sign of an authentic Christian (e.g. *Dial* 80:4-5; as part of a system of justice (i.e. recompense for the righteous and punishment for the wicked (e.g. 1 *Apol* 18:1; *Dial* 117:3, and 130:2); and as the final establishment of the correct interpretation of Scripture (*Dial* 80 and 117), instrumental in the settling of grievances (especially between Jews and Christians). The resurrection of the body also formed a conspicuous part of the early construction of community (Setzer 2004a:78).

This leap of intensity of the defence of the resurrection of the flesh, and of material continuity, accompanied certain 2nd century C E developments – in particular: the emergence of alternative understandings of the resurrection of Jesus amongst believers and in other groups, the pagan intellectual challenge, and the increasing possibility of martyrdom (especially the increasing possibility of the annihilation and scattering of the martyr's body). Resurrection thus comes to solve a set of logical and philosophical problems raised by the apparent decomposition of the body, and the negative evaluation of the body in some philosophical systems. This (seemingly) puzzling rejection of the classical values and traditions, held up as superior in the surrounding culture, is what made Young (1999:104) describe the task of the 2nd century C E apologist as a "justification of an anomalous social position". These concepts were so deeply imbedded in the concept of bodily resurrection that the opponents do not seem to be able to employ them for their own arguments; relying instead on negative evaluations of the flesh and extreme dualism of body and soul (Setzer 2004a:83).

3.4.3 Athenagoras' dual-edged argument

Two decades after Justin, Athenagoras promotes the Christian belief in bodily resurrection in two ways:

- As a weapon of defence against widespread charges against Christianity in *Plea on behalf of the Christians* (addressed to the emperor and his son).
- Whilst also still defending the doctrine itself in *On the resurrection* (probably addressed to three sets of hearers in a public context – pagans, Christians who do not accept physical resurrection, and Christians who accept it but need help arguing their case; Barnard 1984:44-45).

But Athenagoras does not present as clear an example as did Paul or Justin of "reading in" or "reading out" adherents from a community because of their stance on the resurrection (because of the highly stylised and formal presentation in *Plea,* and the multiple audiences in *Res*). No, his work is valuable because it provides a window into

the larger debates over resurrection that raged in the 2nd century C E between pagans and Christians, as well as between Christians of different views (Setzer 2004a:88). Athenagoras set out to disprove three well-known charges against Christians – atheism, cannibalism (especially *Thyestean* feasts), and sexual excess (especially incest). For this he applied many of the (then traditional) rhetorical strategies (as later outlined by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969):

- Part of his approach is associative, appealing to the idea that Christians and the emperor are on the same side and agree on premises and values (*Plea* 3:3; 32; and 35:4).
- Resurrection itself comes into play in a second strategy, which falls under the category of quasi-logical arguments (so called because they imitate formal mathematical systems, but use non-formal theses) – an argument where a thesis is disproved by showing that it is incompatible with another thesis. The most effective way to cancel out a thesis is to show it incompatible with a bundle of facts – as an example, because Christians believe in the resurrection and expect to live again they must live impeccable lives, refuting any kind of wrong-doing (*Plea* 31:3-4; 33:1-3; 35:6; and 36:1-2). Important for this study is the assumption that Athenagoras makes of the resurrection as a given; so much so that he handles it as a fact that he does not need to prove, nor does he suggest that there are Christian groups who reject it. Thus, resurrection is no longer the subject of the debate, but has now become part of the arsenal of weapons used to defend Christians against their accusers.

In *On the resurrection*, his treatment of the resurrection does differ slightly from that in *Plea* mentioned above in that it does argue vigorously for the resurrection of the body against its detractors – like *Plea*, it is an apologetic to outsiders (*Res* 1:5; 11:1; and 19:2); but, unlike *Plea*, it is also an in-house document (i.e. written to other Christians, *Res* 1:5; and 19:1). Athenagoras makes familiar arguments for the resurrection, based on values already apparent in Pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism, Paul, and Justin:

- The overwhelming argument for resurrection, the argument from which all other arguments spring (according to Athenagoras), is the argument from authority – from the conviction of God's power and providence as evidenced by creation itself (*Res* 2:3; 3:1, 3; 5:1;9:2; 17:1-2; and 18:1).
- The second argument Athenagoras makes is the argument from justice – since justice is clearly not accomplished in this life, and death alone cannot satisfy the thirst for ultimate justice, resurrection is necessary (*Res* 14:4; 18:2, 4; and 19:7). To this he adds the argument of logic when he argues that humans alone of all God's creatures enjoy resurrection – God has given them the gift of rationality, thus they have a distinct nature (*Res* 11:1; 13:1; 14:4; 15:2-5; 18:1 and 24:4); from this creation for different purposes, Athenagoras concludes that their end therefore also has to be different (*Res* 10:4; 13:2; and 24:2).
- His third argument is a derivative of the first and second arguments and constitutes an argument by definition (*Res* 10:4) – because God in his power creates the human being as a composite, and because humans long for justice, God must judge the entire human being in order for justice to prevail (i.e. the body and soul must be reunited, *Res* 13:2). For, whether a person lived a life of virtue or sin, that life was lived by the body and soul together; so justice would demand that they be punished or rewarded together (*Res* 12:7; 13:1; 16:1-4; 19:3; and 21-22).

So, though belief in the resurrection was by this time widely recognised as part of being Christian; it did still draw some refutation and ridicule from the pagan world. This meant that Athenagoras now had to bridge the gap between the particularism of a group associated with Palestine (and a leader executed by the Romans), and the dominant Greco-Roman culture; meaning that he had to employ the language of philosophy, invoking truth and nature and reason, in order to be able to soothe the problems of logic and any philosophical objections that might come up. What is interesting to note here is that, quite unlike the other material discussed up to this point, the boundaries between

those who believe in the resurrection and those who do not are not being drawn by the author any longer – no, he implies they are being drawn by others.

3.5 The outsiders

These different Christian defences of the resurrection belief (as discussed above) hint at the specific objections coming from outsiders: when the apologists (like Justin and Athenagoras) argue at length for the resurrection of the unified person as body and soul (see also e.g Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* 2.31:1; 2.34:1-2; 5.6:1-2; 5.9:2-4;, 5.10:2; 5.12:3; 5.13:1; and 5.14:1, 4; and Tertullian in his *Resurrection of the dead* 3:1-3, 5-6; 16:1-2, 4-7; and 22:8, 11), we can make an educated guess and say that this means that there were others who argued for an essential dissimilarity of body and soul; when the apologists laud God's power to create the human body (see also e.g Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* 2.1:5; 2.13:3, 8; 2.28:4; 2.29:1; 3.20:2; 3.24:1; 5.3:2; and 5.5:1-2; and Tertullian in his *The Apology* 48:5-8, 14-15; 49:4, 5-6; and 50:5-9, 11, 13-14, 16) – as proof that he can also re-create – we can guess that others insisted that God neither could nor would reform the body that has dissolved.

Two specific pagan representatives, who attacked Christian belief in the resurrection, provide a mirror to the Christian arguments discussed above – Celsus and Caecilius; both positioned within Christian refutations of their ideas (in itself a testimony to the Christian desire to meet the pagan intellectual challenge directly), and representatives of entrenched pagan attitudes. Both writers show a class snobbery that cites four interlocking characteristics – Christians are lower-class and uneducated boors (*Cels* 2:55; 3:16; 6:34; 7:28, 32, 45; *Oct* 5:3-4, 6; 8:4; 12:7; 13:4; 17; 20:1; and 34:5), rendering them disrespectful of the civic life, religion, and the culture in which they live (*Cels* 8:49, 55; *Oct* 4:6; 8:1, 3-4; 11:6; and 12:5-6); causing them to denigrate the value of life in this world (*Cels* 8:54; *Oct* 8:4-5; and 12:5-6), therefore also failing to appreciate the goodness of this life; making them arrogant, overconfident, and lacking the modesty that befits their low social status (*Cels* 5:14; *Oct* 3:4; 11:3, 5; and 12:7). In fact, these

attacks on Christians – linking them with poverty, women, and foreigners – were part of conventional pagan slanders because, for example, poverty had a positive valence for Christian piety, but was viewed negatively by Greco-Roman society, causing alienation (Beard, North & Price 1998a:291-295). Similarly, the frequent charge of "superstition" carries with it the idea of foreignness, atheism, and misanthropy (see also Tacitus in his *Ann* 15.44:2-8; Suetonius in *Nero* 16; and Pliny in his *Letters* 10.96:1-10). Other complaints about Christian belief all arise out of the claim that Christians are uneducated and simple-minded; couched as ones of intelligence and understanding – implying that, were Christians more intellectually sophisticated, they would give up these notions. Interesting to take note of is the fact that pagans did not uniformly reject the idea of an afterlife – there was just no consensus of views that held sway; with ideas ranging from a denial of any kind of post-mortem existence, to the expectation of a vague and shadowy existence after death, to those beliefs that predicted horrible punishment (Beard, North & Price 1998b:235-238).

Even so, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body offended both writers – simply because it offended all reason and logic in terms of the nature of the body and the inferiority of the flesh (*Cels* 2:55; 4:52; 5:14; 8:49; *Oct* 11:7-8; and 34:9, 11-12). By nature, bodies change over time and return to their original state – put another way, since they are matter, and therefore subject to decay and corruption, they cannot take on permanence (*Cels* 4:58, 60-61; 5:14; 6:72-73; 7:42; and 8:49, 53). These reactions of disgust explain why the apologists argue to such a degree for the value of the body as God's creation and as a reflection of his image, as well as for the indivisible union of body and soul in the human being. Both pagan writers also seem puzzled by the Christian emphasis on the afterlife, leading to the neglect of the pleasures of this world – here Perkins (1984:62-63) reminds us that much of pagan religion and popular piety did not concentrate on the afterlife; religion was for good fortune in this life and for festivals to enjoy.

4 "GROUNDED" THEORY

4.1 Missing in action?

Since all the literary materials that we have looked at give voice to the importance of the belief in resurrection as an element of community self-definition, it would only be logical to also expect material evidence (particularly funerary inscriptions) to bear this out – meaning that references to resurrection or to certain burial practices may be typical in some communities, while conspicuously absent in others. But, in reality, material evidence for the resurrection is scarce amongst the Jews, and even scantier where early Christians are concerned – of all the Roman Jewish inscriptions, only 3% refer to an afterlife at all (Rutgers 1998:159); and for Christians, the amount of epigraphic material evidence from before the 4th century C E (mostly from Rome and Anatolia) rarely mentions resurrection. Even the earliest datable Christian epitaph (of Aberkios around 200 C E) makes no mention of the afterlife whatsoever (Llewelyn & Kearsley 1992:177-178). Iconography tells a similar tale – the earliest Christian examples of any depiction of the afterlife are images of the raising of Lazarus, also from the mid-3rd century C E; whereas images of Jesus' resurrection do not appear until the late 4th century C E (Jensen 2000:156-182). Further complicating our search for material evidence is the fact that many of the phrases used on funerary inscriptions were conventional, and therefore may or may not reflect their original meaning (see e.g. Van der Horst 1991:11-21); for even though they were heartfelt, they could still reflect the views of either the deceased, or the family of the deceased, or the stoneworker – not all of whom necessarily belonged to the same religious group. Nor is it always clear who is Jewish and who is Christian, or what the religious symbols that are used actually meant (Kraemer 1991:141-162).

These cautions point to a stark reality: a person's deepest convictions are rarely expressed at the grave; for the phrases, symbols, and customs of burial – often ambiguous or conventional – do not necessarily reflect what people are thinking (except

maybe in the very broadest sense). In fact, they very often rather present an idealised image or elements of wishful thinking; thereby erasing controversy and muting polemics over identity or self-construction; thus showing a deceptively monochromatic quality of culture.

4.2 Identifiable evidence

With all of the above in mind, three kinds of material evidence still come into play when searching in early Jewish and Christian communities for evidence of resurrection belief:

4.2.1 Inscribing ever after

Jewish and Christian inscriptions in the early centuries (of which Jewish inscriptions, though sparse, far outnumber identifiably Christian ones) usually describe the customs of the time and what the person did in his/her life (see e.g. Rutgers 1998). We only possess singular and anomalous inscriptions with explicit expectations of an afterlife in either Jewish or Christian epitaphs. Interestingly, the most common references to resurrection in early Jewish and Christian funerary materials do not point to the deceased; but rather to those who might violate the tomb (see e.g. Van der Horst 1991:54-60; and Park 2000:144-145). Thus, the references that we do find continue the characteristic connection of resurrection and afterlife with judgement – pagans, Jews, and Christians regularly call down a variety of punishments on tomb violators and on their families – usually in this world. These literary materials thus show a mixture of ideas and themes about the afterlife, with no obvious point where one form of belief triumphed over the others.

4.2.2 Packaging forever

The Jewish practice of secondary burial (Rahmani 1981:43-53; 1982:109-119) – the gathering and deposit of the bones of the dead in ossuaries, after a period of disintegration – has been linked by some to an increased belief in bodily resurrection; as care was apparently taken to keep one person's body together and to avoid mingling bones from others. The bones were also arranged in a certain order, with the skull on

top; usually in ossuaries of stone, ensuring that the box would not decay and allow the bones to mingle. The question here is whether this custom points to a change (or amplification) of belief in an afterlife (especially the resurrection); or whether this was simply a more efficient way of burial, allowing for more burials in a family grave (e.g. Park 2000:50-53; and Kraemer 2000:50-53)? When taking into account later literary evidence (e.g. from *Semahot*, or the Babylonian or Jerusalem *Talmud*) it can be inferred that the gathering of the bones at the end of the first year after death meant the end of expiation – the decaying flesh effecting atonement for the deceased and (perhaps) preparing them for the resurrection – and a release (Rahmani 1982:118). But, without this later evidence, the connections between these elements are less clear. The early rabbis did not connect the practice to an afterlife; or, if a connection was made, said that the process was competed after 12 months. And, since even the earliest evidence is later than most of the secondary burials, a facile connection between the practice of secondary burial and belief in resurrection becomes fatal (Meyers 1971:85-89).

4.2.3 Taking this life into the afterlife

Here we are referring to the presence of grave goods buried with the deceased – probably the most ambiguous evidence of all concerning belief in a/the afterlife. Like inscriptions and ossuaries, grave goods are prone to the problem of interpretation – to questions as to whether their presence is a matter of convention or a deeply held belief; with a range of opinions and a variety of proposed explanations for the presence of these artefacts (for the range of the spectrum see e.g. Park 2000:41-44; and Hachlili 1998:292, 303, 309-310).

4.3 Resulting conclusions

Our expectation – that the material evidence would show communities distinguished by their belief in the resurrection – has not been fulfilled by the material evidence; as one kind of expression, for resurrection or against it, does not typify one community over another (Johnson 1997:37-59; and Rutgers 1998). Thus, the material evidence is

generally mute on the matter of an afterlife, with relative uniformity prevailing across the Mediterranean in this regard; pointing us in the direction of a generalised Roman culture, in the face of which certain groups felt compelled to distinguish themselves by defending (in their writing and their preaching) their distinctive teaching of resurrection. So, while ideas of some form of afterlife were common in the ancient world, those who believed in the resurrection of the body were a minority (Setzer 2004a:2): of the so-called world religions, only those that emerged in the Middle East/Mediterranean basin – namely rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism – teach the resurrection of the body (Ringgren 1987:344-350); and, of these, Christianity has defended the idea that the body is crucial to self in the most strident and extensive form. Some rejected any idea of an afterlife; many others saw the body as a hindrance, whose resurrection would therefore neither be possible nor desirable. Between these two poles – the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul (a dichotomy accredited to Cullmann 1965; but warned against by Collins 2000:129) – lay a range of ideas of the afterlife, many of them not fully articulated; so much so that divergent beliefs could be found within one set of materials, or even the different writings of a single author (Setzer 2004a:2).

5 WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Using some of the categories presented by Cohen (1985) in his work on the use of symbols in the modern construction of community, I will suggest some of the possible reasons why the idea of the resurrection worked so effectively as a symbol. Interesting to note is that Cohen himself argues that symbols of community are held more intensely in times of extreme social change and the weakening of tangible group boundaries – very appropriate in this context; as belief in the resurrection grew out of circumstances of persecution – applied first to the “many” who were the good and evil principles in that specific persecution; and only later to a much broader mass of humanity – functioning as vindication of the righteous martyrs and punishment of the unpunished apostates

(Nickelsburg 2006:5). Seen in this light, the symbol and strategy of the idea of the resurrection can be described as follows:

- It condensed a worldview – several other beliefs (e.g. belief in God's power) could adhere to it and be mentioned with it; or, as Douglas (1973:195) puts it, "body attitudes are condensed statements about the relation of society to the individual". It helped solve certain social problems, as "resurrection was the preserve of the disenfranchised classes of people who could not abide foreign domination, whereas notions of immortality of the soul were typical of people who benefited from Greco-Roman society and were more at home in the culture" (Segal 1997:102).
- As an imprecise and abstract symbol it could capture and contain the variety of subjective meanings and individual interpretations that any group of human beings contains (Cohen 1985:21); presenting a fairly simple public face to outsiders, while the internal understandings of it within the community could be (and usually was) more complex.
- It draws boundaries – functioning as a visible marker that distinguishes those on the inside from those on the outside; putting one within the bounds of the community. This function was especially important in times when the structural base of the community was weakening (e.g. with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C E, and the reconstruction of a new form of Judaism by the rabbis); the lack of clear physical boundaries rendering symbolic ones more crucial, and the construction of community based on ideas more pressing.
- It constructs community by constructing symbolic boundaries, thus strengthening people within the group's sense of identity – particularly when encountering other groups.
- It confers legitimacy on those who preach it – a symbol only works if others recognise it; and the symbol of resurrection confers authority on those who promote it exactly because it is recognisable to a significant number of people as

the shorthand for their cultural values, and because it formed part of an effective strategy for solving (especially political) problems (Setzer 2004a:47).

- It solves a set of problems created by Palestine's incorporation into the Roman Empire: the loss of Jewish sovereignty, the suffering of the Jews under Gentile domination, and the seeming withdrawal of God's favour towards Israel.

For early Jews and Christians belief in the resurrection thus seemed to say that outward forms did not necessarily tell the whole truth about deeper realities (Setzer 2004a:2); thus allowing its adherents to live in the world as it was – reconciling the gap between beliefs and reality they "massage away the tension" (Cohen 1985:92) created by the disparity between *what is* and *what ought to be* (according to the community in question's beliefs), and to retain their commitment to a certain community and its history. The resurrection was also utilised as a symbol in the construction of the abovementioned communities (Setzer 2004a:4); as a tool for creating meaning that reached beyond itself and so allowed other ideas to coalesce around it. In this sense then, belief in the resurrection of the dead formed part of a strategy of coping with the distance between *what is*, and what *ought to be*. As Cohen (1985) rightly observes, "symbols do not so much express meaning as give the capacity to make meaning" – and then especially at boundaries between groups. In a striking number of instances in the 1st and 2nd century C E people used their belief in the resurrection to claim authority and to declare others excluded because of their unbelief; standing as a boundary marker between authentic representatives of the faith, and those who only "claimed" to belong (Setzer 2004a:4); in this way also acting as an implicit protest.

When looking at the symbolism and meaning of the resurrection in this way thus sheds some light on the way in which these groups saw themselves, how they saw others, and how they coped with their social and political reality – implying that the assertion of resurrection is ultimately about human dignity and autonomy in the face of hostility (Setzer 2004a:1); about helping with the struggle for definition and meaning; about opposition, group identity, and self-respect. Through the authors' repeated references to

another “order” of things called the kingdom of God they endeavour “to imagine and construct an alternate reality to the dominant social institutions of their immediate context and its moral values (Vaage 1994:56)”; which coincides with the rhetorical function of language classified as “eschatological” or “apocalyptic”, insofar as such language imagines and constructs an alternative vision of reality and evaluates present and ethical systems – a “symbolic subversion” of the present order of things; communal or corporate imagery that draws on the socio-political realities of human life and imagines/projects the world and its power arrangements as if God (solely) were in charge.

5.1 The importance of Christ’s uniqueness

Popular public discourse on religion links Christian identity to an understanding of Christ as unique (Woodward 2000:52); a concept constructed in two interrelated ways:

- As the Son of God, Jesus Christ died and was resurrected as the Gospels report.
- As a result, he is fundamentally *unlike* the central figures of other religions.

Interesting to note is that it is “eschatology” that is often implicated in establishing that uniqueness (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:116). Thus the logic goes: it is Christians’ belief in the first claim (a belief considered to be essential) that necessitates the second claim – the first claim invokes ontological truth for Christ’s uniqueness, with the difference between Christ and Buddha and Muhammad thus also receiving ontological value. Many theologians have pointed out the difficulty raised for interreligious relations by such claims to ontological uniqueness, together with its attending claims of superiority with respect to other religious traditions – Mack (1993:255-256) describes two problems that have arisen for “those concerned about the effective difference Christianity might make in the world where nations and cultures are struggling to find ways to work together”:

- The Christian missionary impulse "with its explicit claim to know what is best for other people".
- The recognition that the Christian tradition (particularly its "messianic vision of a powerful superhero to right the world's wrongs") has done much to perpetuate systems of power that abuse and control rather than empower.

"The question before us," concludes Mack (1993:257) "is what the Christian religion might have to offer as we rethink how to live in a multicultural world?" Yet, though many other scholars have also criticised the ways that uniqueness claims have functioned to insulate Christianity from unwanted comparisons, they rarely articulate their own interests in the acceptance or rejection of Christian uniqueness. Johnson-DeBaufre (2005:116-128) discusses four such possible interests or characteristics of contemporary debates over Christian uniqueness:

- Often underlying interests of claims for the uniqueness of Jesus (and/or the early Christian proclamation) are Christian apologetics and the quest for pure origins – whether it be origins in a singular and momentous person (the historical Jesus), a program (the *basileia* of God), or an event (the crucifixion and/or resurrection) – interests that "have rarely been cognitive, but rather almost always apologetic. As such, no other purpose for comparison has been entertained but that of genealogy" (Smith 1990:143).
- An emphasis on eschatology as an existential understanding of life – individualising eschatology to the exclusion of the "political and social factors which determine such experience of existence in a particular historical situation" (Koester 1985:72); thus removing both Jesus and early Christianity from their complex historical contexts.

> whereas for the history-of-religion school the term "eschatological" described the foreignness of Jesus and the early church – together with Jewish apocalypticism and

> other comparable ancient eschatologies – for Bultmann and many contemporary New Testament scholars and Christian theologians the term "eschatological" stands for the novelty of Christianity, its incomparable superiority, the uniqueness of the victorious religion ... wherever a comparison is ventured, wherever analogies lift their head, wherever challenges are heard from other religious options but the canonical ones, the invocation of the "eschatological" is made, and the demons, the shadows have to disappear. Historical criticism thus turns into exorcism.
>
> Georgi 1985:82

- The understanding and implication of the idea that the debates over Jesus' uniqueness (whether human or ontological) take place in the larger field of Christological reflection and its relationship to Christian identity and self-understanding. In this way of thinking, "eschatology" stands as a cipher for finality and ultimacy – for it is only if Jesus made ultimate and final claims about the reign of God, and only if there is some connection (however implicit) between these claims and the person of Jesus himself, that Christological claims can be sustained (Freyne 1997:90).

> If Jesus is not the Messiah and the incarnate Son of God on any traditional interpretation of these terms, then how does one articulate his uniqueness in a way that makes sense out of remaining Christian...? Can Christians value Jesus if he was just a Jew who chose to emphasise certain ideas and values in the Jewish tradition but did not invent or have a monopoly on them? If claims about Jesus' specialness are intrinsic to Christianity, then is there a way to make

> these claims that does not end up rejecting or disparaging Judaism?
>
> Plaskow 1991:106-107

Does rejecting uniqueness claims mean "deconstructing Jesus' divinity" and accepting that he was "just a Jew who chose to emphasise certain ideas"? Here, once again, "eschatological" and "non-eschatological" emerge as terms in the debate that point to larger issues – in this case the discourse about Christology, and the continuity between the early Christian *kerygma* and the teaching of the historical Jesus.

5.2 The great divide

The methodological critique of uniqueness claims often constructs a divide between theological apologetics and respectable and disciplined historical scholarship; constructing a sharp break between the theologically/ethically/politically-engaged scholar as religious practitioner, and the interested-only-in-knowledge scholar as legitimate academician (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1999:69). One of the reasons for such a divide to emerge is the fact that scholars are not in the habit of articulating their own theological and/or ideological interests – although few actually use the language of disinterestedness for scholarship anymore, the impression created by these methodological critiques is that the flip side of theological interest is a value-free interest in knowledge for its own sake. But of course, knowledge is never produced just for its own sake; indeed, this divide has long been deconstructed in theory and in practice – insofar as scholars use historical arguments to "re-make the Jesus sign" (Arnal 1997: 308-319) for their contemporary readers, they are participating in the larger public discourse about Christian identity in a pluralistic world (Arnal 1997: 317); insofar as they cloak their own interests with historical scientism, they re-inscribe the dominant discourse in such a way that historical-scientistic methodology functions as "the reverse side of the fundamentalist literalist coin".

The epistemological nature of this dichotomy becomes apparent in Johnson's (1996:57) characterisation of the current state of Biblical scholarship as a contest between two orientations to Christianity:

- "Christianity regarded as a way of life rooted in and organised around a genuine experience of ultimate reality mediated by the crucified and raised Messiah".
- "Christianity as another among the world's religions (i.e. fundamentally a cultural reality rooted in the human construction of symbolic worlds)".

In the context of such an epistemological divide, historians are expected to continue to avoid the articulation of their own interests. But Christian claims of "difference plus superlative value" – particularly with regard to the interpretations of Jesus – are as old as the Gospels (and the *kerygma*) themselves. Indeed, the doctrines that are often at stake in discussions of eschatology and uniqueness claims are Christological doctrines – the basic building blocks of Christian identity.

Here then, rather than attempting to set aside our own interests in the contemporary discussion, we need to locate our interpretations within this ongoing debate; for, in order to develop criteria for evaluating discourses of Christian uniqueness, one must begin not with "disinterested" methodology, but rather with the contemporary situation – with the process of analysing our contemporary discourses alongside and toward informing our exegetical work, maybe in this way opening up new possibilities for thinking about the texts and materials of early Christianity. And the work of envisioning the *basileia* cannot end with the Biblical texts and authoritative interpretations of them; it must continue on through participation in the present ongoing public discourse that seeks to shape Christian identity in a diverse world, with scientific ethos demanding *both* ethical and cognitive criteria that must be reasoned out in terms of standard knowledge and, at the same time, inter-subjectively understandable and communicable (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1999:195-196).

6 ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

The past has come to us fragmented – ancient historians were selective in what they reported, and much of what was written has been lost. Legend emerged rapidly in antiquity, and could be quite credulous (e.g. Lucian, *How to write history* 12). Seneca the Younger notes that historians were often guilty of reporting incredible events in order to win approval; adding that "some historians are credulous, some are negligent, on some falsehood creeps unaware" but that all have it in common that they do not think that their "work can achieve approval and popularity" unless they "sprinkle that work with falsehoods" (*QN* 7.16.1-2). After a lengthy discussion on accuracy and falsehood in ancient historiography and rhetoric, Byrskog (2002:213) comments:

> It seems likely, generally speaking, that the apparent paradox between the rhetoricians emphasis on the 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, whilst its elaboration (the *exaedificatio*) should only be plausible.

Thus ancient biographers were allowed certain literary freedoms, although they took these to varying degrees – some, like Suetonius, exercised minimal liberties; while others, like Appian, have been "severely censured for want of accuracy in details" (White on Appian in his translation of *Roman history* 1972:xi). Given this challenge, it is of utmost important to identify and adequately account for the historical bedrock which "can be recovered even from the most deplorable of our tertiary sources" (Sherwin-White 1963:186). 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 still in fact shot by someone" (Allison 2005b:127-128). But, 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

present investigation; identifying historical bedrock that is strongly supported and acknowledged by a nearly universal and heterogeneous consensus of scholars – historical bedrock that is clear and firm, and must be accounted for by any serious hypothesis. This means not granting 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 fulfil the criteria for the best explanation, and the historical bedrock occurs in a context that is charged with religious significance (Licona 2208:415).

The past only survives in fragments preserved in texts, artefacts, and the effects of past causes. These documents were written by biased authors who had their own agenda and were shaped by the cultures in which they lived (often foreign to us), who varied in both their personal integrity and the accuracy of their memories, who had access to a cache of incomplete information that varied in accuracy, and who had selected from that cache only information seen as relevant to their purpose in writing (Licona 2008:21-22). For this reason, all sources must be viewed and employed with prudence. Therefore, throughout all our further investigation and critical evaluation, we will be proceeding with caution – meaning that if a hypothesis cannot account for the relevant historical bedrock it uses, it is dead in its tracks. But the historical bedrock makes no statement pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection appearances, meaning that we must choose how we shall define this resurrection hypothesis – either as an objective vision (i.e. Jesus ontologically appearing to others in a manner not perceived by the physical senses; or an actual appearance outside of space-time); or as Jesus appearing in his revivified corpse, seen with ordinary vision. The former could not have been videotaped, while the latter could have been. Though, because neither of these interpretations belongs to the historical bedrock, we will not choose between them in the present research. Since the claim that it was *God* who raised Jesus is also incapable of verification, we will not make any claims pertaining to the cause of the event; other than it must have been supernatural.

6.1 The reason for the ruckus – the resurrection hypothesis

This is the hypothesis that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. Perhaps the earliest assertion of the post-Easter Church was: "God raised Jesus from the dead". What did these early Christians mean when they proclaimed that God had raised Jesus? The answer has, and continues to be, debated. Widespread agreement on the matter is (not surprisingly) absent. We will be looking at three of the major contributors to the modern understanding and defence of the resurrection hypothesis.

6.1.1 The great debater – Gary R Habermas

Habermas clearly believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus – over the course of the past two decades, he has consistently been employing his (now well-known) strategy for establishing the “probable historical fact” of the resurrection of Jesus; confirmed by his 2006 article, in which he once again states that, “building upon agreed data, various reasons are given to establish the reality of the disciples’ experiences” (Habermas 2006:288). Important to remember from the outset is that Habermas is not a New Testament Science specialist, he is a professor of philosophy and apologetics; implying that the methodological tools normally employed by New Testament scholars are not necessarily on the foreground in his approach, as well as providing the reason for the strong philosophical orientation evident in his work and a substantial part of his approach to understanding the resurrection. Instead of using current exegetical tools, Habermas analyses all the different approaches as an apologist; using these results to make general conclusions. Habermas himself (2004:44-47) describes his methodology as one “to use only those data that are recognised as historical by virtually all scholars, including sceptics”. This methodology led to the development of what he now calls the “minimal facts” (2004:44-47) – a list of “at least eleven events ... considered to be knowable history by virtually all scholars” (Habermas 1987:20-21):

- Jesus died due to the rigours of crucifixion.
- He was buried.

- Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope.
- Although not as frequently recognised, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later.
- At this time, the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
- The disciples were transformed from doubters, who were afraid to identify themselves with Christ, to bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection – even being willing to die for this belief.
- This message was central in the early church's preaching.
- It was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had died shortly before.
- As a result of this message, the church was born and grew.
- Sunday became their primary day of worship.
- James, the brother of Jesus – and a sceptic – was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus.
- A few years later Paul, the persecutor of Christians, was also converted by an experience that he believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.

In this way, Habermas (1987:21) indicates that, except for the empty tomb, "virtually all scholars who deal with this issue agree that these are the minimum known facts regarding the events". Because of this, "the historical resurrection becomes the best explanation for the facts, especially because the alternative theories have failed ... it may be concluded that the resurrection is a probable historical event" (Habermas 1987:22-23). He even goes so far as to say that a sufficient case can be made for the historicity of the resurrection by using only four (of the above eleven) accepted facts:

- Jesus' death due to crucifixion.
- The subsequent experiences that the disciples were convinced were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
- The corresponding transformation of these men.

- Paul's conversion experience, which he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Of these four facts "the nature of the disciples' experiences is the most crucial" (Habermas 1987:25). With this approach, Habermas (1987:15) clearly shows his staunch opposition to what he calls *naturalistic* science; describing it as a trend in which "recent philosophical scepticism often focuses on the relationship between miracle-claims and the laws of nature" in order to determine "whether empirical evidence exists for such claims". In this process, he identifies five major problems with most of these philosophical objections:

- They "are attempts to mount up the data against miracles in an *a priori* manner" (Habermas 1987:16).
- They "are also mistaken in not allowing for the real possibility of external intervention in nature ... the issue of the supernatural" (Habermas 1987:17).
- They "generally treat the laws of nature in an almost Newtonian sense as the final word on what may occur" (Habermas 1987:19).
- That this "strict empiricism ignores both the historical evidence for miracles and the fact that the strict forms of verificational standards are themselves non-verifiable" (Habermas 1987:19).
- This approach "frequently ignores the strong historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus" (Habermas 1987:19).

In opposition to these views Habermas (2004:32), on the other hand, says that:

> Twelftree sets the standard for belief that something was really said or truly happened at the point when the reason for accepting it significantly outweighs the reasons for rejecting it ... if there are no reasonable opposing theories, a finding of historicity is the default position.

It thus becomes clear that Habermas does indeed work with historical method, and allows for the possibility of miracles; in this way distancing himself from classical liberal theology – but also leaving himself very little facts (eleven to be exact) to work with.

6.1.2 William L Craig and "reasonable faith"

In 1989, Craig published a "long-term project" of his – a very thorough exegetical volume on the resurrection; in which he made a strong plea for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Included in this the plea were both the bodily resurrection and the empty tomb as historically highly plausible events. He indicates that he cannot commit himself to any opinion/belief existentially unless he is convinced that it is true; however, he does not equate this to taking the standpoint of theological rationalism with regard to the resurrection, as "certainly God's Spirit may move in the hearts of men to persuade them of the truth apart from considerations of evidence" (Craig 1989:xiv). In this way, Craig attempts to indicate that faith and history should not be mutually exclusive, but rather related to each other; and that he is unashamedly pre-occupied with the question of what actually happened. His strong emphasis on historicity becomes even more evident when he states that he is "primarily interested in the question of the historical credibility of the resurrection accounts, not their theology, except insofar as the latter impinges on the former" (Craig 1989:xiv-xv).

With regard to presuppositions, Craig (1989:xvi) states:

> There is a difference between *innocuous* (a presupposition that does not enter into the verification of the hypothesis) and *vicious* (a presupposition that actually enters into the argumentation and purports to be a ground for the acceptance of the hypothesis) presuppositions.

From what follows, it is clear that Craig wants to work with the following *vicious* presuppositions:

- Markan priority.
- The independence of John from the Synoptics.
- That Mark 16:8 represents the original conclusion to that gospel.

He further rejects the hermeneutical position that deems the universe and history to be a closed system – as an example of this he (Craig 1989:320 n19) indicates how Bultmann works with an "*a priori* assumption of history and the universe as a closed system"; then quoting Niebuhr's (1962:197) statement that "Bultmann retained uncriticised the 19th century idea of nature and history as a closed system, forcing him to insist that the resurrection is only the wonder of faith". Craig (1989:338) then continues by making the statement that "theological conceptions cannot change historical events; *a priori* constructs of what can and cannot have happened will be broken by the facts themselves". Thus, Craig (1989:339 n 31) clearly rejects the description/position of faith as being "a leap in the dark"; stating:

> This catastrophic misunderstanding springs from the error of taking faith as an epistemological category, a way of knowing. It ignores the fact that, in Biblical usage, faith is not merely *assensus*, but *fiducia.* Because faith is a whole-souled trust or commitment, it cannot in any way be opposed to either knowledge or evidence. On the contrary, Paul and the Gospels invite us to believe on the basis of the evidence ... No Biblical writer could construct a dichotomy such that if one saw the risen Jesus, then one no longer needed to believe ...
>
> Craig 1989:339 n 31

Though Craig believes that Paul saw the risen Jesus, he states that Paul's experience was not a vision or hallucination (as some of the scholars to be discussed in the next chapter contest) – he does agree that Paul's experience was different from those of the other witnesses, but does not equate this with meaning that they therefore must also have been encountering different Jesus'. Craig goes on to literally deal with every New Testament reference concerning the resurrection; beginning with Paul and working through the Gospels (also including books like James, Hebrews, and Revelation). What makes Craig's approach unique is also what makes it interesting – although he affirms his commitment to the inspiration and historical reliability of Scripture, his research on the resurrection doesn't employ that presupposition in the explanation or validation of his exegesis.

6.1.3 Emergent perspectives – Tom (NT) Wright

At present, Wright's work (2003) on the matter stands as the proposal that must be answered by those taking a contrary position. The resurrection hypothesis, believed to be both coherent with the worldview of Second Temple Judaism and fundamental to the New Testament, is defined 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.
>
> Wright 2003:686-687, 718

He thus concludes that, when the early Christians claimed that Jesus had been resurrected, they meant that his corpse had been revivified and transformed. In this sense, he remains true to the identified minimum facts, while still allowing for a range of specific possibilities.

6.2 A critical assessment

In general Habermas, Craig, and Wright do not have very extensive differences; and they have one very crucial similarity – all of them hold that God can intervene in nature, thus rejecting the 19th century C E theory that the world is a closed system. With the above in mind; it can be said that, according to them, faith in the resurrection of Jesus is a gift from God which (after revelation) becomes a hermeneutical presupposition affirming that God intervenes in his creation – this gift is revelation. And yet, all three of these scholars are still able to substantiate that belief in a rational academic environment with their intellectual integrity intact; as they all state that faith in this act of God does not need to amount to "a leap in the dark" – it is a revelation from God, which can be testified to on reasonable historical grounds.

But, while the resurrection hypothesis is (obviously) open to the existence of the supernatural (including God), that does not necessarily mean that it automatically presupposes it – the historian has to carefully examine the data and context of this miracle claim to be able to adjudicate on whether it was a historical event (i.e. whether it fulfils the criteria for the best explanation, and whether there is adequate reason for awarding historicity); in order for the historical conclusion to have theological implications. If a particular miracle claim's historical conclusion leads to a theological or supernatural implication, the historian is on safe ground. But when a study is done the other way round – in other words when the theological (or *anti*-theological) motivations of historians guide their historical conclusions – then trouble is almost certainly guaranteed. That said; Jesus' resurrection will never be established *via* historical method with the degree of certainty desired by many of the faithful; as 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, this is an uncertainty not unique to Christian claims, but one that applies to all historical knowledge. We wish there was more, as it would be nice to possess greater

knowledge about our sources. But the absence of additional desirable sources cannot be used as the argument against the validity of the resurrection hypothesis – the question is whether the evidence is adequate enough for the building of a respectable hypothesis; and historians remain confident that they are able to recover the past to varying degrees, without ever knowing who their sources were (Barrera 2001:203; Cladis 2006:100). Here we are fortunate that the minimum facts/historical bedrock discussed earlier provide a substantial foundation on which historians may work.

6.2.1 Elapsed time equals elapsed memory

Ehrman complains that all of the canonical Gospels were written 35-65 years after Jesus, with Jesus only appearing in "any non-canonical pagan source ... 80 years after his death"; reading into this that it meant that "he didn't make a big impact on the pagan world". However, Josephus mentions Jesus within 60-65 years (and though not pagan, he was definitely non-Christian). Moreover, when compared with other written sources of other historical figures and events, 35-65 years is a relatively short period – Augustus is generally regarded as the Rome's greatest emperor, but only three of the seven chief sources (used by historians to write a history of Augustus) are contemporary with Augustus; a fourth source writes from 50-110 years after his death, and the final three write from 100-200 after the death of Augustus (Yamauchi 1994:26). Therefore, it is remarkable that four biographies of Jesus were written within 35-65 years of his death (Ehrman also grants that this is the view of "almost all scholars"; 2008:57).

Furthermore, very early oral tradition (e.g. creeds, hymns, oral formulas, the Acts sermon summaries; some of which goes back to the earliest stages of the post-Easter Church) is peppered throughout the New Testament writings, including the Gospels. The lacking plethora of non-Christian contemporary sources on Jesus is again not a unique phenomenon – once again, one need only look at the fact that only three sources on Augustus have survived that are contemporary with him; of which only one reports his adulthood. Another example: the emperor Tiberius was a contemporary of Jesus; and 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:Tiberias ration goes from 9:9 to at least 42:10 (Habermas & Licona 2004:126-128).

In addition, it must be remembered that the purpose of the writing heavily influences what authors do and do not write about – they write according to where their interests lead them; meaning that Christian writers said very little about their Roman lords, and Roman writers said very little about Christians. Yet this does not warrant the conclusion that their content is mistaken – one first has to analyse the arguments provided, and take the genre into consideration (Willits 2005:107). For, though propaganda can be used in malevolent ways, it is not necessarily bad; it can actually be good *and* true – words that precisely replicate what the subject said are good, but can only be properly understood within their context. We all have the urge to relate our past to a sort of morality, making complete accuracy difficult to attain (even when it is our aim), because "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" (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob 1994:307).

7 THE WAY FORWARD

For these very reason (and this very present reality) we must be careful not to condemn the ancients for not acting according to our modern conventions, as our "wish list" can become "so idealistic as to be practically irrelevant to the work of the practicing historian" (Craig 2006:18). When it comes to the Gospels, this theory could provide a good reason for the bias of the Evangelists – *because* they were so convinced of the truth of their story, they did not hesitate to write it; especially when we remember that all of the discrepancies between the Gospels usually cited appear in the peripheral details rather than at the core of the stories (Craig 2006:7). Also important to note is that most of the *non-canonical* Christian sources that report on Jesus' resurrection (and report it

differently from the canonical gospels) are *later* than the canonical sources (in fact most, if not all, of them are *much later*).

7.1 Analysing technique

Accordingly, when analysing *bioi*, historians should focus on identifying the historical core in the narratives, and on whether the sources are adequate for learning what happened; especially where their subject is not an individual. Historian Paul Maier (1991:180) offers the following comment concerning discrepancies in the Gospels:

> It is no service either to Christianity or to honesty to gloss over these discrepancies … 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.

Michael Grant (1977:200) agrees with him when he says that:

> 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 … happen to have described it in differing terms.

Discrepancies amongst the peripheral details thus do not necessitate wholesale invention. As Craig noted in his debate with Ehrman (2006:37),

> 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, involve very few eyewitnesses, and are told by people that are completely biased. And yet Greco-Roman historians reconstruct the course of history of the ancient world.

7.2 Reaching conclusions

Thus, the only legitimate reasons for rejecting the resurrection hypothesis are philosophical and theological in nature – for example if the idea of supernaturalism is found to be false, causing a naturalist hypothesis to be of equal strength (or stronger) than the resurrection hypothesis; or if a non-Christian religion is found to be exclusively true. However, if one brackets the question of worldview – by neither presupposing, nor *a priori* excluding supernaturalism – and examines the data, the historical conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead could plausibly follow. And a good critical scholar must account for the facts with integrity, even when he/she finds his/her conclusion in tension with his/her desired outcome; for "facts are stubborn things and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictums of our passions, they cannot alter the state of the facts and evidence" (McCullough 2001:65-68).

This also implies that certain questions – pertaining to, for example, the cause behind the event (who or what raised Jesus), the mechanism behind the event (how precisely it was accomplished), and the precise nature of Jesus' resurrected state – are beyond the reach of historians. And, 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; resisting misuse when prudent method administers reasonable controls.

Chapter 3

1 WHOSE QUEST? TO WHERE?

Schweitzer once described the "quest of the historical Jesus" as "the greatest achievement of German theology". And, even though this claim is somewhat over the top in its treatment of the "quest" as an almost exclusively German enterprise, it does reflect a period (roughly one hundred years, from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century C E) when it was indeed German theology that led the way in pushing through old frontiers and setting the agenda for Biblical and theological scholarship (Dunn 2005:3). More importantly, Schweitzer's comment confirms the crucial importance of Jesus in Christian theology; and thus also the priority that must inevitably be given to achieving as clear as possible a picture of Jesus in his own time and context in historical study.

It is this priority that has motivated the "quest" from the first – the desire to see Jesus as he was, or at least as he was apprehended in his own time by his own contemporaries (Dunn 2005:3). The underlying assumption of the "quest" being that the Jesus of 1st century Galilee must have been a figure of epochal importance; and that, if the "superstition" of the time and the subsequent faith of orthodox (and heterodox) Christianity has in any way obscured the impact he really made, it must be worth pushing through the clouds of piety to re-experience something of his impact afresh. But this motivation, as already becomes visible in the above statement, has often been mixed with less commendable features – for example an enlightenment dismissal of the "supernatural"; hostility to tradition; and suspicion of anything that smacked of faith (Dunn 2005:3).

1.1 The scope of the quest

Scholars are captivated not only with the task of uncovering Jesus' teachings and deeds, but also with determining his fate. And while nearly every scholar in the world agrees that Jesus was killed by the Romans *via* the brutal method of crucifixion, it is

what happened after he was removed from his cross that has been the subject of more than 2500 books and articles during only the past thirty-five years. Now, the outsider might expect that there would be agreement among scholars in their conclusions pertaining to what happened to Jesus after his crucifixion; but instead they find numerous renditions of a Jesus who either died, or survived, or was revived – thus a multitude of interpretations ranging from complete denial to unhealthy fundamentalism (Mulder 2006:1). Recent historiography, especially of a postmodern flavour, has pointed to this difficult but unavoidable conviction that "what we make" of someone's life – a biography – is just as much *interpretation* as it is *description* at an objective level (McKnight 2005:347).

This has widened the range from wherein to argue in the "quest": if the postmodernist contends that this "linguistic turn" goes all the way down (even to the point that any historical description of Jesus is nothing more than interpretation); more moderate voices contend that the early Christians did "remember" Jesus, and that this memory correlates not only with what the early Christians believed about Jesus, but also with what Jesus himself said and did (McKnight 2005) – with this "memory" of Jesus itself becoming a "linguistic turn"; for there never was a time when there was not a Jesus of faith (Dunn 2003; 2005). Pannenberg (1996:62) states that "the Christian belief in the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ presupposes an outlook on reality in general that is not shared by everybody". We thus find significant opposing views being expressed – based on the same documentary and other source evidence. Given this amount of academic interest in the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, we are not surprised to find that it has been called the "prize puzzle of New Testament research" (Allison 2005b:200).

1.2 Challenges along the way

There are numerous challenges to knowing the past – the most prominent being that the past is forever gone and can therefore neither be viewed directly nor reconstructed

precisely or exhaustively – meaning that historians cannot verify the truth of any hypothesis in an absolute sense. Our knowledge of the past comes exclusively through sources (our only link to the past is thus through the eyes of someone else, someone who had his/her own opinions and agendas); meaning that reports coming to us from ancient historians have already been influenced in varying degrees by his/her own bias. Moreover, many ancient historians (simply put) lacked interest in the past as such; they were more concerned with having their present remembered (Finley 1965:288), and for this reason were selective with the material they reported on – namely data the reporting historian deems uninteresting, unimportant, or irrelevant to his/her purpose in writing are usually omitted (Byrskog 2002:257-258).

But modern historians also select data because of its relevancy to this particular historian and the particular hypothesis being set forth; with data seen as irrelevant to the hypothesis archived or ignored. This selectivity goes beyond the events or narratives they chose to report on; thus, an *incomplete* description does not necessitate the conclusion that it is an *inaccurate* description. What's more, memory itself is selective and augmented by interpretive details – meaning that the authorial intent of ancient writers often eludes us, and the motives behind the reports often become difficult to determine and interpret. Then there is also the occasional unreliability of eyewitness testimony to take into account (Licona 2008:19). Another watchword with some revisionist historians is that "history is written by the winners" (Franzmann 2005:127) – when attempting to understand the past, we look primarily at narratives written by someone from an advantaged position; thus we are getting our story from the perspective of the party in power rather than those who are not.

1.3 A high stakes venture

As we have seen, in the past two decades there has been a lot of attention paid to the historical Jesus, both among scholars and in the public arena; with the debate over the

eschatological outlook of Jesus and his first followers made to figure prominently for some time by a wide range of New Testament scholars, because of the fact that:

- There is “considerable terminological confusion” (Borg 1994:9) in historical Jesus research over the meaning and historical appropriateness of categories such as “eschatology”, “eschatological”, and “apocalyptic”.
- Some researchers question whether historical-critical scholars should still use a modern doctrinal category (Sauter 1988:499) to describe early Christian perspectives on the future (see for e.g. Cameron 1996:231-245).

But what is at stake in this debate about “eschatology”? What do we accomplish by arguing that Jesus (and therefore Christian beginnings) was “eschatological”, or “apocalyptic”, or “non-eschatological”? What can we learn from this debate? One thing that is positive about this debate is the fact that Biblical scholarship is actually participating in larger contemporary discussions on the essence of Christianity – by presenting historical reconstructions of Christian origins that confirm or challenge particular understandings of the central message of Christianity, Biblical interpreters take sides in the ongoing struggle to define Christianity and to shape Christian identity in a changing world. In much of this recent discussion of “eschatology” and Christian origins, the focus has been on and around three specific scholarly contributions:

- Kloppenborg’s (1987; 1988; and 1994) proposal for the redactional strata of Q.
- The hypothesis that the historical Jesus was a Cynic-like wisdom teacher (see e.g. Downing 1988).
- The work of The Jesus Seminar (see e.g. Funk, Hoover & The Jesus Seminar 1993).

All three of these contributions, in one way of another, differentiate wisdom (or sapiental) traditions from apocalyptic ones (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:6); leading Robinson (1991:189, 194) to declare that this change – from a pervasive eschatological

interpretation of Jesus' preaching, to a consensus against such an interpretation – marks a "paradigm shift" and a "Copernican revolution" in the field of Jesus research. However, when considering the current extent of the debate over the "eschatology" of Jesus; together with the ongoing struggle over the interpretation of Jesus' "eschatology"; it seems that Robinson's statement might have been premature – it has become ever clearer that a new consensus has not been reached. On the contrary, the current debates surrounding the "apocalyptic" or "sapiential" Q and the "eschatological" or "non-eschatological" Jesus reveal that these ideas and questions do still form a very active part of the long-standing tradition of theological debate; drawing on reconstructions of the historical Jesus and Christian origins in order to authorise contemporary theological, ethical, and political perspectives. We will now examine and evaluate some of the current debate's main proponents using our proposed theory (see Chapter 1). We do this in order to determine whether such a combined approach can assist us with the critical navigation through, and a balanced understanding of, the current debate in all its rich diversity (to be discussed in Chapter 4).

2 THE QUEST: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

2.1 The historical-critical eye view

2.1.1 Alexander J M Wedderburn – Moving beyond the resurrection

In his 1999 book *Beyond Resurrection,* Wedderburn uses the historical-critical method to assess whether it is possible to answer the historical question concerning the resurrection of Jesus; devoting the first three chapters of the book to the discussion of whether the question can even be asked in the first place. He notes that, when events in antiquity are the subject of investigation, the evidence is often fragmentary and the factual is mingled with bits of legend. The result is that it is unlikely that the historian may conclude what is true beyond all doubt on these matters (Wedderburn 1999:11). He then states that, since no one actually claimed to have seen the resurrection-event,

statements by those who believed they had seen a resurrected Jesus are interpretations of what occurred at the tomb:

> What the first witnesses experienced was not the resurrection-event itself, but an encounter with Jesus; an encounter which they then interpreted as meaning that Jesus was risen, or had previously been raised, so as to be in a position to encounter them.
>
> Wedderburn 1999:12

Wedderburn thus argues that an inquiry into the resurrection is limited in that the explanation that Jesus was actually raised

> Passes beyond the historian's competence, as a historian, to deliver a verdict upon it. He/she may be able to weigh up the probabilities of natural, this-worldly explanations … but the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” is “imponderable”.
>
> Wedderburn 1999:13-14

However, this should not encourage historians to raise their hands in surrender and conclude all is hopeless where the historicity of Jesus' resurrection is concerned. For him, although the resurrection may be outside the reach of historical research, historians can still approach it through the back door – an event, needed to explain the data (Wedderburn 1999:14). In the re-interpretation of the resurrection that follows, he states that nothing is added to the post-Easter faith that is not already present in the pre-Easter faith. But in this approach there is a challenge – one must know what is meant by "resurrection"; in order to be able to answer the question: "Did Jesus in fact rise from the dead?" (Wedderburn 1999:22). Here, he is willing to agree that something mysterious happened to the disciples; but leaves the door open for a psychological explanation. He also maintains that Paul's interpretation of what happened to Jesus is

quite different from the way it's portrayed in the Gospels (Wedderburn 1999:66) – not a triumphant Son of God who is raised bodily from the dead; instead a resurrection exclusively meant for the here and now, a "realised eschatology". Because of this perceived discrepancy, he arrives at a conclusion of agnosticism when it comes to our ability to make a historical assessments pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

> … In the case of the traditions of Jesus' resurrection these methods lead … to a high degree of uncertainty as to exactly what happened, regardless of how the early Christians may have seen it and proclaimed it. The logical conclusion of such an investigation … a regrettable and unsatisfactory "don't know", a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith…
>
> Wedderburn 1999:96-98

In his further work, he admits to moving beyond what the writers of the New Testament had intended, as he does "not regard the Biblical writers as having said the last word" (Wedderburn 1999:106); stating that "the documents of the New Testament ... are human products, human responses to what human beings perceived to be divine action and movement in historical events" and are "therefore fallible attempts" that "should not be regarded as the only possible adequate responses ..." (Wedderburn 1999:107). From this follows his conclusion that one can go "beyond" what the Scriptures initial intention was; allowing oneself the freedom of deconstructing the resurrection in such a way that even the slightest chance of life beyond the grave (and, by implication, bodily resurrection) is excluded. These results lead him to state that the New Testament's evidence is so confusing that this apparent disunity should be universally accepted – the "surest and most soberly scientific and scholarly option", according to him (1999:97-98), is to become a "reverent agnostic".

2.1.2 The “new perspective” – James D G Dunn

Dunn distinguishes between event, data, and fact: as historical events belong to the past, they cannot be relived or observed directly; it is only “data” (such as reports, artefacts, and circumstantial data) that has survived. But the data in these reports are never *raw* – so when historians encounter descriptions of a subject, they are actually interacting with data that has been soaked in the horizon of the person describing the subject. If/when the modern historian then interprets these descriptions, in an attempt to reconstruct what happened; the reality is that his/her data has thus been influenced by the horizons of several people. These interpretations of the data are referred to as "facts" (Dunn 2003:102-103). He then asks how we may speak of Jesus' resurrection as historical – the empty tomb and the appearances (both of which he grants) cannot be considered data, as the real “data” is the reports one might appeal to in order to arrive at the "facts" of the empty tomb and the appearances.

What does this mean for the resurrection? That:

> The conclusion, “Jesus has been raised from the dead”, is further interpretation, an interpretation of interpreted data, an interpretation of the facts. The resurrection of Jesus, in other words, is at best a second order “fact”, not a first order “fact” – an interpretation of an interpretation.
>
> Dunn 2003:877

In other words, in order for the historian to be able to conclude that Jesus was resurrected, he/she would be making an interpretation of what a few in the 1st century C E had already interpreted (given the data before them).

2.1.3 Overly critical?

It must forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend as Wedderburn notes. We may

also be reading poetic language or legend at certain points. Yet, while fragmented data and possibly legendary or poetic elements command caution on the part of the historian, the question to be asked is whether these challenges prohibit any possibility of a positive historical judgment. This question is especially relevant and important, as most of our historical knowledge is fragmented – both ancient and modern writers tend to report only those details they deem to be important, causing fact and interpretation to appear alongside one another in every text reporting on the past (Lüdemann 2004:21). So historians simply do not practice writing history in the manner they espouse; they proceed by inference, often working with second-order facts. This does not, however, mean that historians are now necessarily left without any legitimate conclusions to be made – the question they must answer is whether or not there is enough data to justify a positive historical conclusion. If this question can be answered in the affirmative, there are no *a priori* reasons why a historical judgment cannot be made (Licona 2008:129).

Wedderburn offers another objection to the resurrection hypothesis as the subject of historical investigation – he correctly claims that, in order for one to render a verdict, the historian must have an understanding of what is meant by the term "resurrection"; otherwise the claim becomes incoherent, and no verdict can be made. Wedderburn then goes on to claim that we cannot be certain what the first-century authors meant when using the term; and, quoting Dunn, uses the example of Paul presenting a different picture of the resurrection than that of the Evangelists and Orthodoxy. But this argument does not have the force that Wedderburn imagines – it is very probable that Paul's beliefs regarding Jesus' resurrection were similar to Jesus' original disciples (Licona 2008:154-164); and, since historians usually prefer earlier reports, his view of the resurrection should be preferred over those of the Evangelists and Orthodoxy. It is only if Paul stands alone as an early source against the Evangelists and other relatively early Christian literature that the waters become muddy.

2.2 Finding meaning in the historical Jesus

2.2.1 John D Crossan and The Jesus Seminar

The works of John Dominic Crossan have received more attention than perhaps those produced by any other member of the Jesus Seminar. 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" (Crossan 2006:185). Precisely because the historical question has been debated for so long, with few minds changing in the process; Crossan says that we are at an impasse in this "irreconcilable debate" (Crossan 2006:173), and that the historical question "is probably unanswerable" (Crossan 2006:185). But since scholars rarely get beyond the question of historicity, the question of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is usually neglected (Borg & Crossan 2006:192). Thus, for Crossan (and Borg), focusing on the meaning behind the resurrection stories "is always the most important question. The alternative – fixating on 'whether it happened this way' – almost always leads on astray" (Borg & Crossan 2006:194). Accordingly, he identifies six problems that are present when proposing a literal resurrection:

- 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" (Borg & Crossan 2006:218-219, n 18). Do we see God acting in this way? Crossan does not think so.

> I have made certain judgements 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.
>
> Crossan, in Halstead 1995-1996:515

- 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" (Borg & Crossan 2006:191-192).
- There is also an *ethical* objection; the view that God has raised only Jesus "privileges Christianity as the only true or 'full' revelation of God, the 'only way'" (Borg & Crossan 2006:218-219 n18).
- 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 sceptics who argue that these kinds of things simply do not happen are not dealing adequately with a pre-Enlightenment worldview (held by the ancients who believed that they did; Borg & Crossan 2006:185).
- 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 (Borg & Crossan 2006:192).
- 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 (Borg & Crossan 2006:192); by *parable*, they mean that the meaning or truth behind the resurrection "is not dependent upon whether they are historically factual" (Borg & Crossan 2006:192-193). And to argue over whether a parable is historical "misses its point" (Borg & Crossan 2006:193).

Crossan does acknowledge that the apostles believed Jesus had risen from the dead. He explains the appearance traditions in a number of ways; starting with Paul: he 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 (Borg & Crossan 2006:194). Relying on the work of Erika Bourguignon (and a few of her doctoral students), he 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 of the mind, or chemical composition of the brain's neurobiology" (Crossan 1994:87). The content of these psychological phenomena is guided "by cultural training, control, and expectation"; those having the experiences may only borrow from what they already know (Crossan 1994:87, 168) – "the *what* of trance is absolutely psycho-socially conditioned and psycho-culturally determined" (1994:88). This means that pre-Christian Paul must have known, at minimum, certain contents of the Christian *kerygma* that he opposed. He 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.
>
> Crossan 1995:204

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 (Crossan 1994:169; 1995:209). But 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? He 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" (Crossan 1994:169). So there were other visions, but they were not the only way in which the continuing life of Jesus was acknowledged; and they came *after* their belief in God's continuing power and presence through Jesus, rather than serving as the cause of it (Crossan 1995:209, 216; 2006:34). 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.
>
> Crossan 1994:169; 1995:204

Approaching the other resurrection narratives, Crossan contends that Mark invented his story of the empty tomb (Crossan 2006:33); the original passion narrative was to be found in a hypothetical *Cross Gospel*, which he dates to the 40's, and contends was "the original passion narrative" and "is the single source of the intra-canonical passion accounts" (Crossan 1991:385, 429; 1995:223). Although now lost, he adds that we are reading a redacted form of it in the *Gospel of Peter*, and even finds traces of it in the canonical Gospels. Despite all this, none of the report is historical – they presume the appearances in Paul's list, but completely reformulate them (Crossan 2006:177). 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 – " … by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care" (Crossan 1991:394). Crossan also 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 interested in "authority, power, leadership, and priority"; presuming the Christian community, "they detail the origins of Christian leadership, not the origins of Christian faith" (Crossan 1994:169-170; 1995:203, 208). And since apparitions in the resurrection narratives are designed to confer authority on the recipient, he sees arguing over the

historicity and nature of the appearances as missing the point – "that here, unlike with Paul, we are dealing with quite a different phenomenon. These are dramatisations of power and visualisations of authority" (Crossan 1994:170; 1995:206). 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 (Crossan 1995:209-210); as they may have lost their nerve and fled, but they did not lose their faith and quit (Crossan 1995:209).

So what did the earliest Christians mean when they proclaimed that God had 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 (e.g. the Emmaus disciples); how did Paul, the Evangelists, and many of the earliest Christians come to claim that Jesus had risen bodily from the grave? For him, the answer is an equation: apparitions + eschatology = bodily resurrection. In this, he 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" (Crossan 2006:177). So, in order to have bodily resurrection, in addition to the apparitions the early Christians must also have had an understanding (even if not fully consummated) of Jesus' statements that the kingdom of God had already come and was present (Crossan 2006:26, 38). This means that the Christians understood that God's "great clean-up" of the world had begun; that 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 (Crossan 2006:24-25) – thus mutating the Jewish concept of the general resurrection at the end of time into something which was not only imminent, but had already begun (Crossan 2006:25-26). There were numerous ways to say that God's great clean-up had begun – resurrection

was just one of them. He 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.
>
> Crossan 1994:163

Because 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; and then even the tortured bodies of the martyred (Crossan 2006:25, 175-176). And, since there was a backlog of martyrs to be vindicated, Jesus could not have received a privileged position over them in the resurrection. 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 "first-fruits" (1 Cor 15:12-13). Thus, his resurrection was not God exalting Jesus as supreme over all others (Crossan 2006:181) – no, it was about the commencement (or inaugural event) of God's cosmic clean-up. Jesus as liberator 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; a theology – found in a hymn (*Odes of Solomon*); images (found in two ancient Greek Orthodox churches, St. Sargius and Chora; Borg & Crossan 2006:180-182); a narrative (*Gospel of Peter*); the poetic language of two hymns and chants in 1 Peter 3:18b-19; 4:6; and a weird "residual fragment" in Matthew 27:52-53 which, if taken literally, would mean that there would have been many (perhaps hundreds) of empty tombs around Jerusalem on that first Easter (Crossan 2006:182) – that persuades him to understand the *resurrection* metaphorically (Borg & Crossan 2006:181). He contends that those coming out of the

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" (Crossan 2006:388). But, in time, four reasons contributed to its marginalisation:

- It was an "intensely Jewish-Christian" tradition "and the future did not lie with that stream of tradition" (Crossan 1991:388).
- It is "serenely mythological" (Crossan 1995:197); Jesus was killed by demons, descended according to plan, and emerged victoriously (Crossan 1991:388).
- It created numerous doctrinal problems – did those whom Jesus led out of hell need to become Christian prior to their release? Did they need to be baptised? And who was freed – everyone, or just the righteous (Crossan 1991:388; 1995:197)?
- The most potent reason – how could Jesus have led forth the corporate resurrection of the just straight into heaven and have appeared to his disciples prior to his ascension (Crossan 1991:388; 1995:197)?

This marginalisation of the harrowing of hell is for Crossan, "one of the most serious losses from earliest Christian theology" (2006:181). His conclusion is that Paul did not literally mean that Jesus' corpse was resurrected, leaving behind an empty tomb; but rather that he wrote in poetic terms – Jesus lived, died, and is still alive; accordingly, the resurrection did not involve Jesus' corpse, which had become food for scavengers (Crossan, in Halstead 1995-1996:520). 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 through Jesus all over the Western Mediterranean world" (Crossan, in Halstead 1995-1996:521). For this reason, Paul would regard a belief in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus as a theological "yuck" (Crossan, in Halstead 1995-1996:521) – for him, *resurrection* was "the only possible way" to express Jesus' continuing presence; and is tied to an imminent general resurrection, in which the remainder of the general resurrection of those still alive would occur (Crossan 2006:27, 176, 180-181). This new understanding of resurrection meant that each person now had

two programs from which to choose: the power of Rome that conquers to gain peace; or the humble program of Jesus, that seeks justice in order to obtain peace (Crossan 2006:28). So, while the Romans were proclaiming the deity of Caesar, Christians were proclaiming the deity of Christ; without us being able to know whether the Romans or the Christians actually believed, in a literal sense, the deity of Caesar and Christ; only 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* (Crossan 2006:28, 128). 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 (Borg & Crossan 2006:208). 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 (Crossan 1994:164-165).

2.2.2 Possible weaknesses

Crossan offers a unique view of Jesus' resurrection that is unsurpassed in its innovation; taking us onto new ground, far from the standard naturalistic hypotheses we have examined thus far in this study. Yet we still have to acknowledge its possible weaknesses. He provides six initial concerns that present themselves when proposing a literal interpretation of Jesus' bodily resurrection. We will discuss our concerns with them in the order that they were introduced earlier, without listing them again:

- While he has not observed God's open and miraculous activities in the modern world, may others claim that they have (e.g. Allison, Habermas, Keener, and Moreland & Craig). Thus, the pool of experience from which he draws is quite limited. Second, and more importantly, if God's son had actually visited the earth, reports of phenomena not normally observed in his absence would be of no surprise.
- His second concern – that it may thwart non-Christians from embracing the Christian faith – is a *red herring*, since it distracts from the issue of historicity with

another issue that is not logically related. Rather, it is a pragmatic concern for those interested in evangelistic efforts. Crossan may want others to identify themselves as Christians in the sense that he promotes; but would his definition of *Christian* be recognisable to the early Christians? And has he considered that many who presently embrace the Christian faith might become uninterested in it if his definition is what it actually means to be Christian? If he is truly interested in removing a stumbling block, he must also recognise that in doing so he places a new one that may be even larger. In the end, 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.

- His third concern is *ethical* in nature, and is likewise a *red herring* – irrelevant to historical inquiry as it ignores truth, being concerned with the "what now?" What if following Jesus teachings *is* the only way to please God while other religions fall short in this regard? Then, his proposal would actually lead many away from the truth. But he must be indifferent to, or does not regard as true, the particular religious claim in question – Jesus' resurrection – as 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; by not doing so, he puts the cart of theological implications before the horse of historical truth (a problem of which Ehrman is likewise guilty). The ethical objection is also culturally insensitive, since it favours one cultural attitude over another; As Amy-Jill Levine so aptly puts it,

> We are not inevitably directed [towards pluralism], as the continual publication of parochial materials demonstrate. Nor is a non-pluralistic approach necessarily a betrayal of cultural awareness, of scholarship, or of 'theology' … exclusivism should not be 'morally dubious', as the blurb claims … what I would find more 'morally dubious' is my

> insisting to another that to another that his/her reading or presuppositions, because they are not pluralistic, are somehow wrong.
>
> Levine 2005:195-196

If one of the purposes of his proposal is to unite, it is bound to fail in that respect. It should rather be possible to disagree in the strongest sense with another's cherished views, while still acknowledging – and even defending – the right of the other to have them.

- Crossan's fourth concern – cultural misunderstanding – is valid to an extent, since there were indeed 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 (Habermas 2003:30). Moreover, the number of miracles ascribed to anyone within two hundred years before and after Jesus is very small in comparison (Twelftree 1999:247). Furthermore, 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 exorcisms (Evans 2002:12). 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 (Meier 1994:625). He also chides sceptics 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, sceptics existed in antiquity as today (Davis 1993:37-38; Hemer 1990:428-429) – not all of the ancients would have believed that the sort of actions attributed to Jesus actually occurred. Moreover, sceptics interested in the historical question of Jesus' resurrection should not be prohibited from such an investigation *because* they have a different worldview – though historians *need to comprehend* the worldview of those they are investigating, in order to have a better understanding of the things they describe,

all historians are inevitably going to judge the historicity of ancients reports according to their own worldview. He himself is guilty of this very practice; as, since Crossan today does not see God acting in the manner described in the Gospels, he concludes that he did not act that way in the 1st century C E (Crossan 1994:95).

- His fifth concern regards the fact that a literal interpretation of Jesus' resurrection introduces a number of difficulties related to the sources, as there are irreconcilable differences in the narratives and the language employed does not appear to be historical. But here we need to 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 a metaphorical sense.
- We have to agree with Crossan's sixth, and final, concern – namely that those who focus on a literal understanding of Jesus' resurrection often neglect the meaning it conveys. But this does not equate to a reason to abandon the historical question; it only reminds scholars that there are practical applications to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. In fact, if scholars abandoned the historical question and focused only on meaning, their opinions would collide on the meanings they ascribed to *resurrection*; and the impasse he dislikes would not have been eliminated. He 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 recognise that the impasse is largely as a result of the conflicting horizons of the historians participating in the debate. And, 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 his concerns were to be applied consistently.

In summary, three of Crossan's six concerns are not historical in nature – though he himself is certainly free to go beyond the historical question, and to then ask how this historical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection may apply to our present situation. But then he is acting more in the capacity of theologian and anthropologist than historian.

There are also serious challenges to attempting when attempting to identify hypothetical earlier strata in the relevant written sources, as he 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 (Evans 2006:56). Second, since horizons have tremendous influence in historical investigation (and especially so on the one we have embarked upon), historians must proceed with great caution – he appears negligent in this respect, as his portrait of the historical Jesus depends largely on sources he regards as early (the *Cross Gospel*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Secret Gospel of Mark,* the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the Egerton papyri); but that are regarded as late and of dubious value for the task by most other scholars. The same approach occurs when he postulates on Jesus' resurrection – he claims to be able to extract from the *Gospel of Peter* a passion and resurrection narrative (only represented in the Akhmîm fragments from the seventh to ninth centuries) from a hypothetical *Cross Gospel* which he dates from the middle of the 1st century C E, thus predating the canonical Gospels (Crossan 1994:149-152, 163). This assigning of an earlier date to the resurrection narrative employed by the *Gospel of Peter*, and his employment of this resurrection narrative consistently with the canonical Gospels, is a reverse of the current scholarly assumption that sees the more extraordinary reports as reflecting legendary additions.

Put another way, his hypothesis 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); accordingly, he has based a significant portion of his hypothesis on sources having questionable pedigree (Bauckham 2002:262; Evans 2006:98; Johnson 1996:47-48, 50). It is difficult to see how this may be regarded as a sound approach. Can modern historians know whether

a report or claim was intended to be interpreted literally or metaphorically? His "honest answer is: we do not have the faintest idea, and we do not even know how to figure it out" (Crossan 2006:182).

For the first Christians (and for us today) "Jesus was and is divine for those who experience in him *the* manifestation of God"; understanding that this claim is not meant to be understood in the strictest literal sense – when someone understands such a statement literally, thus negating similar statements by other, is when problems start to appear (Crossan 1995:216). But this does not appear to be an accurate reading of the early Christian texts. Is the language of resurrection found in the Gospels of a historical genre (thus meant *literally*)? Crossan answers in the negative (Borg & Crossan 2006:192). But herein lies a troublesome tension: if the Evangelists and early Christians would have been insulted by a crude literal interpretation of bodily resurrection (as he claims), would it not be strange – even counterproductive – for those Christians to defend that very view in their polemic with opponents? This problem becomes even clearer when 1 Corinthians 15 is given full consideration – if a literal bodily resurrection would have been a theological "yuck" (as he asserts), why provide comments that tend to support bodily resurrection (especially those in 1 Cor 15:53-54)? 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). So, in what way must their statements concerning Jesus' resurrection be regarded as differing in genre? To be sure, *resurrection* is sometimes employed as a metaphor; but it is difficult to read the Biblical texts and walk away with his interpretation, without doing great violence to them (Davis 1993:40; Harvey 1989:339) – these proposals "strike me as all too abstract and scholarly to explain the fact that the solid hillbillies from Galilee … were changed within a short period of time into a jubilant community of believers" (Lapide 2002:128). With the above in mind, Davis (2006:52) contends rightly 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.

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 he 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. His 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 St Sargius Church building in Old Cairo cannot be dated earlier than the 4th century C E, and the Chora Church in Istanbul was built in the early 5th century C E That, of course, is not to say that the 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. As for the Petrine sources, we have already noted that the *Gospel of Peter* is of a highly questionable pedigree; which means that the 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). He 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. Though this appears to be allowable; the text does not indicate to whom the voice in heaven is addressed. And when considering that nothing else in the text indicates that the cross is a large formation of people, there is no reason for preferring one explanation over the other.

Approaching the two texts from 1 Peter Crossan and Borg assert that, although it is debated whether 1 Peter 3:18b-19 refers to the harrowing of hell, there can be no

question pertaining to 1 Peter 4:6. Accordingly, if the harrowing of hell is mentioned in 4:6, the preaching to the spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3:19 appears to be a related activity. However, in 1 Peter 3:20 it is stated that these spirits were once disobedient. Were these spirits human or demonic? That they were demons may be more at home with 1 Peter 3:18-20; and 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" (Quarles 2006:112). Thus, neither of the two texts in 1 Peter provides support of much weight for the harrowing of hell.

This brings us to the 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 (Mk 15:33, 38; Lk 23:44-45). John is silent on the matter. Matthew also reports the darkness and tearing of the 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 (Mt 27:51-54). Brown notes that similar phenomena were reported at the death of Romulus and Julius Caesar (Brown 1994:1120-1127).

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); he also reported eight phenomena when Julius Caesar enslaved Egypt (*Roman History* 51.17.4-5). Philo (*On Providence* 2.50) claimed that eclipses were omens of the impending death of a king. Also of interest is the comment by Lucian of how he embellished a story ("…thickened the plot…") for the sake of "dullards" (*The passing of Peregrinus* 39). 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; chariots and angels were seen in the clouds surrounding the city; etc. Thus, that the Biblical writers were familiar with, and employed, this type of language seems clear; not only from the surrounding cultures, but also from within their own tradition (e.g. Jr 15:9; Am 8:8-9; Zph 1:15ff; Jl 2:2; Is 2:19 *LXX*; 1 Ki 19:11-12; Zch 14:4; Ezk 37:12b-13; and Nah 1:5-6). On the other hand, in favour of the historicity of the phenomena reported in Matthew, the darkness reported in all three Synoptics is also (apparently) reported by a secular historian – Thallus, 52 C E (*The anti-Nicene fathers* 1.6.2.1.3.25). Moreover, destructive earthquakes were common in the region, and can explain four of the six phenomena. But, given the presence of phenomenological language (used in a symbolic manner in both Jewish and Roman literature related to a major event, i.e. the death of an emperor or the end of a reigning king or even kingdom), 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 merely speculating pertaining to a natural cause of the darkness claimed by the early Christians), it seems that an understanding of the language in Matthew 27:52-53 as poetic is most plausible – especially when taking into account Matthew's further description of the tombs being opened and the saints being raised upon Jesus' death, but only coming out of their tombs *after* Jesus' resurrection (Crossan 1995:195). What were they doing between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning?

But even if we regard Matthew's report of the six phenomena that occurred after Jesus' death as a poetic device – something which he grants – his hypothesis (Crossan 1995:220) that Matthew was thinking of the harrowing of hell is not necessarily supported. Since Virgil before him, and Dio Cassius afterward, uses a similar device; Matthew may simply be emphasising that a great king has died. Or, if he has one or more of the Jewish texts in mind, he may be proclaiming that the day of the Lord has come. Moreover, Crossan and Borg (2006:176) 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' presence, and they do not appear with him in the resurrection, but only without him after the resurrection". They suggest that Matthew is making a

difficult attempt to fit the harrowing of hell into the resurrection narrative that he had borrowed from Mark (Borg & Crossan 2006:176). However, given the absence of any evidence of reasonable strength for the harrowing of hell theme in earliest Christian literature, this may be a bit of a strain (especially since the authenticity of the text has also been questioned; Evans 2006:195). 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 judgement awaits Israel.

But, even 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 this regard:

- 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 criticised 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? Yet the early opponents only 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 also (or automatically) interpreting Jesus' bodily resurrection as nothing more than a poetic or symbolic device.

2.3 Plausibly explaining the historical facts

2.3.1 Michael R Licona

Licona (2008:205-207) observes six arguments in favour of the historicity of the passion and resurrection predictions; and three arguments for their non-historicity. The arguments can be summarised as follows: There can be no doubt that Jesus' passion and resurrection predictions were known very early in the church (they appear in Mark, and may have an Aramaic original). They are multiply attested, and appear in multiple literary forms. They appear in contexts that portray Jesus, as well as the leadership he left, in an embarrassing manner. They generally lack theologising; they report Jesus referring to himself in a manner believed to be historical; and are even expected within the context in which Jesus walked. With the exception of references such as Mark 14:28, Jesus could certainly be seen as making the passion predictions without requiring supernatural knowledge.

Against historicity, to the extent that it could be demonstrated that deism or atheism is true, it would be probable that Jesus did not have supernatural knowledge. Moreover, to the extent that it could be demonstrated that the early church created the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, it would be probable that the church likewise invented the passion and resurrection predictions in order to exalt Jesus and/or promote Christianity. Finally, it is strange that Jesus' disciples act as though Jesus never made the passion predictions. These six arguments for the historicity of the passion and resurrection predictions mount a strong case in his eyes; and of the three arguments put forward for non-historicity, his opinion is that only the third carries weight – the disciples' lack of anticipation of the resurrection of Jesus. He offers a few possible explanations, choosing to put his weight behind the first – it was probably difficult for Jesus' disciples to grasp Jesus' passion and resurrection predictions, given their beliefs about what the Messiah would do in terms of setting up an earthly kingdom when he came.

As a result, he is of the opinion that the strong case for the historicity of Jesus' predictions of his passion and resurrection stands; since the only cogent argument against it can be answered without strain. He thus concludes that the historical Jesus did predict his violent and imminent death and subsequent resurrection. However, we cannot establish that he made these predictions as a result of possessing supernatural knowledge. Accordingly, even if we were to include the passion predictions in our Jesus context, their value varies according to the strength of the resurrection hypothesis – if the resurrection hypothesis is inferior to a competing hypothesis, there is little significance in Jesus' belief that he would die a martyr (at least in his investigation of the resurrection); but if the resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation for the data, supernatural knowledge on the part of Jesus becomes more plausible and religiously significant.

Licona concludes that Jesus thought of himself as an exorcist, miracle worker, and God's eschatological agent. Indeed, to him there can be little doubt that Jesus awed crowds with deeds that many interpreted as miracles and exorcisms; while others appear to have interpreted them as demonic or magical. Moreover, Jesus thought of himself as having a special relationship with God, who had chosen him to bring about his eschatological kingdom.

2.3.2 Evaluating the endeavour

These conclusions that Licona accentuates are generally also regarded by other scholars as historical bedrock upon which to build a meta-narrative of Jesus' life. But His goal is much more modest – he only seeks to establish a context in which the data related to Jesus' resurrection appears; as, if these "minimal facts" related to Jesus' opinion of (and claims about) himself are correct, they provide a fascinating context that is indeed charged with religious significance; a context in which we might expect a god to act if he/she/it chose to do so. If, in addition to this historical bedrock, we were to consider that Jesus predicted his violent and imminent death (as well as his subsequent imminent vindication by God) – claims for which he illustrates significant support (Licona

2008:206) – the context becomes super-charged. He adds that, though this neither confirms the historicity of the resurrection nor provides any evidence for it, our context is a necessary component for distinguishing a miracle from an anomaly; should the resurrection hypothesis be superior to its competitors, the contexts warrants historians to regard the event as a miracle. He does concede to the objection that this context provides an expectation for a miracle, since it is already charged with superstition; that religiously charged contexts create an expectation for miracles, and that people in these contexts will make more out of a circumstance than may actually be there. But he adds that this observation also demonstrates that naturalistic explanations such as delusion, hallucination, and legend can be quite reasonable in accounting for certain phenomena; that a context can serve multiple purposes (Licona 2008:207).

He is of the view that, 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 (Licona 2008:329). For this reason, he highlights the importance of weighing the different hypotheses, with the commitment of using only agreed upon historical bedrock (Jesus died by crucifixion; 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; within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him; Licona 2008:207-325) to serve as a safeguard against confusing urban legend with fact. These three facts that comprise our historical bedrock, pertaining to the fate of Jesus, have been arrived at through careful historical analysis and are accepted by the nearly unanimous consensus of scholars (the membership of this group is quite heterogeneous; Baxter 1999:20-21). Of these three different elements that form our historical bedrock, he assigns priority to Paul – he is the earliest known author to mention the resurrection of Jesus, and there are numerous extant texts he wrote that give us clues pertaining to the nature of Jesus' resurrection (Licona 2008:306). Paul's letters are the only verifiable reports by a verifiable eyewitness of the risen Jesus

himself (Hoover 2000:129); and he personally knew the other disciples who were also claiming that the risen Jesus had appeared to them in both individual and group settings, so he was teaching the same thing about the resurrection as were the Jerusalem apostles; thus if Paul taught the resurrection of the body, so were the Jerusalem apostles. Paul's conversion is seen as especially interesting because he was an enemy of the Church when his experience of the risen Jesus occurred. For him, this means that Jesus' resurrection is reported not only by his friends, but also by at least someone who was a vehement foe at the time of the experience. And Paul's belief that he had witnessed the risen Christ was so strong that he, like the original disciples, was willing to suffer continuously for the sake of the gospel; even to the point of martyrdom. A critic may assert that Paul's conversion is no big matter – many have converted from one set of beliefs to another – however, the cause in Paul's conversion makes his different. People usually convert to a particular religion because they have heard the message of that religion from a secondary source, and then believed this message; Paul's conversion was based on what he perceived to be a personal appearance of the risen Jesus. For Paul, his experience came from primary evidence – he had an experience he perceived to be a personal appearance of the risen Jesus. Today, we might have to believe that Jesus rose from the dead based on secondary evidence; trusting Paul and the disciples who saw the risen Jesus – for Paul his experience came from primary evidence; the experience that the risen Jesus had appeared directly to him (Licona 2008:308).

2.4 Returning to the (Jewish) root

2.4.1 Geza Vermes

Although he 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* (2000); *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" (Vermes 2008:x, xv), given the emphasis laid upon it and its centrality in the teachings of the early Church. His goals are: (1) to unravel "the true meaning" behind the New Testament's reports that Jesus had risen from the dead; and (2) to construct a "tenable hypothesis" of how early Christianity came to ascribe such "extreme importance" to Jesus' resurrection when there is a "very limited amount of interest in the subject discernable in the authentic teaching of Jesus" (Vermes 2008:x-xi).

He supports the historicity of the empty tomb and the visions/apparitions of the disciples – he argues that, if the accounts had 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" (Vermes 2008:140); moreover, they would have gotten the number of women in the various narratives correct (i.e. they would have been more uniform; Vermes 2008:140-141). Although the embarrassing testimony of women is enough to convince him that Jesus' tomb was empty, differences in the accounts decrease their value for "legal scientific inquiry. The only alternative historians are left with in their effort to make sense of the resurrection is to fall back on speculation, hopefully enlightened speculation" (Vermes 2008:141). 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; Vermes 2008:119). In terms of the nature of the apparitions, he is unclear; but appears to favour a form of disembodiment (Vermes 2008:63-67) – citing Jesus' dialogue with the Sadducees in Mark12:25/Matthew 22:30/Luke 20:34-36, and using 1 Enoch 51:4 and 2 Baruch 51:5, 10, 12 as support (being like "angels in heaven" means that the resurrected are "purely bodiless beings"), he argues that Jesus' dialogue with the Sadducees implies "that in Jesus' mind the distinction between resurrection and mere spiritual survival was minimal" (Vermes 2008:66). Later on, he 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 (Vermes 2008:147-148) – and one must wonder why, as

the arguments he previously presented appear to point precisely in that direction. So what then are historians to do with the empty tomb and the appearances? He asserts that these "convince only the already converted" and that historians may only speculate (Vermes 2008:141), since the accounts do not pass the standards of legal or scientific inquiry.

Vermes notes eight hypotheses, but only considers six, judging both blind faith and outright rejection as the "two extremes that are not susceptible to rational judgement" (Vermes 2008:141) – (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 (Vermes 2008:142-148). He 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" (Vermes 2008:148). His answer is 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; they can only speculate on the cause(s) behind "the birth and survival of Christianity" (Vermes 2008:141, 148). His thus does not propose a theory for what happened to Jesus, but takes the position that historians cannot know (i.e. agnosticism).

He proposes that the empty tomb and apparitions of the missing Jesus gave the apostles hope, although doubts did continue; but he does not specify who experienced the apparitions, or state whether any of the apostles themselves 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" (Vermes 2008:149). When they resumed their ministry of preaching the gospel in the name of Jesus, they realised that "his charisma was working again" – they felt his presence and were convinced that he truly had been raised – which

"accounts for the resurgence of the Jesus movement after the crucifixion" (Vermes 2008:150-151). But, according to him, it was Paul's turning the resurrection into the centrepiece of Christian doctrine that prompted Christianity to grow into the powerful world religion that it is today (Vermes 2008:151).

2.4.2 Eliminating extremes, or eliminating necessities?

He narrows his options by eliminating "extremes" on both ends "that are not susceptible to rational judgement, the blind faith of the fundamentalist believer and the out-of-hand rejection of the inveterate sceptic" (Vermes 2008:141). According to this classification, he accuses N T Wright's treatment of the subject as falling into the category of the former; whereas treatments offered by Strauss and Price/Lowder belong to the latter (Vermes 2008:101; 2005:153).

Now, 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. Quite the contrary, in fact, as the treatments by Wright and Price/Lowder include historical argumentation of greater sophistication than he offers in his own 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. So, irrespective of whether one accepts Wright's arguments or conclusions, one can hardly accuse him of working out of "blind faith" (as he seems to suggest). Accordingly, Vermes' writing off of Wright's work as "extreme", and his refusal to interact with it on any point, is disappointing – in this way he dismisses, without hearing any arguments, the very position that is the subject of his book (the historicity of Jesus' resurrection). Nearly the same may be said of the work of Price/Lowder – though their hypercritical approach is not necessarily responsible historiography, and should definitely be treated lightly by more sober scholarship, their work cannot simply be dismissed because it is hypercritical. Even hypercritical work can be carefully argued and therefore warrant consideration. It would thus have been better for him to propose that "its treatment here

would be a pure waste of time" (Vermes 2008:158) since the hypercritical approach is not embraced by the overwhelming majority of scholars, and not because it cannot be seen as a plausible line of argumentation.

This is not the only example of his moving perfunctorily: he opines that the empty tomb and the appearances cannot solve the question as to whether Jesus was resurrected, as they "convince only the already converted" (Vermes 2008:141); but he gives no consideration to the problem of horizons, and the fact that no-one comes to the discussion without being heavily influenced by his/her horizon – thus his *a priori* exclusion of the resurrection hypothesis 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 would have to conclude that the evidence is also meagre for the existence and execution of Jesus, since both hypercritical and Muslim historians remain unpersuaded. Another important issue is the question as to why he deems it necessary for scholars to abandon the resurrection hypothesis in, order to remain "rational" (Vermes 2008:148). When scholars supporting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (such as Wright, Habermas, and Craig; Witherington 2006:5) provide sophisticated and reasoned arguments in support of their hypothesis, 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? It is here that small traces of his worldview start to reveal themselves.

He 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 – but, although a woman's testimony failed Jewish *legal* standards in the 1st century C E, the 21st century C E historian is bound by *historical* rather than *legal* standards. Vermes also, at times, applies exegesis that is inattentive:

- He refers to the apparition of Jesus to his disciples in Luke and John as a "spirit" and "ghost" (Vermes 2008:146; see Lk 24:36-37 and Jn 20:19); but this is clearly not what the writers wanted to convey, as just two verses later Luke reports Jesus himself as saying that he is not a "spirit/ghost" (Lk 24:39-43; we find similar actions reported in Jn 20:20-27, and implied in 21:9-15).
- Then he attempts to demonstrate that Jesus thought of "resurrection" as a state similar to disembodied existence, using Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees where he refers to the sons of the next age as being "like the angels" as proof text – a proof text that he later finds as "inauthentic and probably reflects by anticipation arguments opposing the haughty Sadducees and the representatives of the apostolic Church in the latter part of the 1st century C E … the tale itself smacks of fiction", but then still wants to use because the "ideas expressed here correspond to the eschatological thought of Jesus" (Vermes 2008:65).
- He also defines the Jewish concept of resurrection as the reunification of the soul and revived corpse (Vermes 2008:xvi); but then argues that this is *not* what Jesus meant by the term, appealing to a saying about resurrection (Mk 12:25; Mt 22:30; Lk 20:34-36) that he thinks Jesus did not actually say – in order to make this argument work, he 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 deemed by himself as authentic (Mk 9:43-48; Mt 18:8-9; Vermes 2008:66-67, 70-71).

Moves like these strengthen the impression that he knows where he wants to go and hurries there somewhat carelessly. He accounts for Jesus' death by crucifixion (the event serves as a prerequisite for belief that he had risen from the dead); he likewise accounts for the appearances (the use of this term causes ambiguity to be present in abundance) in individual and group settings, but he does not attempt to account for Paul's experiences; he grants the empty tomb as historical, but *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, leaving him severely depleted on

available options as to what happened to Jesus' corpse; because of this he now redirects his efforts at discovering the cause(s) behind the birth and survival of Christianity. Therefore his theory possesses a great deal of ambiguity and vagueness (it lacks explanatory scope, explanatory power, and plausibility), it contains *ad hoc* components, and it does not provide any illumination for solving problems in other areas where unanswered questions or tensions still exist.

2.5 Crossing boundaries, rehabilitating perspectives

2.5.1 Michael Goulder

In the formation of his hypothesis Goulder appeals to the social sciences (the most popular naturalistic hypothesis during the last century; Habermas 2003:12), contending that various psychological conditions brought about the experiences of the risen Jesus in Peter, Paul, and the other disciples:

- He suggests that Peter experienced a hallucination, given "the series of blows to his self-image, the guilt, [and] the bereavement" over Jesus' death (Goulder 1996:51-52; 2000:87; 2005:193). To strengthen this hypothesis, he argues that Peter is said to have experienced a number of visions (e.g. the transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:2-7, and his trance in Acts 10:9-16) – thus he (Peter) was prone to this type of experience, making his experience of the resurrected Jesus nothing more than a hallucination to reduce the *cognitive dissonance* he experienced (Goulder 1996:48-49).
- He goes on to posit that Peter shared the news of his experience with others, who then had similar experiences in groups of various sizes (Goulder 1996:53; 2000:103) – this group experience of the disciples is granted plausibility through the existence of modern "communal delusions" (such as sightings of Mary, Big Foot, and UFO's).
- He explains Paul's conversion by proposing that Paul may have begun entertaining secret doubts pertaining to his view of Christianity; combined with a

> growing distaste of Judaism (Goulder 1996:52) – 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" – Gl 5:1; Rm 8:15); his "intense religious upbringing" as a Pharisee (Phlm 3:5) also contributed to his emotional state and he states that "we know that he was going to Damascus to persecute the Church there, and this level of intense feeling is also correlated with conversion"; all of these factors led Paul to experience a hallucination of the risen Jesus (Goulder 1996:51-52). As with Peter, the plausibility of Paul having a hallucination is bolstered by the fact that he testifies to having experienced multiple revelations in 2 Corinthians 12:7. His own "suspicion is that Paul had had a Gentile friend in his youth, and that the connection of his conversion with his call to evangelise the Gentiles has to do with some such experience" (Goulder 1996:52).

According to Goulder (2005:187-188), there were

> Two distinct traditions of understanding the resurrection in earliest Christianity…a more “spiritual” transformation (i.e. immaterial) associated with the Jerusalem church and the “bodily” resurrection associated with the Pauline churches …

He continues to say that, three to seven decades after Jesus' death, there were tensions between Church groups resulting in the speculation about what other differences may have occurred. Questions were asked, and the answer was given; but "it *must have been* like this" soon becomes "it *was* like this" – eventually it was suggested that a prominent figure buried Jesus' corpse, the tomb became empty upon his resurrection, and he appeared to his disciples, some of whom touched him (Goulder 2000:103) – though in reality Jesus' tomb contained a decomposing body.

> 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 … the Pauline, physical theory is without basis … Peter and James just had conversion visions …"
>
> Goulder 1996:58-59

2.5.2 Carefree/careless spontaneity

His work is certainly innovative, and 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 can be described as speculation, significantly lacking in evidence (thus *ad hoc*); the one making the assertion bears the burden of proof, and appealing to the *possibilities* does not warrant the conclusion that it is what happened (it is possible, therefore it *is this way*); his psychoanalysis of those living two thousand years ago is a highly problematic exercise, as "psychoanalysis is notoriously difficult even when the patient is seated in front of you, but is virtually impossible with historical figures" (Craig 2000:50). He is also often guilty of a careless use of data – as an example, he asserts that Peter experienced a hallucination at Jesus' transfiguration, but ignores the fact that Jesus, James and, John were likewise present; problematic as collective hallucinations where every member of the group simultaneously experience the same hallucination (both visual and auditory components) are extremely unlikely (if not impossible).

A similar criticism applies to his use of Peter's vision related to Cornelius. This means that he is uncritically selective in pertaining to the details he accepts; but once the historicity of the experiences as a whole are granted (he does account for the appearances), on what basis do you then grant only certain details of the reports while rejecting others? Certainly not on the basis of historicity! 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 – 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 2000:194). In explaining

Paul's hallucinatory experience by noting that he was given to having visions contains an *a priori* assumption that these other experiences were also/had to be hallucinations, rather than the real thing. Moreover, it would be easy to turn his argument on its head by asking whether his hypothesis is not the by-product of a *cognitive dissonance* he himself is experiencing, in order to be able to continue his rejection of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

He also revives an old theory pertaining to a split between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership that has long been less popular, especially as Paul himself asserted that he and the other apostles were teaching the same things pertaining to Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-11). And, not surprisingly, he 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, providing a number of arguments that the resurrection deniers Paul addresses in this text had a Jewish background (Goulder 2005:189) – this in no way supports his contention that the Jerusalem leaders were likewise resurrection deniers, especially given Paul's tenacious commitment to *tradition.*

Goulder's analogy – that the resurrection appearances of Jesus to groups were "communal delusions", of the same nature as apparitions of Mary, Big Foot, and UFO's – also fails. People who claim to have seen the aforementioned actually *saw* something that they mistook for something else; they were neither experiencing delusions, nor hallucinations. In many cases they may have been deceived, but delusions *by definition* are beliefs held in the presence of strong disconfirming evidence – believing something is real even after knowing you were tricked – and are therefore not of the same nature as what he claims pertaining to the disciples' experiences, and implausible as explanations for post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He seems to prefer *any* naturalistic explanation over one that is supernatural, because "we shall fall into superstition" if we do not (Goulder 1996:55). But this concern is an overreaction, and

has received support from only a very few scholars (Allison 2005b:129) – our commitment to taking deliberate actions for managing our horizons and applying method carefully are hindrances to a pseudo-critical investigation ruled by credulity (which can also be present in the historical work of sceptical scholars who uncritically accept poorly supported natural hypotheses that are terribly *ad hoc*).

2.6 Liberated; theology as discipline freed from the church

2.6.1 Gerd Lüdemann

Lüdemann is probably one of the most controversial New Testament scholars because he "converted" from Christianity to atheism – rejecting attempts by others to claim that Jesus' resurrection is beyond the scope of the historian's practice (Lüdemann 2004:21-22), and seeking to investigate and find an answer as to whether Jesus rose from the dead. In this way, he distinguishing 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 (e.g. Borg 2006:281); as, in his research process, he has come to the conclusion that

> Historical consideration of the origin of the New Testament makes the walls of the church and theology – insofar as they were grounded in the New Testament as Word of God, collapse like a house of cards.
>
> Lüdemann 1996b:206

So his aim is "to prove the non-historicity of the resurrection of Jesus and simultaneously to encourage Christians to change their faith accordingly" (Lüdemann 2004:7); using "the natural methodological principle" of inferring "the unknown primarily from the known", beginning with "completely clear facts and from there to argue back to what is less certain" (Lüdemann 1996a:7-8) – informing us that his atheistic worldview will be guiding his historical investigation. Such bias can be a hindrance – left

unchecked, bias will tend to cause one to see only what one wishes to see, missing data that might disconfirm tightly held views – or helpful – if atheism presents the most correct worldview, atheist scholars maintain an unequivocal advantage when seeking to discover what actually happened to Jesus; with the converse likewise being 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. Meaning that, if the Resurrection Hypothesis is strong enough to be awarded historicity, his atheistic worldview would face a most serious challenge. Nevertheless, Lüdemann (1996a:2) believes and accentuates that

> It is impossible to overlook the historical distance between every possible theology today and the primitive Christian period ... the gulf between ... history and proclamation ... makes it impossible for us to continue to offer a serious defence of the inspiration of the writings of the New Testament; or even to identify Word of God and Holy Scriptures.

For Lüdemann (1996a:3) then, the Biblical text is exactly the same as any other ancient text; thus distancing himself from both “a Word of God theology” and a *kerygmatic* theology, as well as from “the trend in scholarship which seeks to combine historical-critical work with a salvation-historical view”.

He grants all the historical bedrock (summed up by Licona 2008:326) granted by most scholars (Lüdemann 2004:78, 88, 107). 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" (Lüdemann 2004:163). His use of the social sciences brings him to the conclusion that Peter was a victim of "self-deception" (Lüdemann 2004:24); that "Peter's vision would be delusion or wishful thinking … an example of unsuccessful mourning…it abruptly cuts off the very process of mourning, substituting fantasy for unromantic reality" (Lüdemann 2004:165); that "by a bold if unconscious leap Peter

entered the world of his wishes … he 'saw' Jesus, and thus made it possible for the other disciples to 'see' Jesus as well" (Lüdemann 2004:166); and that "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" (Lüdemann 2004:174). Thus he uses phenomena affiliated with the grieving process – sensing, hearing, sometimes even seeing the deceased loved one; and the frequent appearance of "libidos", "aggressive drives", and "guilt" when a person's world is dramatically changed by death – to explain the experience the disciples had of Jesus' resurrection; that in a situation as experienced by the disciples "normal reality controls" break down, and the unconscious self "creates artificial fulfilments" (Lüdemann 2004:165). As substantiation for this line of argumentation he notes research conducted at Harvard, involving 43 widows and 19 widowers who were monitored during the first 13 months of their grieving periods. In the study

> 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 dependant relationship.
>
> Lüdemann 2004:165

He now uses this research to conclude that

> In the case of all the disciples, but especially that of Peter, we should note that all three factors that inhibit grieving apply … Jesus' death was violent, unexpected, and sudden … even the gospel accounts offer evidence that the relationship between the disciples and Jesus was coloured by a sense of guilt and profound ambivalence … the dependant 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 … further magnified by their

> status as a tiny group…withdrawing from much of the larger culture.
>
> Lüdemann 2004:165-166

In short – Peter and the other disciples were unable to cope with the loss, causing their unconscious selves to create a hallucinatory experience of the risen Jesus to ease their intense mental anguish. Jesus' appearance to the group of more than five hundred (described by Paul in 1 Cor 15:6) is understood by him as being "a kind of foundation legend of the Christian community" (Lüdemann 2004:73), and 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" (Lüdemann 2004:73-74). Rather, it derives from the event underlying Acts 2 (Lüdemann 2004:73), a "mass ecstasy" (Lüdemann 2004:81) stimulated by one (or even a few) other(s). 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 …" (Lüdemann 2004:176). According to him, Paul (like Peter) was a victim of self-deception; understanding Romans 7 as Paul's "unconscious conflict", experienced prior to his conversion (Lüdemann 2004:171), he (with Goulder) thinks that Paul had secret doubts about the Christian teachings and his Jewish faith. At the same time he was a competitive overachiever who "must always be 'number one'" (Lüdemann 2004:171). His conversion becomes nothing more than a perceived opportunity "to assume the obviously vital role of foremost apostle to the Gentiles", an "exalted position" that Paul "was eager – of course subconsciously – to assume" (Lüdemann 2004:171-172).

What then of the manner in which the resurrection was experienced to have took place? He contends that, though Paul's experience involved a visionary appearance of Jesus from heaven, his strong view of bodily resurrection prohibited him from understanding Jesus' post-mortem 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 (Lüdemann 2004:180). Almost from the beginning, however, he states that there were many Christians who did not understand resurrection as the transformation of a corpse; that interpreted the statement "God has raised Jesus from the dead" as symbolic, even though he admits that "we have no sound way to place the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection within the context of earliest Christian resurrection belief" (Lüdemann 2004:180). However, that many embraced a symbolic interpretation is certainly "true of Paul's converted Gentiles … whose inner promptings were sufficiently sophisticated to remind them that religious truths can never be understood literally" (Lüdemann 2004:178). Later on, those holding the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' resurrection grew in number (2 Tm 2:16-18 and in later Gnostic literature, e.g. *Letter to Rheginos*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and the *Gospel of Thomas* – no references are provided by Lüdemann). Lüdemann contends that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels were created later in response to challenges such as the symbolic interpretation (Lüdemann 2004:35, 109, 111), especially seeing as 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" (Lüdemann 2004:177).

A final argument offered by him concerning the fact and nature of the resurrection – belief in the resurrection, ascension, and glorious return of the Son of God were major interconnected elements in the earliest Christian beliefs; so remove one brick and everything collapses. Now, 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 … it still hasn't happened after two thousand years …" (Lüdemann 2000:62). His train of thought – if the belief in Christ's return is false (an argument bolstered by the fact that it hasn't happened yet), then so are the beliefs in Christ's resurrection and ascension; since they are all interdependent beliefs.

This means that, in effect, the "early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection" is "a history of self-deception" (Lüdemann 2004:24); that all of the appearances were subjective

experiences, "visions commonly arise from the frustrations, the hopes, and even the yearning for power on the part of both individuals and groups …" (Lüdemann 2004:49), emerging from varying psychological disorders. Thus, there is no room for regarding them as objective in nature; for saying that there was corresponding external reality – the risen Jesus existed only in the minds of those who thought they saw him;

> The original Easter faith sprang from a visionary perception … properly denominated a vision, for though seen as being alive, Jesus was and remained in fact dead … this “risen Jesus” existed only in the memory of the disciples … no more than a fancy of the mind.
>
> Lüdemann 2004:176

It is very clear that he works with a very sharp historical methodology, revealing a rationalism that excludes both the possibility of a transcendent God intervening in history, and belief in the Bible as the Word of God – it is only the words of men, and excludes any meta-physical element.

2.6.2 The presupposition plague

Lüdemann asserts that his conclusions are "solidly based on historical scholarship" and "sober insights" (2004:203, 209). But, instead, his hypothesis seems to be based *entirely* on numerous speculative conjectures (some of which are implausible), and presupposes an atheistic worldview that he fails to support. Now, like Goulder, he is very innovative in his attempts to explain the historical bedrock in natural terms; but, because his hypothesis is similar in many respects to Goulder's, it is plagued with many of the same problems: his resurrection hypothesis is based on pure speculation, and not on "any evidence whatsoever" (Wright 2003:20) – psychoanalysing persons who are not only absent, but who also lived in an ancient foreign culture, is a very difficult and highly speculative practice. This leads to Allison opining that his 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 analysing the psycho-histories of men and women long dead.
>
> Allison 2005a:242

But he appears not to recognise this – instead, his approach seems to be a methodical scepticism with "the spirit of modernity with its inability to stomach the miraculous" (Johnson 1996:34) that says: "As long as I can offer a naturalistic proposal that has an ounce of being correct, I do not need to consider the supernatural one". And this is where methodical neutrality then places him in check, as those making proposals must defend them; thus he must show that his hypothesis is superior to all other hypotheses proposed and argued for (even the supernatural ones). But his methodical scepticism does not at all demonstrate his hypothesis as superior; it rather reveals that he is being guided more by his worldview than by historical method – he appeals to a "scientific view of the world" and "natural law", claiming that these render statements about Jesus' resurrection as "nonsense" that has "irrevocably lost their meaning" (Lüdemann 1995:135; 2002:45; 2004:62) – in a sense then, his method is his worldview:

> 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 *by God*, are notions that modern social-scientific and cultural-theoretical approaches to religion simply reject as incompatible with their implicit assumptions … the underlying beliefs of the modern social sciences and humanities are metaphysically naturalist and culturally relativist … consequently contend that religion is *and can only be* a human construction.
>
> Gregory 2006:137

Therefore, is suspect of being *ad hoc*. His allowance for his worldview to guide his historical investigation unchecked raises red flags – "possible" and "probable" are not interchangeable terms; so merely stating that a resurrection is "nonsense" is an opinion, rather than an argument. He posits many psychological conditions in so many different people (friend and foe), and in different situations (within individuals and groups), and all without an much solid evidence. This gives it the appearance of being an attempt to salvage a favoured, but failing, hypothesis. Though Lüdemann is more precise than Goulder in his reference to the psychological experiences he attributes to the early Christians, it does not come without a cost – as Gilderhus (2007:106) explains, the amalgamation of psychoanalytical theory and history is psychohistory, leading "some individual practitioners" to "have inadvertently produce comic consequences". Modern psychology has not come close to confirming (or disaffirming) the possibility of collective hallucinations (Habermas 2001:30-31).

Habermas (1995:126) asserts that naturalists are "mistaken if they think that the advances of science make supernatural belief obsolete"; as science is designed to explain natural phenomena and is limited in its scope – scientific equipment such as telescopes, microscopes, and MRI's 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, with the hypothesis that best explains the effects being preferred (Licona 2008:357); remembering that responsible historians must assign greater value to the claims of the purported eyewitnesses, even if they may not believe their reports (Licona 2008:361). We have also illustrated that he is incredulous of the appearance to the more than 500, understanding the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 as underlying this appearance, seeing as to the fact that this event (witnessed by more than five hundred) left no trace outside of 1 Corinthians 15:6. But neither has the event in Acts 2 left any trace outside of this passage. So why must the Pentecost event, reported in Acts, be behind the appearance to the more than 500 reported by Paul decades earlier?

Given his form criticism approach, an argument in the other direction would have been more anticipated; an argument that Paul reported an appearance to more than five hundred at one time, but we have no narrative of this event, therefore the number must have been embellished over time and the initial Pauline report reworked by Luke into the Pentecost event where about three thousand were converted. Moreover, the smaller we postulate the size of the crowd, the possibility that the brothers of Jesus would become attracted to the phenomena (as he suggests) shrinks correspondingly. And then he must also explain why Paul believed that some of the more 500 were still alive and could be examined as witnesses (Lüdemann 2004:41) – he argues that this appearance was the result of "mass ecstasy", because Peter's experience was contagious; but what he has actually provided is an unverified speculation supported by the example of another unverified speculation pertaining to Peter. His argumentation surrounding the brothers of Jesus and their conversion also seem far from probable – 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. And if the Gospels accurately report that Jesus was chided and rejected by his brothers, who thought him at times crazy, it seems more likely that Jesus' execution as a criminal and a blasphemer would have supported their continued unbelief; rather than their conversion to a faith that they would have regarded as apostasy (Licona 2008:364). His characterisation of the appearance to Paul, interpreted as a bodily resurrection because his particular Jewish views prohibited him from thinking otherwise, 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 come yet).

That the belief in the bodily resurrection was challenged by some outside and inside of the Church (1 Cor 15:12; 2 Tm 2:16-18) there can be no doubt about, but this in no way changes the fact that the purported eyewitnesses believed that Jesus had risen bodily from the dead and had appeared to them. Paul and the Jerusalem apostles were all proclaiming that Jesus had been raised bodily and had appeared to them; 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 1st century C E) are of a single voice in their proclamation that Jesus had been raised bodily. In the end, if we understand Jesus' resurrection in terms of the revivification of his corpse, the resurrection narratives make sense; despite the tensions that exist between them (Licona 2008:360). Other serious challenges to his hypothesis presents themselves: in order to account for Paul's conversion, he postulates dissatisfaction with Judaism (reflected in Rm 7); however, the tensions Paul discusses in Romans 7 do not hint at the struggles he suggests. Also, some of the psychological conditions he proposes may certainly have been present in the disciples immediately after Jesus' death; but he makes for an inept psychologist, as the whole of the evidence should be considered prior to selecting a preferred explanation, which he never attempts. Then there is the interconnectedness of Jesus' death and resurrection throughout the New Testament, and that is built upon the relevant historical bedrock – we would have to deny Jesus' death if we were to deny his resurrection; something the nearly universal consensus of scholars, including Lüdemann, would rightly be unwilling to do (Lüdemann 2004:50).

2.7 Anthropological historiography

2.7.1 Pieter F Craffert

Craffert 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:

- Understanding the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event (Craffert 1989:334).

- Understanding the reports of Jesus' resurrection as a literary creation (Botha & Craffert 2005:20-21).

He sees four problems with the first approach – 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; Craffert 1989:334); 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 (Craffert 2002:97); in the presence of abundant parallels in antiquity and in the modern world, it is morally wrong ("… against the acceptance of supernaturalism as such …") to claim that the Christian traditions about Jesus' resurrection are historically accurate while miracle traditions in other religions are not (Craffert 2003:367; Botha & Craffert 2005:21); what one thinks about Jesus heavily depends upon what one thinks about God, and the historian must employ this worldview when adjudicating on the historicity of a miracle claim (Craffert 2003: 367; Botha & Craffert 2005:21) – theist Christian historians will thus logically tend to regard the Gospel reports as historical, while historians who are atheists will not. In regards to the second approach, Craffert and Botha (2005:20-21) ask whether an approach as offered by him (i.e. the resurrection is a parable) is equally valid to, or more plausible than, other approaches; as "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 …" when "cultural sensitivity not only invites all sorts of possibilities, but also makes some possibilities plausible – especially when considered within the setting of cultural realities". He also applies his ethical and theological objections to those in this camp – he views those scholars on the left, who write off Biblical stories "merely as mythological creations or creedal statements" as being equally disrespectful to "those people for whom the stories were part of reality" (Craffert 2003:368); and he accuses members of the New Quest of being guided by a metaphysics that *a priori* excludes the possibility of God revealing himself in Jesus, who

was a miracle-worker and who rose from the dead (Craffert 1989:342; 2002:100; 2003:366).

So he recognises that the major factor influencing conclusions in the debate over Jesus' resurrection concerns worldview; as he says:

> The real issue in historical Jesus research is not about textual evidence (or the lack of evidence) about these aspects … the real issue is philosophical in nature, or if you like, about world-views and perceptions of reality.
>
> Craffert 2003:365

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 (Botha & Craffert 2005:19). But, according to him, both of the traditional approaches just discussed have in common a lack of attention to cultural events; and in that their approaches are the same (Craffert 2003:343).

He proposes a different approach – the social scientific approach; combined 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 postmodernist 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 ... [and they] can be appreciated as such.
>
> Craffert 2003:369

This proposed historiography thus "implies the acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism" (Botha & Craffert 2005:13); not only that, this approach also "accepts that each worldview is an expression of reality and therefore, that more than one worldview or view of reality is valid" (Botha & Craffert 2005:14). For this reason, Craffert and Botha describe *cultural realities*: some things exist ontologically, but only because there is widespread agreement on the matter within human institutions; meaning that *cultural realities* cannot be captured with language that merely describes their physical and chemical makeup – one must include meanings imported by the cultural context in which they appear (Botha & Craffert 2005:16); "the most important implication following from this is that events or phenomena can be real without being 'out there'" (Botha & Craffert 2005:17).

Turning to the Gospels, Craffert and Botha assert that "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 belong to their specific cultural system"; concluding that "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*" (Botha & Craffert 2005:17). 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. So when that investigation is into the resurrection of Jesus, he contends that historians must determine what the subjects claimed (or thought had occurred) and *then* compare those with their own experience in modern culture; in this way, historians may do justice to their sources while also attempting to provide "an adequate interpretation" of the event (Craffert 1989:338, 343; 2003:369). 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" (Botha & Craffert 2005:18).

In his 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 based on the facts that were mined from the literature (Craffert 1989:337) – instead he will employ the principle of *analogy* (Craffert 1989:343); meaning that one does not stop with what the disciples believed about the experience, but interprets what occurred within the framework of their own worldview – as "ontologically subjective experiences need not be taken as evidence for ontologically objective events" (Botha & Craffert 2005:19-20) – thus opening the door to encouraging additional possibilities for describing events in the Gospels via the social scientific method (Botha & Craffert 2005:11); and ensuring the inclusion of "cross-cultural dialogue and criticism" (Botha & Craffert 2005:19-20).

When applying this social scientific approach to the resurrection of Jesus; he asserts that it rejects the claim that the early resurrection faith originated from post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and seeks "to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated" (Craffert 1989:340; 2002:90). In other words, given their first-century worldview, what did the early Christians mean when they claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead (Craffert 1989:339-340)?

Craffert (2002:98, 99-100) describes those living in the ancient Mediterranean world as people for whom "visions, dreams, apparitions, and the like" were "typical and normal" experiences, which they regarded as "literal and real"; with the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus belonging "to these phenomena". So, when the disciples saw the

body of the risen Jesus in a vision, they believed that "they were experiencing reality"; a reality that did not require a transformation of Jesus' corpse. But, since his goal is "to explain why and how the appearance narratives originated" (Craffert 1989:340; 2002:90), the portrayal of Jesus in the resurrection narratives as eating with his disciples and being touched by them presents a challenge; a challenge to which he answers that the

> Human brain does not need external stimuli in order to create physical or material visionary bodies … 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.
>
> Craffert 2002:101

So, 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 Altered State of Consciousness (ASC) experiences. This naturally complicates answering the historicity question ("Did the resurrection of Jesus actually occur?") Craffert's (Botha & Craffert 2005:18-19, bold and italics in original) 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 (e.g. 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!" Craffert (2002:97) 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"; and therefore can also be called "cross-cultural" – honouring 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.

2.7.2 A fresh new look?

Craffert provides a unique proposal, combining a postmodern element with the use of the social sciences. Drawing on the work of John Pilch (1998), he provides a fresh look at Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Important to note is that, even in critique, Philip H Wiebe (2001) acknowledges that Pilch has offered new challenges pertaining to identifying the nature of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances that are not fully resolved. Thus, we are indebted to him for his work on the subject. Nonetheless, there are a number of concerns we must address.

He is guilty of employing a "straw man" argument – he accuses traditionalists of being guilty of circular reasoning; but, 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 (circular) manner suggested by him.

His 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, 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, 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. That said; he is obviously not a radical postmodernist who denies a past, any hopes of knowing it, or the truth about the events. Consequently, his hypothesis does not suffer from all of the problems inherent to such a position. In fact, although his language is very postmodern, he is somewhat modernist in his practice; creating inconsistencies – for example he promotes the "acceptance of multiple realities and radical pluralism", asserting that "more than one worldview or view of reality is valid"

(Botha & Craffert 2005:14); but it is actually a select "radical pluralism", as it *a priori* excludes hypotheses including supernatural events (Craffert 2003:369; Botha & Craffert 2005:18-19). Thus, in practice, he does not acknowledge multiple realities, but rather multiple ways of understanding an experience. Realist historians also readily grant that much. He also claims that his proposal "radically takes seriously the insight that *reality* is a systems phenomenon" (Craffert 2003:369); bespeaking postmodern thought. To the extent that reality may be classified as a "systems phenomenon", limiting that reality to *viewer-dependent* events, we can be in agreement. However, it is not the same with *viewer-independent* events – one who creates ontological reality is divine, and when humans think they can they are deluded (Licona 2008:402).

His social scientific approach *a priori* requires a natural explanation, excluding those that are supernatural. Because historical facts are not vacuous of interpretation

> We are forced to set up hypotheses based upon assumptions and knowledge about human behaviour to interpret data … that forces us to accept that when the origins of resurrection faith are being considered, we are dealing with some kind of human construction.
>
> Craffert 1989:333

The question we may ask is *whose assumptions and knowledge* about human behaviour are we to use for interpreting the data? Must we settle for psycho-histories – said differently, for conjectures composed of compounded speculations without any direct evidence, often built upon a foundation of metaphysical naturalism? Historians should not be chained to using psychology that is stacked against the supernatural, in order to obtain purely natural conclusions in their historical work. They need to go beyond psychological conjectures and employ method carefully.

In critique of Crossan, Craffert and Botha (2005:20-21) 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?" When, in requiring a natural explanation, his approach does precisely what he and Botha chide Crossan for doing. In 2006, the theme issue of *History and Theory* focused on "religion and history". In this issue, Brad Gregory (2006:135) 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". He goes on to note that recent historians of Christianity

> Have turned to theories of religion drawn from the modern social sciences … or the humanities … 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 ...
>
> Gregory 2006:135

Meaning

> 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 … the results yield *differently* biased accounts that reflect the secular assumptions underpinning the theories.
>
> Gregory 2006:136

Gregory (2006:136-137) goes on to refer to a "*secular confessional history*" that is simply an antithesis to the old *traditional confessional history* – historians abiding by it

> Leave no room for the *reality* of the content of religious claims … consequently, spirituality … can only be approached through secular psychological categories … consequently contend(s) that religion is *and can only be* a human construction.
>
> Gregory 2006:136-137

In the end, Gregory (2006:147) writes that "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". Craffert (1989:342) refers to the principle of analogy as "one of the basic principles of all social scientific study"; which implies that *ad hoc* divine interventions in nature that produce events with special historical significance do not occur. 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 worldviews.
>
> Craffert 1989:343

Since we have already discussed a few of the more serious drawbacks to an unqualified usage of the principle of analogy, here we can only affirm his observation that *worldview plays a large part when using analogy*.

Craffert (2002:97) is concerned that historical method becomes a moot act if it is assumed that God can intervene whenever he desires, can do whatever he wants, and that some can experience authentic revelations not readily observed by others. However, openness to the historicity of an ancient miracle claim does not necessarily render one credulous and susceptible to all sorts of superstition; as 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 judgement 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.

Although Craffert and Botha propose that an Altered State of Consciousness (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 night-time and that the disciples were exhausted, sleep-deprived, and afraid 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 the water. So, while the proposal that ASC's explain the "cultural event" of Jesus' walking on the sea is one possible explanation; it is by no means required, since the incident can also be explained as a "cultural event" in different terms and employing a different judgement pertaining to the ontological reality of what occurred. In fact, a supernatural 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 (Hurtado 2005:205).

Craffert and Botha (2005:17) differentiate between hard and soft biographical data – soft biographical data pertains to descriptions of "cultural events" such as "controlling the elements, experiencing spirit possession, controlling and commanding spirits, miraculous healings, special births …", which "make sense in many traditional cultural systems and particularly in a shamanic worldview"; hard biographical data pertains to legal documents and reports of somewhat mundane events, to "the when, where, and what of a social personage … important specific events in a person's life which are observer

independent …". With this differentiation in mind, Craffert and Botha (2005:21) make the contention that "there never was any hard biographical evidence for Jesus' walking on the water", as "the only evidence is of soft biographical nature"; for this reason they postulate that "the position that it is an actual instance of a report about a supernatural event need not be seriously entertained". But, when they define Jesus' walk on the water as soft biographical data, they are actually claiming to know ahead of time that the event did not take place in space-reported time – which is metaphysics, not history.

Craffert and Botha contend that their approach does more justice to the texts than Crossan's *symbolic parable* hypothesis. But, while in agreement with them on this point; their contention (if followed through with all the miracle stories, especially Jesus' raising of the dead) transforms Jesus into an extraordinary hypnotist, magician, and imposter, who surrounded himself with thousands of amazingly gullible people. Thus, the ASC hypothesis asks too much of us – it seems easier to propose (if one wishes to be sceptical that supernatural events occurred) that the stories were urban legends that quickly developed, were redacted with theological spins, and then passed along.

Although the concept of the resurrection in the 1st century C E is debatable, the more important question concerns how the earliest Christians interpreted *resurrection*. Craffert himself (1989:338) agrees with this, and adds that historians must do justice to their sources in the process. But he contends that the concept of *resurrection* did not necessarily involve a corpse (Craffert 2002:98). Craffert, together with Botha (2005:17, 18-19), go even further – they accuse those holding that Jesus' post-resurrection bodily appearances could have been photographed of committing the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness.* We might be able to agree with him if only some appearances

to individuals had been reported, for in that case enough ambiguity is present.

The fact that there are numerous group appearances – and then not only in the resurrection narratives, but also in the *kerygma* preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 – is damaging to his proposal. Can he 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 (e.g. speaking with, eating with, walking with, and touching) with an individual who is not actually there in an ontologically objective sense? It may also be seen as quite presumptuous of him to assume that the early Christians did not think they were encountering the risen Jesus in space-time, as perhaps the earliest Christians thought about the nature of their experiences more than he imagines.

This is indeed what we find in the texts: 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 (e.g. Ac 9:12; 12:6-12; 2 Cor 12:1-4). The resurrection narratives, and Paul, are unquestionably more at home with a bodily resurrection involving a corpse than with ASC; meaning that he does not do as much justice to the texts as he imagines.

What then may be said of his two objections to understanding the resurrection appearances in a literal sense? (1) His *ethical* objection is merited if the historian *a priori* grants the relevant New Testament literature a privileged position, therefore presupposing it is correct and all the others are not or if we knew beforehand that the religious claims in all religious literatures are mistaken – the former has not been made in the present investigation, and the latter is not known. His *ethical* objection is more of an

emotional appeal than an enquiry into what may be factually true. (2) We agree with his *theological* objection in that all sides have an equal rite to present and defend their views; but granting the others the right to have, present, and defend a view is not the same as acknowledging those views as being equally valid to one's own (as Craffert and Botha, 2005:14, would have us do).

Jesus' resurrection might indeed imply or entail theism, but one need not presuppose theism in order to investigate the historical question of Jesus' resurrection – one might rather 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. Otherwise, the philosophical and theological presuppositions of historians may lead them to historical conclusions prior to an examination of the data.

Chapter 4

1 WHAT WE'VE LEARNT SO FAR

1.1 History as science: to be or not to be?

What is *history*? How is the concept defined? Is there agreement on the scope of the definition? A number of historians and philosophers define history as the easily and widely assumed "synonym for the past" – as "past events" (Tucker 2004:1); as "the events that occurred in the real past and that historians attempt to discover" (Davis 1993:24); to name but two. Yet many others provide quite differing definitions – "history is the past reconstructed interactively with the present through argued evidence in public discourse" (Crossan 1998:20); "history is an account of what people have done and said in the past, which means that various kinds of biased, pragmatic, and didactic features can be part of the writing of history" (Byrskog 2002:44); "what really happened is what the evidence obliges us to believe" (Oakeshott 1933:107); "history is a product of human intelligence and imagination, it is one of the ways in which human beings negotiate their present experience and understanding with reference to both group and individual memory" (Johnson 1996:81-82); "history refers both to an object of study and to an account of this object" (White 1987:55).

The leading objection to regarding the practice of history as a science is that, unlike scientists who have entities they can work with in the laboratory; the past is inaccessible to historians. Firm agreements and strong confirmation are also seldom available in the study of history (Gilderhus 2006:85). However, many of the sciences are faced with the same challenge – although a historian does not have direct access to the past, a scientist does not have direct access to the experiments he/she performed last year either; he/she can only refer back to his/her notes. This means that, in essence, both historians and scientists mostly have access only to entities from the past, as every manuscript is actually an artefact from the past - "an electron is no more immediately

accessible to perception than the Spanish Inquisition. Each must be inferred from actual evidence, yet neither is utterly determinable" (Zammito 2005:178);

> … the differences between what in English are known as the sciences are at least as great as the differences between these disciplines taken together and a humane discipline such as history … to search for a truly “scientific” history is to pursue a mirage.
>
> Evans 1999:62-63

Thus, the conclusions of science are not as firm as believed by those outside of the traditional disciplines of science; in fact, similar to many historians, the theory of method (i.e. philosophy of science) actually plays little part in the practices of the scientists (especially those in Quantum Physics). Because of this uncertainty associated with knowledge in general and historical knowledge in particular, a requirement of “incontrovertible” proof is both an unattainable and an unreasonable expectation. For this reason, many historians have started recognising degrees of historical confidence that may be viewed along a *spectrum of historical certainty*:

- "I use the word 'probable' in the common-sense historians' way … that is to say, as a way of indicating that the historical evidence, while comparatively rarely permitting a conclusion of 'certain', can acknowledge a scale from, say, 'extremely likely', through 'possible', 'plausible' and 'probable', to 'highly probable'" (Wright 2003:687).
- "I will content myself with such general judgements as 'very probable', 'more probable', 'less probable', 'unlikely', etc." (Meier 1991:33).
- "… almost certain (never simply 'certain'), very probable, probable, likely, possible, and so on … the judgement 'probable' is a very positive verdict" (Dunn 2003:103).
- "There should be three columns for judgements on historicity (historical, non-historical, and question mark)" (Meyer 1989:135).

- "'very probable' to 'somewhat probable' to 'somewhat improbable' to 'very improbable' to 'extremely doubtful' … beyond even 'extremely doubtful' there is a huge number of statements, limited only by the imagination, that are certainly false" (Miller, in Scott 2008:11).
- "Utterly certain, highly probable, solidly probable, probable, various shades of possibilities, genuinely indeterminate … the historian is warranted in awarding historicity when a hypothesis is solidly probable" (O'Collins 2003:36).
- "A position is demonstrated, when the reasons for accepting it 'significantly' outweigh the reasons for not accepting it … this leaves a large grey area where positions are held to be 'likely' or 'probable'" (Twelftree 1999:248).
- "'Certainly true' means beyond all reasonable doubt … the level of probability has become so high that the falsehood of the assertion is highly improbable … more often, we will be left with a choice between verdicts of 'more probable', less probable', and 'improbable'" (Wedderburn 1999:4-5).

In association with this knowledge regarding the myth of absolute certainty in reference to any type of knowledge, we should also not expect a burden of proof that requires absolute certainty before awarding historicity; only then giving historians warrant to judge their hypotheses as "plausible" – one can imagine it could have happened this way without too much of a stretch of the imagination (McCullagh 2004b:38). Though historians would definitely like to have more data, they have to work with what is available; implying that, if a hypothesis deemed "probable" distances itself (by a respectable margin) from competing hypotheses, this may serve as a compensating factor so that historians need not pause at concluding that their preferred hypothesis is historical (so long as it is also held to be provisional). From these opinions we can gather two criteria for something to be regarded as "historical":

- The hypothesis must be strongly supported and much superior to competing hypotheses.

- The reasons for accepting a hypothesis must significantly outweigh the reasons for rejecting it – in other words, the hypothesis has to outdistance competing hypotheses by a significant margin, and do a good job at explaining counter-arguments (which also illustrates the primary value of strong supporting arguments with an ability to answer counter-arguments).

Seen through these lenses, the ideal way for coming to an historical conclusion is through critical and rigorous tests of truth; a style of intellectual life that insists on rational inference; and a determination to withhold assent until it is compelled by evidence (Licona 2008:66).

1.2 Reassembling the past

Because we cannot (as yet) go back in time, the past is forever gone. That being said; remnants of this past do still exist in the form of manuscripts, artefacts, and effects (Evans 1999:217). Historians study these remnants, attempting to reassemble them, so that the resulting historical hypothesis can serve as a window through which we can peer back into the past (Zammito 1998:345). Though this window is often blurry, it usually does have some spots through which we can see more clearly; but, as a result, historians (especially those who study antiquity) prefer to speak of the *probable truth* of a theory rather than of its *absolute certainty*:

> We rake over the ashes of the past, and only with difficulty can we make out what they once were; only now and then can we stir them into a flicker of life … through the sources we use, and the methods with which we handle them we can, if we are very careful and thorough, approach a reconstruction of past reality that may be partial and provisional, and certainly will not be totally neutral, but is nevertheless true … it is an illusion to believe otherwise.
>
> Evans 1999:217

> The past as a series of events is utterly gone. Its consequences, which are very real, remain to impinge on the present, but only a retrospective analysis can make their influence apparent.
>
> Appleby, Hunt and Jacob 1994:254-255

> Historiography does not reconstruct events … historiography does attempt to provide a hypothetical description and analysis of past events as the best explanation of present evidence. This knowledge is probably true, but it is not true in an absolute sense … Therefore most of history is and always will be unknown and unknowable.
>
> Tucker 2004:258

> … Historians do not expect full accounts of the past but narratives that are partial and intelligible … an adequate accounting of the data where they get it right, even if not in an exhaustive sense.
>
> Martin 2005:143

Because of the abovementioned insights into (and understanding of) the nature of history, historians usually start with the available facts and any underlying hypotheses (there are, of course, numerous levels of both fact and hypothesis), holding them in provision, yet willing to adjust them all as they progress through their investigation and (re)interpretation of the facts and their significance. For you see, "excessive epistemology becomes cognitive cannibalism; but a little bit of it is important as a hedge against easy assumptions and arrogant certainties in any branch of knowledge" (Johnson 1996:84). This process can be described as a form of *critical realism* – as the recognition that there is a past that can be known to some extent through an honest questioning of the data in an interdependent relationship (or a hermeneutic spiral between historian and data and hypothesis and data); combined with the recognition

that the historian's questions often reach further than this identification of evidence – as his/her investigation is to understand not only *what* occurred in the past, but also *why* it occurred (i.e. the cause of the event in question; Dunn 2003:101).

1.3 Pre-programmed influences

One's hermeneutical presuppositions determine how you live – also what you embrace; what you believe about Jesus' resurrection; and, ultimately, what you believe about God (Mulder 2006:3) – for "the historical past, itself a construction based on reasoning from evidence, is ultimately a construction within the historian's 'world of ideas'" (Oakeshott 1933:107); implying that "objectivity is unattainable in history, the historian can hope for nothing more than plausibility" (Iggers 2005:145). This is due to the fact that "historians, like everyone else, are historically situated and their reconstructions of the past are inevitably informed by their various existential interests and purposes" (Anchor 1999:114). For better or for worse, we are influenced by our culture, race, nationality, gender, ethics, as well as our political, philosophical, and religious convictions; and we cannot look at any data without these biases, hopes, or inclinations – in fact, "the historian who thinks he has removed himself from his work is almost certainly mistaken" (Elton 1967:105). And, even though we may not always be too willing to admit to this when referring to ourselves and our academic work; it is just as true today as it was in antiquity that "historians, in their reconstructions of the past, do give expression to their own pre-understanding, imagination, interests, and the force of their social location" (Via 2002:5).

> ... The historical Jesus is the Jesus whom scholars reconstruct on the basis of historical methods. Scholars differ, so reconstructions differ. Furthermore, the methods that scholars use differ, so the reconstructions differ all the more. But this must be said: Most historical Jesus scholars assume that the Gospels are historically unreliable; thus, as a matter of discipline, they assess the Gospels

> to see if the evidence is sound. They do this by using methods common to all historical work but that are uniquely shaped by historical Jesus studies. The essential criterion used in most historical Jesus studies is called "double dissimilarity".
>
> McKnight 2010:2

Thus, in our examination of any phenomenon, we as scholars cannot *but* base our theory and theology on our own understanding and our own convictions (Mulder 2006:3).

Another designation for this hermeneutical process is the meaning-cluster *horizon* (Meyer 1979:97) – describing the way in which we view things as a result of our knowledge, experience, beliefs, education, cultural conditioning, preferences, presuppositions, and worldview. These *horizons*, more than anything else, are responsible for the diversity among the conflicting portraits of the past on offer today; exactly because they are so difficult to control, and because they influence the way in which we interpret facts so heavily – the stronger the commitment of the historian to his/her worldview, the lesser the likelihood that he/she will be open to accepting a historical description that is in conflict with his/her worldview (Licona 2008:31).

> To one degree or another, we all conform Jesus to our own image. Since we are pushing this point, let's not forget historical Jesus scholars, whose academic goal is to study the records, set the evidence in historical context, render judgment about the value of the evidence, and compose a portrait of "what Jesus was really like." They, too, have ended up making Jesus in their own image.
>
> McKnight 2010:1

Thus, justifying our historical description may require justifying the horizon behind it; which might leave us feeling like we're arguing in a circle, justifying our historical description by justifying the horizon behind it using facts interpreted by that horizon.

Does this mean that we have to *a priori* dismiss all reports given by historians as providing inaccurate information? No, it only means that we have to be alert when studying these reports; or, as Wright (1992:89) puts it:

> To discover that a particular writer has a 'bias' tells us nothing whatsoever about the value of the information he or she presents. It merely bids us to be aware of the bias (and of our own, for that matter), and to assess the material according to as many sources as we can.

"The fact that people have certain preferences does not mean they cannot reach true, justified conclusions about the past. Their descriptions might be biased, or unfair in some way, but they could still be true as far as they go" (McCullagh 1998:171). So even though total neutrality may never exist, it is still possible to reduce the influence of one's horizon. Granted, most historians do not obtain this level of objectivity (as some hold their horizon so tightly that they are unable to even come close); but a strong and logical argument based on solid data can become consistent with a breakthrough, as the probability for the accuracy of any argument increases with stronger supporting arguments and weaker competing hypotheses.

Here it must also be remembered that, not only is one's bias difficult to overcome, it is often difficult to recognise. But, in order for historians to begin achieving this, they should search "for evidence inconsistent with their preferred hypothesis before being willing to assert its truth" (McCullagh 2004b:33); they should force themselves to confront data and arguments that are problematic to their preferred hypotheses, in order to be able to understand and empathise fully with other (possibly) opposing horizons

(Denton 2004:99). It is only when this willingness/stance is consciously maintained throughout an investigation that a historian even come close to transcending his/her horizon (Licona 2008:38); for “imperfect self-restraint is better than none" (Gregory 2006:147).

1.3.1 Set up for failure?

Given the prominent role of the horizons of historians in every historical inquiry (as elaborated on above), we can anticipate that consensus opinions will often elude historians – due to "interpretive polarities" (Martin 1998:28).

> Historical Jesus scholars reconstruct Jesus in conscious contrast with the categories of the evangelists and the beliefs of the church ... The quest for the historical Jesus is an attempt to get behind the theology and the established faith to the Jesus who was – I must say it this way – much more like the Jesus we would like him to be.
>
> McKnight 2010:3

Moreover, many members of the audience to whom historians present their research are no less biased than the presenting historians.

> By the very nature of the subject, history tends to divide scholars and set them at odds … we no longer possess a past commonly agreed upon … we have a multiplicity of versions competing for attention … and no good way of reconciling all the differences … an apt expression of the confusions of the world, and the experiences of different people in it.
>
> Gilderhus 2006:86, 113

> One has to wonder if the driving force behind much historical Jesus scholarship is more an a priori disbelief in orthodoxy than a historian's genuine (and disinterested) interest in what really happened. The theological conclusions of those who pursue the historical Jesus simply correlate too strongly with their own theological predilections to suggest otherwise.
>
> McKnight 2010:3

Of course, no "universal consensus" should be sought in any case – a fact should not be identified *because* a strong majority of scholars grant it, it should be about *the arguments* provided by the strong majority of scholars who grant a particular fact – as there will always be those who make their abode on the fringe (Tucker 2004:33).

"A single judgement of a sober historian easily outweighs a majority vote…historical judgement must remain a matter of argument…" (Pannenberg 1998:22-23). For this reason Lorenz (1994:326) comes to the conclusion that:

> A proper philosophy of history must elucidate the fact that historians present reconstructions of a past reality on the basis of factual research, and at the same time discuss the adequacy of these reconstructions … whilst also elucidating the fact that these discussions seldom lead to a consensus … pluralism is a basic characteristic of history as discipline.

But this inability to obtain *absolute* certainty does not prohibit historians from having *adequate* certainty – carefully examined inferences are generally reliable, and it is reasonable to believe that they correctly describe what actually occurred – when his/her horizon is mature and he/she has been deliberate in serious attempts to minimise the negative impact of his/her horizon by always following the proper methodology (McCullagh 1984:ix). So, even though their theories might be discarded tomorrow as a

result of new data, this must not prohibit them from stating that their theory provisionally (and to an extent) describes the state of reality. For failure on the part of historians to know the whole truth (and nothing but the truth) does not prohibit them from having an idea of the past that is adequately relevant to a limited or more focused inquiry (Bachner 2003:411; Zammito 2004:135). "It is a convention that we all accept that sound inductive inferences regularly lead us to truths about the world, and it is a convention we take seriously, on faith" (McCullagh 1998:33); we live our lives in a manner that is based on the laws of logic – we cannot prove that logic leads us to the truth, however, following sound logic based on accurate information provides results that can serve as strong empirical support for realism (Theissen & Winter 2002:230), a realism that maintains that the accuracy of historical descriptions may be held with varying degrees of certainty (Licona 2008:58).

1.3.2 Shifting the burden of proof

Methodical scepticism is often described as the preferred method when doing historical research; exactly because it has the attractive feature of weeding out poorly supported reports, thus providing evidence that is strong. However, as we have seen, historians (like everyone else) have their own strongly held beliefs which heavily influence how much weight they assign to specific texts. Therefore, methodical scepticism can be a vice as much as it is a virtue, and could actually keep us from knowing the past – as "scholars who would consistently implement such a method when studying other ancient historical writings would find the corroborative data so insufficient that the vast majority of accepted history would have to be jettisoned" (Blomberg 2007:304). Of course various shades of methodical scepticism and credulity do exist, marked by the burden of proof required.

But between these two poles a third view becomes possible – that of methodical neutrality – where the one making the claim bears the burden of proof and has to defend his/her hypothesis against criticism; thus coinciding with the historian's practice of weighing hypotheses. The main difference between methodical scepticism and

methodical neutrality concerns the burden of proof: all historians bear the responsibility of defending their hypotheses with proof; with methodical neutrality the burden of providing an alternate theory of (at least) equal strength now shifts from the text to the sceptic – the stronger the data behind a historical interpretation, the greater the burden that is placed upon the historian holding a different position; as his/her view has to be *more plausible* in terms of fulfilling the criteria for weighing hypotheses.

2 WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE JESUS?

"Secularisation theories that suggest religious traditions are anomalies in modernity have not, in fact, provided adequate accounts of the modern world as we find it" (Cladis 2006:96).

> Another claim ... that history works *against* religion, as its other and opposite … is not as it should be. The opposition is an artefact of modernity … modernity is the obstacle of prejudice that stands not just between historians and the people of the past, but also between historians and many religious people today … religion has turned out in a variety of ways to be more important and a more clearly permanent factor in history than our paradigms had supposed … consequences of this include a need to reassess the historian's attitudes toward religious phenomena and religion's trajectory within the mass of forces we call historical …
>
> Shaw 2006:1, 3-4

2.1 Admitting the debate/argument is rigged

It has been made clear that our concept of history (whether realist or postmodern), combined with our conception of the external world (whether theist or otherwise), largely determine our conclusions (Anchor 1999:120). Accordingly, when this general premise is applied to the debate surrounding the historical Jesus and his (alleged) resurrection; it

becomes evident that those historians who believe they have experienced the supernatural will have a different pool for the interpretation of present reality than those historians who have had no such experiences (Licona 2008:24). The concrete effect of this premise is to be seen in all dimensions and aspects of the debate itself – theistic or Christian historians being accused of allowing their horizon to muddy their ability to make accurate assessments on the historical Jesus and his resurrection; with non-theist historians accused of being guilty of this same prejudice, only in the opposite direction. But, aside from providing us with a better understanding of the divide that so easily opens up between people; the full implementation of this premise implies that only the very naïve can now still try to maintain that historians of (non)religious orientation approach the question of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus without any biases (McKnight 2005:24).

In light of the above it should come as no surprise that, beginning in the twentieth century, somewhat of a proverb started circulating (and continues to circulate to this day), one that states that historical Jesus scholars end up reconstructing a Jesus that reflects their own convictions and preferences – "each successive epoch of theology found its own thoughts in Jesus … each individual created him in accordance with his own character … there is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a 'Life of Jesus'" (Schweitzer 1964:4). So much so that Crossan has gone as far as saying that "this stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, and to do autobiography and call it biography" (Crossan 1991:xxviii). Allison (2005a:135-136), whilst discussing this subject, has said that:

> We may justly suspect that many, or even most, New Testament scholars hold the view of Jesus that they do because it was instilled in them at a young age by their education … once they came to see things a certain way they found it difficult to change their minds … we all see what we expect to see and want to see

> … if we hold a belief, we will notice confirming evidence, especially if we are aware that not everyone agrees with us.

It is these biases that can lead historians to errant conclusions and may actually prohibit them from arriving at an accurate description of past events. The situation and the resulting debate is complicated even further if we keep in mind that:

> Not only are they themselves [as men/women and scholars] influenced by theological presuppositions, but [also that] readers will only accept their conclusions with regard to the historical evidence, [if and] when they match the worldview to which they [as readers] adhere.
>
> De Mey 1998:272

2.2 The real face behind the pages

When the historicity of Jesus in general, and the resurrection in particular, is the subject of inquiry; we have to now consciously take into account that the horizons of other historians/scholars (as well as my own horizon) will be in full operation throughout the entire process (Willitts 2005:72). Accordingly, it is of no surprise to find similar comments in reference to a history of Jesus and in discussions on his resurrection – "widely acknowledged but poorly understood in the traditional debate about Jesus' resurrected body is the role that worldview elements, or one's understanding of reality, plays in these questions" (Craffert 2002:95); “Belief in the resurrection of Jesus does not ultimately depend upon historical evidence, but upon the acceptance of a worldview that allows one to interpret the resurrection of Jesus as an act of God” (De Mey 1998:273); "the life of Jesus is a theme in which the notorious problem of achieving objectivity reaches its height" (Grant 1977:200); "for us no innocent reading of the resurrection message is possible" (Smit 1988:177); "finding agreement about the ground rules by which what is relatively secure can be identified is very difficult" (Sanders 1985:3);

"there must be recognition of givens and of limits; the morality of literary knowledge demands both. If we are to live these tensions, we must avoid both absolute knowledge and absolute agnosticism alike" (Vanhoozer 1998:462).

This is deemed to be so important because the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ has always been seen as the basis for the existence of the Christian faith; the non-negotiable meta-narrative which determines its confessional identity, permeating all spheres of life (Van der Watt 2005:256). In fact, for many, the question "is something like the bodily resurrection of Christ really non-negotiable?" has become the most important question any church must deal with (Mulder 2005:2). Of course, the fact that we have so precious little material from early Christians available to us, and that it is often enigmatic and quite fragmentary, only escalates the felt tension and insecurity – as it means that the little fragments of the historical Jesus we do have need to be pieced together and, like a frieze, patched up in order to fill the gaps and hold together something resembling a whole (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:1). In this context it is even less surprising, then, that interpreters draw on their own knowledge, expectations, and experiences to solve the puzzles and fill in the holes. And, because interpretation is shaped by our expectations and interests – the questions we ask have a way of ensuring that the texts we are reading can and will answer them; producing and reproducing a view of Christianity as originally and always about how one understands and responds to Jesus, which has implications for how Christians understand and respond to Jesus as well as to interreligious differences and the diversity within Christianity (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:2).

The situation/debate is even further complicated by the fact that not all historical descriptions can be held with the same degree of historical certainty, as none of the criteria frequently employed for ascertaining the historicity of a saying or deed of Jesus can be said to be reliable all of the time – they are merely guidelines which often prove helpful, but can never be applied in a wooden sense; with some hypotheses being supported by stronger evidence than others. Background knowledge is especially

difficult to agree upon when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, since it would have to provide for the relative probability that the Judeo-Christian God exists and that he would want to raise Jesus. Also, as historians, we cannot employ a statistical inference argument in our examination of the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead – if it occurred, it would be a unique event. One could perhaps use statistical inference arguments for Jesus' death by crucifixion, but not for his resurrection; there is simply not enough background evidence to draw such a conclusion based on mathematical probability, and historians do not possess this sort of knowledge.

2.3 The resurrection vote

All of the above research and discussion brings us to the (sad?) conclusion that it is highly unlikely that a consensus will ever exist pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus: for, although strong agreement may exist regarding a number of "facts" – often used as evidence to support the resurrection hypothesis – no consensus will ever exist for the conclusion that the resurrection hypothesis is an accurate description of what actually occurred (Licona 2008:42).

> At some point, historical methods run out of steam and energy. Historical Jesus studies cannot get us to the point where the Holy Spirit and the church can take us. I know that once I was blind and that I can now see. I know that historical methods did not give me sight. They can't. Faith cannot be completely based on what the historian can prove.
>
> McKnight 2010:5

What we can say with certainty, is that either Jesus rose from the dead, or he did not; and that historians holding to one of these positions are more correct than those not holding to any position.

Because of the uncertainty of historical knowledge many historical descriptions will never receive a stamp of approval from the consensus of the relevant scholars; but this should not restrain the historian, as "we should not expect that hermeneutical questions are resolvable in the sense that all will catch on and agree" (Meyer 1994:133-134) – "no historians really believe in the *absolute* truth of what they are writing, simply in its *probable* truth; which they have done their utmost to establish by following the usual rules of evidence" (Evans 1999:189).

> Genuine historical study is necessary – not to construct a "fifth gospel", but rather to understand the four we already have. History confounds not only the sceptic who says "Jesus never existed" or "Jesus couldn't have thought or said this or that", but also the shallow would-be "orthodox" Christian who, misreading the texts, marginalizes Jesus' first-century Jewish humanity.
>
> Wright 2010:1

Preferred hypotheses can thus be compared to temporary workers waiting to see whether they will one day be awarded a permanent position (Licona 2008:44) – because the premises of all historical inferences are fallible, no historian interested in antiquity can ever be epistemologically justified in having absolute certainty that an event occurred. But this is not said in order to suggest that adherents to the resurrection faith did not genuinely believe in resurrection; or that their use of the belief was necessarily conscious or intentional – only that beliefs endure because they work, because they allow you to live in the world as it is; because they highlight questions of identity and belonging (Setzer 2004a:2).

The tension that usually becomes apparent in contemporary debates over the historical Jesus is to be found between two competing definitions of Christianity (Johnson 1996:57-60):

- One in which Christianity is defined internally; generally unified around a set of control beliefs; and authenticated by claims to ultimacy.
- The other defining Christianity externally as just one version of religiosity among multiple possibilities.

Naturally, scholars on both sides of the debate analogise between ancient and modern Christianity; the result in both cases being to render one's own understanding of ideal Christianity as inherently true (either rationally or metaphysically), of course over and against the mythic "other" (whether this other be the world's religions [e.g. Johnson 1996] or orthodox Christianity [e.g. Mack 1993]). But, if we argue that Christianity was (and is) diverse, then the question no longer has to do with which one of the diverse meanings of Christianity is the earliest or most accurate; but rather: "which one is both textually persuasive and ethically preferable for thinking about Christian identity in a diverse world" (Johnson-DeBaufre 2005:42)?

2.3.1 Methodological approaches

There is thus no easy approach to the resurrection of Jesus, illustrated by the variety of methodologies and stances presented to us in contemporary writings on this theme (Osborne 1997:14). Yet method is still extremely important, not only on the issue of understanding the resurrection, but in all issues of theological endeavour – conclusions are most often the result of the use or non-use of methodology (Osborne 1997:14). Current methodologies on the resurrection of Jesus are (inspired by Klappert's schematisation; in Osborne 1997:15):

- The *historical* question – what actually happened?
- The *soteriological* question – how are we saved?
- The *eschatological* question – in what do we hope?
- The *kerygmatic* question – what do we preach?
- The *anthropological* question – who is a person of Christian faith?

Keeping in mind both the fluid/fleeting (?) nature of research, and the pace with which new ideas are promulgated; I think it safe to say that Klappert would have never meant for these various aspects that he identified to be seen as the only/exhaustive approaches to the resurrection – and indeed, other aspects (and therefore also other questions) might be added to his list (Osborne 1997:20):

- The *pneumatological* question – what is the role of the Spirit in the resurrection?
- The *ecclesiological* question – how is the Christian community an Easter community?
- The *sacramental* question – in what way is the risen Lord the primordial sacrament?
- The *cosmological* question – how is the resurrection of Jesus the ecological point of our universe?

Though the Kantian overtones of these questions are evident, perhaps the key word here should be multi-dimensionality – clearly, the resurrection is not only a complex issue, but a multi-dimensional complex issue; therefore the resurrection of Jesus, theologically considered, cannot be approached from a single standpoint; rather, it must be approached from a number of vantage points – helping believers to go beyond the historical data and to ask more profound theological questions about the resurrection of Jesus (Osborne 1997:16). Indeed, it is precisely the obsession with a single-lens approach that could ultimately make the resurrection of Jesus a non-credible doctrine.

2.4 Miraculous possibility?

> Among many academics … the belief that miracles are impossible in principle seems natural, normal, obvious, undeniable … the conviction has an aura of neutrality and objectivity, as if dogmatic metaphysical naturalism were somehow not as much a personal conviction as is dogmatic religion; as if the rejection of the very

> possibility of transcendent reality were the default position … this yields a secular confessional history [which] goes unrecognised to the extent that such metaphysical beliefs are widely but wrongly considered to be undeniable truths.
>
> Gregory 2006:138, 146

A position whose pervasive nature and strength becomes ever clearer when we consider that:

> Even some contemporary Biblical scholars assume that miracles must be left out of account if we are going to do "scholarly" work like the "other critical historians". This is a carry-over from the anti-supernatural bias of many Enlightenment historians, but it seems a very odd presupposition today. Our postmodern world is experiencing a newfound openness to miracles, magic, the supernatural, the spiritual, or whatever you want to call it.
>
> Witherington 2006:5

Moreover, there are signs from the community of professional historians that the epistemological Ice Age of anti-supernaturalism appears to be coming to an end (Licona 2008:133). Those who refuse historians the right to investigate it, or who *a priori* exclude miracles as a possible answer, could actually be placing themselves in a position where they cannot appraise history accurately as

> He … finds himself in a situation which does not allow him … to come to grips with history, for he cannot know whether or not the possibility he dutifully omits to consider offers the best account of a given constellation of data.
>
> Meyer 1979:102

So, can historians embark on historical investigations when the subject is a miracle-claim? The answer is a conditional yes; it is possible – if and when the following conditions are met:

- We have to form criteria for the identification of a miracle, without at the same time opening the floodgates of credulity (Licona 2008:106) – thus we must give attention to epistemology and to the justification of our methods.
- We must be prepared to defend our worldview (McCullagh 1984:1).
- We must place a check on how far we can go in our examination of miracle claims, since a description of "resurrection" carries more than the claim that a corpse was revivified – it is theologically charged to the extent that some of its components cannot be verified (Meier 1994:513-514).
- The criteria and method we employ must likewise be applicable to miracle claims in non-Christians religions (Ehrman 2008:242).

3 THE END/THE BEGINNING

In closing, it has been shown that modern objections to the idea of the resurrection often argue in this way because they associate God with the alpha point – creation; but disconnect him from the omega point – the messianic end-time. If the language of miracle is retained at all, it is retained as a description of that alpha point – which implies that the miracle is that the inviolable laws of nature came into existence. If the idea of the omega point is respected, it is reformulated as a product – as human beings following moral laws and so ushering in a perfect world (Levenson 2006:23). Thus a basis for faith that has been stripped of any traditional Christian foundational meta-narrative; moving beyond a faith based on the “mysteriously inscrutable” evidence in the New Testament to an individualised existentialism (Wedderburn 1999:214) – building faith on their understanding of the historical Jesus, and on the idea that “human beings exist first, and then define themselves in terms of action” (Schrift 2006:32).

But this is not surprising; as starting with an *a priori* position which excludes any supernatural intervention in history, makes the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus a fairy tale before the exegesis even starts. This could be because an existential faith in Jesus does not need him to do any miracles, or to be bodily raised from the dead. What is important is that you have a spiritual experience; which is personal and doesn't need a rational explanation (e.g. Bennett 2001:125) – thus making faith a completely subjective, internal experience – emphasising the vast difference between modern thought's greater concern with the individual (Levenson 2006:14); and the ancient belief that God's promises to a person can be fully realised through community; through his descendants even after his own death.

A collective understanding of faith rubs against the grain of our characteristically (but not uniquely modern) attitude – that God's promise to *me* may not be fulfilled in *my* own lifetime, but only in that of my descendants or other kinfolk, seems unjust today in ways that (for the most part) it did not in Biblical times. But, however much it may offend the materialist orientation of much modern thought, the doctrine of personal immortality at least allows for the relative detachment of the individual from a group in ways with which many moderns feel more comfortable (and more comforted).

Keeping the above in mind, I am actually in agreement with Kohler's (1918:296-297) identification of the central dichotomy operating here as one between a God whose greatness lies in "interruptions of the natural order of life"; and one whose "unchangeable will" has ordained "the immutable laws of nature". Each God is, of course, supernatural; for only one who transcends nature can ordain its "immutable laws". The key difference, rather, is that the supernatural activity of the God of Kohler (1918:195-196) is restricted to the primordial past and will not be repeated in any eschatological future (or even in an active intervention into history). In his ordaining of the laws of nature; and in his creation for human beings an immortal spirit that survives death; the God of Israel exhausted his supernatural mission and is now encountered exclusively in the quiet, lawful continuities of nature and ethics (and the hidden

providential guidance of human events – especially as and when they manifest progress).

So God's supernatural character is not denied, it is simply relegated to a vanished past; the vitalities that characterised this past will not reoccur, for they do not need to – the laws God has devised are so perfect that he will never violate them; even though they lead only and inexorably do the death of the embodied persons. This view of life arises out of an enormously optimistic position; a position where the world as it stands is not seen as in need of a dramatic intervention from above or beyond, because it is already proceeding according to "the unchangeable will of an all-wise, all-ruling God"; a position where the belief that history is not characterised by irreconcilable tension, conflict, and inexplicable loss (in a word, by tragedy) rules – instead, with enough good will and adherence to the self-evident laws of the "all-wise, all-ruling God", human beings can build the messianic kingdom on earth. What's more is that this position/belief is far from defunct today; in fact, it is eminently characteristic of the liberal theology of our time!

In this way the more traditional understandings of redemption – that of God's reparative, restorative, and triumphant intervention into the tragedy of fleshly, historical life – have been replaced by an ethical striving/waging of a battle of individual persons overcoming evil in a world in which the potencies of God's goodness are (happily) already actualised. So, having no power of its own, evil is in fact but a privation of the good, and human recognition of God's will is all that is needed to eliminate it. When redemption is collapsed into ethics in this way human beings, in one sense, take the place of God (Levenson 2006:17).

3.1 A new quest?

In this study I have aimed to begin the process of answering the following questions: What interests and frameworks inform the questions we ask and the way in which we interpret our sources? How does scholarship echo (and even participate in)

contemporary public discourses about Christian identity? For these first steps; for me to begin exploring the possibilities (if any) for enriching our study of the New Testament by seeing differently and by asking new questions; I decided to use the very ancient current debacle surrounding the resurrection – an area so overexposed and overworked, and yet (hopefully) so full of unseen potential.

What has developed has been infinitely more than I had hoped for – the up to now underemphasised importance of; no, urgent need for; us as scholars to be self-reflective and critical of the hypotheses we spin and the theses we propound (Nickelsburg 2006:14); the recognition that the beginning of wisdom in such an endeavour lies in avoiding literalism, in order to confront both the formidable challenges of linguistic translation, and the even more difficult cultural translation (Levenson 2006:37); for

> This isn't about an "uninterpreted" Jesus. Jesus' contemporaries perceived him within a network of narrative, symbol, and hope, and their stories about him reflect that. To say that "we can't go behind that faith perspective" so that "the past is hard to recover" capitulates to a reductive modernist epistemology ... [for] t is when we put Jesus in his proper historical context that the Resurrection proposes that he was the Messiah, that the Messiah is Lord of the world, and that he died and was raised for me. History is challenging, but also reassuring.
>
> Wright 2010:1

We must therefore also acknowledge that, even with such clear methodology and its careful execution, our work will not be the last word – a cause for celebration about the future of the discipline (Nickelsburg 2006:14).

For our further identification and exploration of these new areas, O'Connor (1998:322-337) provides a helpful summary of three postmodern shifts in the field of Biblical scholarship, each of which presents an epistemological challenge:

- The important role of the interpreter in interpretation - "it is by now a cliché among academics to observe that no interpretation is 'objective' or context-free" (O'Connor 1998:322-337); what you see depends on where you stand.

> History cannot compel faith. But it is very good at clearing away the smoke screens behind which unfaith often hides. History and faith are, respectively, the left and right feet of Christianity. Modernism hops, now on this foot (skeptical "historiography"), now on that (unhistorical "faith"). It's tiring, dangerous, and unnecessary.
>
> Wright 2010:2

- A growing awareness of the way in which our texts are polysemous; with texts no longer appearing "as straightforward representations of past history", but rather as "negotiations and renegotiations of symbolic systems and prior interpretations, designed to address the concrete circumstances of a particular community, but always saying more than they intend".
- A rejection of the notion that texts are windows into the reality of the past (often referred to as the "linguistic" or "rhetorical" turn in Biblical studies) – it is now understood that texts are political discourses that attempt to persuade their audiences to accept their construction of reality "embedded in the political, economic, social, and religious worlds that produced them", rather than records of things as they really were (just as all interpretations serve the interests of their producers).

Once again, it is important to note that these are not methodical steps in a linear progression, they are mutually interacting practices that draw on (and shape) each other. But it does mean that, through the use of these practices, we will not be lulled into thinking that we engage a text apart from contemporary rhetorical trends; thus raising new possibilities for the way in which we historically reconstruct the Jesus movement (and its relationship to other groups within Israel); allowing us to enter into the public debate about Jesus and eschatology in a way that takes the ethical possibilities and consequences of our reconstructions of Christian origins and identity seriously. Because McGrath (2002:26) says it so strikingly, it is with his words that I both end, and begin anew: ‘fragmentary and broken though human words may be, they nevertheless possess a capacity to function as the medium through which God is able to disclose himself, and bring about a transformation encounter of the risen Christ and the believer’.

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Summary

Why has the resurrection once again become the centre point of a new storm brewing in both popular and academic culture? Because of the combination of a realisation of death, and of human beings' need to interpret its (death's) mysteries; a question innate to the human experience. In a fear-filled world where war, terrorism, and economic collapse bring the question of death (and the afterlife) to the fore, people are asking – perhaps more than ever – what happens after we die. This popular fascination with the end, with death, and with what (if anything) lies beyond it, has also influenced the theme and the direction of academic work in the theological field.

For this reason an informed analysis of the resurrection debate has become necessary – a process of analysing the different strata of understanding as it relates to current resurrection research. Any consideration given to gender or power, birth or burial, money or food is made in an effort to situate the debates being studied.
Could a reason for these still varied conclusions on the subject be that those writing on it are not equipped for the task of analysing and interpreting history and historical method? In order to be able to begin answering this question, one of this study's main objectives is to learn and apply the approach of historians – outside of the community of Biblical scholars – to the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead; thus providing interaction with philosophers of history related to hermeneutical and methodological considerations. The method proposed here is a combination of *historiography* and an *ethics of understanding*, with the use of *Correspondence theory* (in which history is described as knowable, and some hypotheses as truer than others in a correspondence sense).

This study wants to address both the different questions and analyses of the debate by asking: What if we see things differently? What if we were to ask a different set of questions? In order for this to be possible, we need to develop an *ethics of interpretation* – instead of asking the expected questions, this study aims to ask: What

interests and frameworks inform the questions we ask and the way in which we interpret our sources? How does scholarship echo (and even participate in) contemporary public discourses about Christian identity? These questions will be attended to through three intersecting practices – *critical reflexivity*, complemented by the use of the two related practices of *textual re-reading* and *public debate*. However, these are not methodical steps in a linear progression, they are mutually interacting practices that draw on each other; raising new possibilities for the way in which we historically reconstruct the Jesus movement, allowing us to enter into the public debate about Jesus and eschatology in a way that takes the ethical possibilities and consequences of our reconstructions of Christian origins and identity seriously. For, though fragmentary and broken human words may be, they nevertheless possess a capacity to function as the medium through which God is able to disclose himself.

Keywords

Resurrection
Jesus
History
Historiography
Development
Critical reflexivity
Textual re-reading
Public debate
Ancient resurrection beliefs
Modern resurrection debate
Exponents of modern resurrection debate
Gary Habermas
William Craig
Tom Wright
Alexander Wedderburn
James Dunn
John Dominic
The Jesus Seminar
Michael Licona
Geza Vermes
Michael Goulder
Gerd Lüdemann
Pieter Craffert