

Email debate
The Resurrection

(8/4/06)

PL

Greetings

I do not recall your first name, but I enjoyed some dialogue with you back in the early part of the year with respect to the same sex marriage issue. I oppose the measure and we went back and forth a little, touching on some theological issues. Anyway, I was wondering if I could engage you again for more academic purposes.

I am about halfway through a Master's program in Christian Apologetics, through Biola University in Los Angeles. This is a Christian University, also featuring the largest Graduate program in Philosophy in the world. The program is done mostly on line, I have fulfilled the residency portion on campus over these past two summers.

I am taking a course "In Defense of the Resurrection" (of Jesus Christ). As part of the course program, I would like to enter into a respectful email dialog with a non-Christian friend, coworker, etc. that is skeptical of the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. In other words, an email dialog with another Christian will not suffice. We would have at least a few exchanges, and those would be submitted to the Phd. directing the program. I will receive a grade for the effort.

I believe that Christianity is intellectually robust and philosophically satisfying, that it is actually true. Would you be interested in such an exchange? I get the sense that you are not Christian, i.e. not a follower of Jesus. Have I understood correctly? I do not mean that as insult, only that your worldview does not seem to comport with classic orthodox (small o!) Christianity.

Thanks for thinking about it! Our exchange in the past was respectful and I thought that you were offering arguments, hence my willingness to solicit your disagreement on this issue, if applicable!

Regards
Patrick

Skeptic

Well yes, if referencing a heretic will add cache to your thesis' references (-); and yes, of course, I remember your well-reasoned position.

I come, however, from a curious corner to be arguing such matters, especially in relation to Christianity that I have not accepted in any exclusive way. Christianity does not allow partial

Christians to claim to be Christians. The Abrahamic religions are in that sense very exclusive, are they not? And I don't like that about them. I think that's why I find the Abrahamic religions dangerous. They are absolutist, exclusivist, and their leaders tend to demand that their adherents remain obedient children, students, whatever. I encouraged my children and my students to challenge history, to challenge the dead, and to challenge me.

Graves explicated the Greeks for me, however idiosyncratically, to give me a 'feel' for their culture and from whence they had come (and how they looked at that). Rather suddenly, the Greek plays I'd read in college made a kind of sense that they hadn't when I'd read them or seen them produced. I began at least to comprehend the genius, not merely the glory that was Greece. Graves was crazy, but that in no way mitigates his grasp of the Greeks and Hellenism generally. All genius is mad, I suppose. I did not become a matritheist, as he was; that, I think, was indeed his madness (-).

In the Greek system, if one can call it that, all the goddesses are all one (or descend therefrom): the goddess, the mother goddess, the mater, the material goddess, matter, natura, from which cometh natural law (or that which we perceive is natural). That is the fons et origo of man.

The Greek myths (not the fanciful and sentimental fables, Narcissus or that sort of tripe, but the myths arising from actual events -- such as demonstrated by the great tragedians) chronicle a revolt against this status quo naturae or, if one will, this status quo maternarum. It is a masculine revolt equivalent, say, to puberty. The gods, therefore, were once men who became heroes and, thence, gods.

The turning point in this war of the sexes is when Hestia retired from Olympus, the oldest goddess, and her place was taken by Dionysus. Sounds innocuous enough, but suddenly -- for the first time in Greek culture -- Olympus was composed of 6 goddesses and 6 gods. I would hold that is as critical a moment in western history as when Moses stood on Sinai -- perhaps more so.

Arnold explicated both in *Culture and Anarchy*, and to my mind clearly differentiated the two not-very-complimentary systems brilliantly but in a nervous, Victorian way fearful of the even-then-declining monopoly which Hebraism had held over Hellenism since the Christians destroyed the Roman Empire (well, of course I had read Gibbon and of course I had read Nietzsche on Paul's plot to destroy the Empire that had destroyed the temple).

When my younger son turned out to be gay, I was nothing but relieved that I had taken the course I had -- or I would have lost him.

Today I'm a bit more balanced. We become conservative as age, less willing to take risks, and moreover convinced that age and experience command respect (:o). Hebraism, you see, is

characterized in Arnold as parental, commanding and demanding obedience, faith, and the maintenance of Hebraic values (which I dub morals to distinguish them from Hellenic ethics).

There are Hebraic morals with which I cannot live. The Levite code, for example, is to me primitive, inhuman, and thoroughly childish. It makes God look like the stepmother from hell -- and, indeed, much of the Levite code is quite obviously borrowed from the laws of Ishtar (who is no friend of mine). The 'paternalization' of these matritheistic mores (barely moral as they are) under the patriarchs has never been very convincing to me. It's as if the Scribes of Ezra attempted a transsexualization but only managed a transvestism.

Now Jesus as a character type in a Greek or Hellenic play would be Heraklean -- a hero, a sacrificed hero, and, therefore, a sacred king. As you have probably read in the literature, there is a lot of evidence for supposing that Jesus himself knew this -- that there are 12 marital labors (displayed in the Zodiac) which one must accomplish before one gets to the sacred queen -- who will thence sacrifice him, as was done to Herakles by his wife in a poisoned cloak.

Since Gilgamesh, whom Jesus greatly resembles in my thinking, all these sacred kings (i.e., heroes who become kings who become gods), must be betrayed, must die or appear to die or experience a kind of nonlethal death, then must be resurrected, and then must reign briefly before disappearing as ever-quieter advisors of man (Orpheus being the prime example of that syndrome!). In this sense, Jesus is a failed sacred king. He was not supposed to die. Jesus did not think that he was going die.

I hold more or less to the Passover Plot in which Jesus really thought that he would be removed from the cross before the sundown which would bring upon the Sabbath. He says so. The glych came not when Jesus was crucified but when he was murdered on the cross. Had Jesus survived as I think his genius would have expected, I think that the resurrection, whatever that might have affected, would have occurred. But he did not survive. He died. The religion of Jesus, what little we know of it, died with him.

The Pauline church is to my mind a completely concocted Jewish sect with which I will truck. It seems to me (and I would agree with Nietzsche if I thought Paul was so smart), that the Pauline church was a watered-down Judaism with emphasis on exactly the codes of the Levites which I find most immoral -- the reduction of women, the persecution of homosexuals, the hatred of foreign states, all the ugliness that characterizes the Levites as snobs.

Now, did Jesus die for our sins? What sins? Those committed against the Levite code? I don't recognize any of those sins that needs forgiveness. I am Hellenic. I compose my own file of morals, and it changes. But the idea of accepting the Levite Code as any absolute utter anathema to my sense of what is moral and what is immoral. And I think Jesus was struggling with the very same difficulty.

Strip Christianity of its Levite code, its Pauline bigotry -- and I have no problem with Jesus; but there are innumerable sacred kings to advise us, and good reason, therefore, not to bother Jesus with every little problem in life that we have. That's our job, that's not god's job.

Now that you know where I'm coming from, more or less (-o), what minutiae of Christian epistemology can I offer that would improve your (already good) behavior for your parent-teacher? Do you seek in the Hebraic manner to obey him -- or in the Hellenic manner to challenge him?

8/9/06

PL

Wow! Where to begin?!?

First of all - thank you; particularly for responding with a blend of personal reflection and intellectual engagement. Portions of your thought are consistent with others that I have read (eg. Pauline theology as inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus, astrology as basis and or stepping stone for Hellenistic and Hebraic theology and its derivatives, and perceptions of cultural phenomena that perpetuate any numbers of "isms").

Much of what I have come to accept as true, I have done via the philosophic enterprise (though at various points in my sojourn I would not have known I was doing the same); and review of contrasting belief systems as a foil against which to compare the evidences, claims and comprehensive theology of Christianity.

You have compassed about a number of arguable points with respect to the development of mono and polytheism, and of course "matriarchal goddess" theologies. There is enough in your initial response that if it were our mutual pleasure, we could together pen a significant volume of debate. That is a little weightier than my present intention, and surely more demanding than the earth's annual orbit around the sun will presently allow! If I understand you correctly, you teach or have taught, have a family and no doubt a busy intellectual and communal life.

But if you are willing to, I would like to pursue my present course with you. I already anticipate some of your rejoinders, and yet I suspect that you will counter with claims that I have not yet been served, and so if what I believe to be true is actually true, if my epistemology corresponds to reality, then I can only benefit from the banter, and you too I bet! As a runner I have benefited from the challenges (and aches and pains) of increasing mileage and incline. I think my pnuema and brain matter can rise to the occasion.

To that end, I will inscript you as my interlocutor. I will present certain claims to you concerning the resurrection. I will employ the disciplines of history, likely some textual criticism, and perhaps as the exchange ensues, Old Testament Jewish expectations of resurrection generally speaking. If I have understood you correctly, you acknowledge that a) Jesus is an actual person of history, b) Jesus was indeed crucified and died as result, and c) Jesus

remained dead and is indeed presently skeletal remains only in some place unknown to archeology and contemporary scholarship. Hope that does not sound too irreverent. I tend towards technicolor terminology and explication! That wierds some people out!

As to timing, I plan to have the dialogue completed by the end of Sept- Oct. I do not expect daily engagement, but probably once a week or perhaps a little more. I am rather busy, as are you. I will not ask you to make any unreasonable sacrifice of time and energy. I also need to present papers on four other subjects before December, and write occasionally for a local newspaper, and serve on a local governmental board - and do family!

So, will you have at it sir? And may I address you by your first name? (Which is?)

I live in Massachusetts, am 43 years old, married 16 years and have children 14, 12 and 10. (Boy-girl-boy). I worship with a group of people that come from a number of religious traditions that center on the main tenets of Christianity, though our specific tradition is in keeping with what is known as

"Reformation" theology.

Thank you again for your initial response. I hope that we may enjoy the intellectual and spiritual challenge together.

Patrick

Skeptic

Patrick,

a) Jesus is an actual person of history,

I cannot concur. The collateral evidence for the existence of the man Jesus as described in the CT is insufficient to make any definitive determination. That being a given, or a not given in this case, I do

not seriously question M, M, L, or J as to an actual character of that name who taught more or less just what is given by them by the disciples.

More pertinently, I would indeed question Paul, for I have no evidence whatsoever that he encountered this man after the man's death; rather, I tend to doubt -- no, actually, to disbelieve him. There is something about Paul that I do not like, not merely his take on women and homosexuals but something about his manipulativeness in his letters that repels me. Yes, I find a great deal inconsistent between the words of given to us of Jesus and Pauline interpretations. I think several are quite gross discrepancies are quite obvious. I find Jesus compelling; I find Paul repulsive.

b) Jesus was indeed crucified and died as result,

Again, there is no collateral evidence, but yet again I have neither evidence nor reason to refute what seem to me to be reasonable claims in the CT that this occurred. But what is probable is not evidenced.

c) Jesus remained dead and is indeed presently skeletal remains only in some place unknown to archeology and contemporary scholarship.

Yet again, I must plead ignorance, and yet again I must say that your a and b not being seriously doubted by me, that biologically one would expect that a corpse survived, that a corpse decayed, and that it is possible (in such a climate) that the remains might indeed be found -- a spectacular archaeological moment providing that they are identifiable. But note that I do not hold that Jesus rose from the dead in any incorruptible bodily form (per infra).

Explication for c: I would never have taken the phrase "rose from the dead" to refer to a bodily 'resurrection'. This is a common phrase in the sacred-king syndrome, even amongst the Orphics and the Eleusians, and only referred to the 'shade' or 'karma' of the person. His 'soul', I presume. So no, I do not think that the CT commands anybody to believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead in the sense that it was his actual body or even the body of his commentary! The Greek allows either interpretation. I hold that Jesus was in that sense very much a 'sacred king'.

Do I believe that all the prepuces in reliquaries in Europe belonged to Jesus? I don't think so (-:). I saw two such in one day! There would not be in any event anything sacred about the bones of Jesus. They are just bones.

If only Jesus and Socrates had learnt the patience and discipline of writing !!!

Astrology. Just to correct your otherwise ample premise a bit, I certainly do not consider astrology any 'basis' or 'stepping stone' of Hellenistic or Hebraic theology. The 12 marriage labors represented in the zodiac are merely a semiotic reflection -- a means of telling 'history' around the campfire which, necessarily, was done at night.

I don't hold as the Magi did (who seem to have been astrologers) that the stars foretold of Christ's birth or that, because I am a triple Virgo, I am a neatnik. Quite the contrary! My excuse at the office for having the messiest of 20,000 desks was, a neat desk = a disorderly mind (-:). Everything about the Greek playwrights suggests that the Greek religion, from which their drama derived, was of actual origin, and the plays psychodramatize actual, i.e., more-or-less worldly, events.

Philosophy is of Greek, Hellenic origin, not Hebraic or Christian origin, and inevitably will pose difficulties rationalizing that which is of divine, emotional, or irrational origin. Not all human belief can be rationalized, as I think Aquinas discovered when he failed to rationalize the

beliefs, let alone the actions, of the Church (i.e., Roman Catholicism). In any event, try analyzing Greek mythology with Hebrew mythology! It is a very difficult and ultimately hopeless task unless, of course, one is looking at Hebraic myth through the spectrum of the overthrow of matritheism and sacred-king sacrifice.

Comparative Religion. Just as comparative language study expands one's English, so too does comparing religion advance one's knowledge of one's own. Just consider Sir Bannister Fletcher: A History of Architecture by the Comparative Method (umpteen editions).

Me? Widowed, 2 sons (both vets), 2 grandsons (16, 14, both pretty savvy -- as in savage ;-) but good building blocks for the nation). I have been a docent for many years in military history with a speciality in homophilic science and military history, but I have never lowered myself to becoming a slave of the military-education complex (-:o). My especial personal interest is UnNatural Selection. Summer off the coast, winter in the US VI.

8/11/06

PL

Thanks for the response. I will be addressing some of the specifics as well as presenting, bit by bit, my positive argument for the physical resurrection of Jesus, as well as attempting to address your specific rejoinders, rebuttals etc. If I do not respond to something specifically with respect to the resurrection discussion, please take me to task for it. I want very much to understand what you acknowledge to be true (I recall that from a previous response you differentiated between belief and knowledge. For our purposes, would you endorse an epistemology of "justified true belief" about things? In other words, the two are not always disconnected?

Initially though, you have abbreviated with "CT". Is this for Christian Testament, i.e. that which is more commonly referred to as NT or New Testament?

Thanks

Pat

Skeptic

I use IHI notation rather than the Chicago one. CT = Christian testament, JT = Jewish testament. BCE rendered in bold 0000, otherwise CE or AD or whatever it's politically corrected to these days.

Justified belief, certainly. Justified true belief? That implies a presumption, which is a bit redundant! Are you, I hope, referring to a belief in something which is proven to be true, i.e., demonstrated by the Baconian or scientific method to be a fact?

Let me set as an example 'the expanding universe theory' of Eddington at Cambridge. He demonstrated to the scientific minds who comprehend the proofs of such things that the universe is expanding, indeed expanding at an accelerating rate. It is a demonstrated fact,

indeed one upon which all cosmological data must accommodate to facilitate factuality and demonstrate demonstrable truth. It is, in short, a demonstrable truth.

I can't comprehend the truth of the accelerating expansion of the universe, but it is accepted by scientists who have demonstrated it and cannot disprove it. Therefore I am obliged to believe it because I am obliged to believe those who (supposedly (-)) know what they're doing. That I would call a justified true belief, but it is only from my perspective. The cosmologists know that the universe is expanding and that the expansion is accelerating despite my own preference for its being an apparent but deceptive expansion ... into nowhere and forever.

Otherwise, I have no means at my disposal to prove them wrong and they have applied the means of determining this to other matters to demonstrate that the method is within the 'laws of nature'.

In that framework, I can comprehend the phrase justified true belief, but I caution that belief does not require demonstrated fact -- merely a faith that the scientific method has been properly applied.

Sky Dey

8/16/06

PL

Sky

You wrote that Nazareth did not exist at the time of the New Testament, at least when Jesus was around. However, archeologist Werner Keller writes, , "Old Nazareth has left many traces behind. It lay further up the hill than the modern village...Yet old-time Nazareth was not wholly out of touch with the busy world...The Roman military road from the north...passed Nazareth on its way"

This is not critical to the issue at hand, except that if certain claims are historically contradicted by others, it seems necessary to interact with them. Similarly, it does seem that at times there may have more than one town in Israel with the same name or very similar. There were two Bethlehems, for instance. So indeed, Jesus could have been from the Nazareth of NT history. Write to you again soon! Thanks.

Pat :-)

Brief break in the action. What follows is the specific argument and rebuttals, etc.

10/02/06

PL

Hi Dey,

Nearly all scholars (conservative, critical, liberal and conservative) in this area of historical inquiry agree to the following “minimal facts”.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. The disciples had experiences that they were convinced were actual appearances of Jesus.
3. The disciples were entirely transformed as result of that conviction, from frightened and disappointed followers, to bold witnesses of Jesus death, burial and resurrection – even to the point of death.
4. The apostles immediately began to proclaim Jesus’ resurrection.
5. James, the brother of Jesus and himself a skeptic, became a Christian as result of the experience he believed was an appearance of Jesus, his own brother, after his death,
6. Saul (Paul), who persecuted Christians unto death, became a follower of Jesus based on what he believed to be an appearance of Jesus.

I want to clarify a point you offered earlier in our discussion.

You responded to my assertion that Jesus rose from the dead thus:

“I would never have taken the phrase “rose from the dead” to refer to a bodily ‘resurrection’. This is a common phrase in the sacred-king syndrome, even amongst the Orphics and the Eleusians, and only referred to the ‘shade’ or ‘karma’ of the person. His ‘soul’, I presume. So no, I do not think that the CT commands anybody to believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead in the sense that it was his actual body or even the body of his commentary! The Greek allows either interpretation. I hold that Jesus was in that sense very much a ‘sacred king’.”

Jesus expected to die physically and rise again physically. He said in Joh 2:18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

Joh 2:19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Joh 2:20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

Joh 2:21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Joh 2:22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

And of course the gospels record Jesus eating and drinking with the disciples after his death. Some women hugged Jesus, and Jesus invited one apostle to probe his wounds, insisting that he was “flesh and bone” and not spirit.

Also, it is widely agreed to that 1 Co.r 15: 3-5 repeats a very early creed regarding the resurrection – within perhaps two years of the crucifixion.

Finally, you have mentioned myth a few times, especially sacred king myth. To my knowledge, none of these precede Jesus. In fact, many likely try to emulate the apostolic proclamation in

some respects. And, nothing in the proclamation or record of Jesus is typical of any mythic drama.

What, if not a bodily resurrection, do you believe witnesses were attesting to? What do you think accounts for the six historically agreed to facts listed above?

Thanks
Pat

Skeptic

Pat:

Sorry for the delay, but I was abroad and entangled in trivial matters passing, should I say posing for events of greater moment.

a. I have a problem accepting your first three words! "Nearly all scholars" (in this area of historical inquiry agree ...). First, religion is not subject to nor historically much supportive of democratic determinations; majority opinion is a fact, but it does not determine facts however "minimal". Second, a majority of the scholars whom you do not identify are, I suspect, not disinterested third parties as I would require to make a determination on the merits of your case but are, "in fact", partisans, believers.

Evangelical Christians studying at Theological Seminaries which require a credal statement as a condition of employment, are ipso facto not scholars. Knowledge does not require belief, however much believers purport that to believe is to know. Belief does not require knowledge.

In point of fact, the one of the most-important Bible researchers of the 20th century was the midrashic scholar Warren Johansson, and he made rather a point of the fact that there were no facts in the matter of Jesus. For a small percentage of scholars in the field, indeed, Christianity is largely a study in mythography and the 'resurrection' a possible hoax.

b. (1) Jesus died by crucifixion. The existence of Jesus is not a "fact"; it is hearsay. His existence has no independent, 3rd-party confirmation. This is not a scientific requirement. We aren't looking for a blood, urine, and DNA sample. This is a logistical requirement, required by science but by the rules of logic. The closest we have come to 'factualizing' Jesus to my knowledge is the recently discovered Gospel of Judas (so-called) which, after nearly 2000 years, suggests (but only suggests) that others knew and met this man. Did he exist? Was he crucified? I have no doubts, but it is not a fact.

c. (2) The disciples had experiences that they were convinced were actual appearances of Jesus. I presume that you are referring to postmortem appearances. My question is, who was the coroner? Where is his report? Was he, considering that it sometimes took days for a man to suffocate in crucifixion, in fact dead? We have no evidence. I am informed that "entirely

transformed" is a special-interest term; it is projective, though one cannot deny that there was belief, doubt, and reaffirmation amongst some in the Bible. I have trouble, however, with Saul/Paul. His manipulations of Christian congregations, indeed his original waffling on capital punishment, leaves him an ambiguous figure in my own mind; it seems a most-disingenuous person to me.

d. (3) "The disciples were entirely transformed as result of that conviction, from frightened and disappointed followers, to bold witnesses of Jesus death, burial and resurrection – even to the point of death." I presume that you are referring to the witnesses' deaths, but I repeat: We have several 'interested parties' with 'vested interests' suggesting to us that Jesus was, in fact, dead. And again we have no corroborative evidence. That most Catholic and Evangelical scholars concur your point does not constitute any proof of the contention. Liberal (Unitarian, Congregational, etc.) and Critical (atheist, agnostic, nonchristian, etc.) scholars have divergent opinions on this point to render it moot.

e. (4) The apostles immediately began to proclaim Jesus' resurrection. I don't doubt it, but we have no corroborative evidence that it was 'immediate'. Indeed, as one correspondent reminds me, half a century (vide: Acts) is "a long time in which to convince yourself of something you really want to believe; and a long time also for a body to decompose." That summarizes my own opinion closely.

f. (5) James, the brother of Jesus and himself a skeptic, became a Christian as result of the experience he believed was an appearance of Jesus, his own brother, after his death. So it is said, but so it is said by Saul/Paul who had a serious vested interest here and, if I remember rightly, a competitive vested interest. You know the joke: borrowing from Saul to pay Paul.

e. (6) Saul (Paul), who persecuted Christians unto death, became a follower of Jesus based on what he believed to be an appearance of Jesus. So Saul/Paul said.

f. You have offered arguments against my claim that Jesus was a Sacred King by quoting Biblical passages which confirm my claim, e.g.: Joh 2:18 in which Jesus himself makes the claim, 2:19, 2:20, 2:22 (0090-1020?), all of which define the expectations of a Sacred King, from Orpheus to Bel to Lugh to Jesus. Did Jesus believe that he would fulfill the Sacred King requirements? Or, as suggested in The Passover Plot, did he stage it? I'd be curious to know.

g. Also, it is widely agreed to that 1 Cor. 15: 3-5 repeats a very early creed regarding the resurrection – within perhaps two years of the crucifixion. Again, the Jewish Testament is imbued with Sacred-King references.

h. "Finally, you have mentioned myth a few times, especially sacred king myth. To my knowledge, none of these precede Jesus. In fact, many likely try to emulate the apostolic proclamation in some respects. And, nothing in the proclamation or record of Jesus is typical of any mythic drama." Perhaps you are not cognizant of what Sacred King scholars study. Jesus is,

in fact, one of innumerable Sacred Kings in mythology. Indeed, most Sacred King myths precede Jesus (i.e., the early Christian era), and Christian Sacred Kingship itself displaced Pagan Sacred Kingship throughout Europe and the Mideast. To comprehend Sacred Kingship, I think one begins with Frazer, et al., and goes on to Robert Graves, i.e., *The White Goddess*, *The Greek Myths*, *The Hebrew Goddess*, and other works in this field.

i. "What, if not a bodily resurrection, do you believe witnesses were attesting to? What do you think accounts for the six historically agreed to facts listed above?" It is a great stretch to suggest that "all scholars" or even most scholars agree upon the "facts" you have offered for the fact that you have not offered "facts" but, rather, hearsay evidence. I'm not questioning the hearsay evidence; what I am questioning is the means by which you have turned them into "facts".

j. One of my correspondents makes the important that: "The gospels radically disagree with each other in their resurrection accounts. Mark — in the probable order of Q (0050-0070), Mark (0060-0075), Matthew (0070-0080), Luke (0080-0100), John (0090-0110) has been considered the earliest input and thus gets a slightly heavier reading than the others, as being closer to the source, does not have one, the 2 included in Mark being later additions. Matthew has just two appearances, one to the women at the tomb, and one weeks after the resurrection, in Galilee. Luke has 5 appearances, all on Easter Sunday and all near Jerusalem; but the same author has Jesus appearing to them over a period of 40 days in Acts. John has 4 appearances, to the women at the grave, to the disciples in Jerusalem, and again to the disciples (this time with Thomas) in Jerusalem, and finally in Galilee. The last, however, was likely added by somebody other than the original author of John. None of these matches Paul's canonical list in 1 Cor. 15 — to which one must add that it is unclear whether John's 'appearances' have the creedal rank of Paul's. Furthermore, Matthew and Luke are now thought by some scholars to be from the Gospel labeled Q (now dated at 0050-0070), though it is said (again by another correspondent, that "a third of Biblical scholars dispute the standard order, or previous existence of Q". Such confusion even of known Christian documents, leads one not to conclusions but to tabling.

Conclusion:

It is difficult for me, with Greek, to comprehend much of the origins of the Christian testament as I have no Hebrew — without which Christianity can make little sense to me, not in the Greek in any event. As Johansson said, then I am useless. But I shall say this in my defense, I should prefer to be incompetent in Aramaic and Hebrew than to be without Greek, in which the most-important surviving texts of antiquity are written.

What I do know is that Saul/Paul's Greek is inexcusably bad; and I say inexcusable because this founder of the Pauline church spend time in Greece where the texts could have been rendered properly, i.e., carefully and with peripheral attention paid to the ambiguities inevitably arising in any translation. Instead, we have hearsay research on Paul's part, confusing texts, a seeming confusion on his part as to whether Jesus is a messiah (i.e., that predicted for the Jews in the

Jewish testament compiled by the Scribes of Ezra) or a sacred king (i.e., as was expected and oft-received previously by the Pagans).

As a reader of and admirer of the Greeks, I am compelled to approach all matters critically. No good classical scholar is oppressed by any obligation to believe anything whatsoever. He is trained to minimize belief in his bearing, indeed in his very being. Despite the valiant but ultimately dishonest attempt of Aquinas to rationalize Christian belief and papal authority in Summa, no Abrahamic religion known to me survives critical analysis by the adductive-deductive scientific method intact. That determined fact does not disprove any of these Abrahamic religions; but it does put them in doubt and, indeed, in increasing dubiety. Now, nobody expects genius from simple impressed with Jesus's resurrection of Lazrus or superstitious Jamaicans believing in the resurrection of zombies in Jamaica, but I would expect more-critical thinking from Saul/Paul whose raising of so many guilty souls sank so many innocent bodies in sin. I would have expected from him a more-critical approach to the history to which he himself claimed to be party. Instead, we get left-over Jewish superstition, a fustigated tirade against enemies (what friends did the Jews actually have?), and a convoluted polemic on circumcision!

My problem with Christianity is not the 'truth' of eucharist or the 'specifics' or 'mechanics' of resurrection but, rather, its waste of time in spiritual levitation, the supposition that belief can effect preservation, that prayer can divert deities, or that sex is sacred or, for that matter, profane. None of it is demonstrable because none of it is replicable. What Jesus himself is said to have said, and I would have been more comforted with his own handwritten manuscript registered with the Præfect, I have little problem with. It's what's been made of this supposed resurrection that disturbs me, and what further would be made of it were it to survive critical analysis — which presently it does not.

10/23

PL

Hi Dey,

Thanks for your response. Hope your travels were great. You ought to see the New England foliage right now – amazing! To your points:

- a. There are a number of "scholars" (self identified) that fall somewhere on the spectrum between ultra conservative, ultra liberal, and those that engage in higher criticism, so called. Dr. Gary Habermas, perhaps one of the leading evangelical exponents of resurrection arguments, has read everything written in the last twenty-five years in this area. The Jesus Seminar (especially John Dominic Crossan and recently deceased Robert Funk) represent that stripe which denies a physical resurrection and argues that many parts of the New Testament are not reliable. Gerd Ludemann and Bart Ehrman constantly debate (as they deny the resurrection and to varying degrees the supernatural) the resurrection with Christians and have written a number of books on the subject. I recently read Ludemann's "The Resurrection of Christ, an Historical Inquiry. You may read my review at Amazon.com if you would like (<http://www.amazon.com/Resurrection-Christ-Historical->

[Inquiry/dp/1591022452/sr=1-5/qid=1160856314/ref=sr_1_5/002-8774356-8408858?ie=UTF8&s=books](https://www.inquirymagazine.com/inquiry/dp/1591022452/sr=1-5/qid=1160856314/ref=sr_1_5/002-8774356-8408858?ie=UTF8&s=books))

Craig Blomberg is a conservative NT scholar who argues on the reliability of the texts, physical resurrection etc. Many of these lines of difference are drawn in the sand of supernatural vs. anti-supernaturalism. Also, religion seems no guiltier than any other enterprise of supporting democratic determinations. Your requirement that a disinterested party should be given deference to a fair examination seems far too strident. The presence of bias may indeed be fairly charged, but that is not sufficient to controvert that person's claim. It must be demonstrated that the person's bias has prejudiced his examination of the evidence. That would require someone, who is "interested" in proving that person's prejudice to be a determinant in reaching their conclusion, which by your standards would seem to make the inquisitor unreliable. One must prove that the "bias flies in the face of some other reality". (Greg Koukl)

I agree that knowledge is not required for belief. But surely, a person may well believe that they "know" a particular thing. Also, knowledge does not require belief, but knowing does. For how can one know something without believing it to be so?

Warren Johansson may indeed assert that there are no facts. Two responses: based on your criteria above he is not a disinterested person. I have no issue with that, but wonder why you find him a worthy source given your earlier pronouncement. Second, it appears from your mention, that he considers none of the extant evidence for the life of Jesus to be fact. And while it is also true that majority opinions do not determine facts, they do merit serious consideration and the findings based on the evidence ought to be measured as to the explanatory force they present. It is noteworthy that so very few consider Jesus a myth and a hoax. Those theories are falling out of scholarly repute for good reasons – they do not account for the evidence. I would also mention ancient "historians" that refer to Jesus Christ, including Josephus, Tallus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and others.

- b. Refer again to those other writers just mentioned. And again, why do we need independent third party confirmation? Must we require more of the study of Jesus than we do other writings of antiquity? If the extant texts, even in some minimal way agree as to the veracity of the claims, why is that not sufficient? And as you mentioned, the gospel of Judas speaks of Jesus, as does the so-called gospel of Peter – indeed many of the Gnostic gospels. In what way do the Greek writers that you speak of enjoy the kind of third party attestation that you press for? How do the rules of logic demand a third party confirmation? Does archeological evidence count?
- c. We do not need a coroner. All we need is people who saw Jesus die. The roman soldiers were experts at death, and while crucifixion could indeed take days, it would not take days if a person was brutally scourged (many died from scourging alone) and then crucified, stuck with a spear and suffered broken legs. Now Jesus died before the leg breaking was necessary. We have plenty of evidence! Gospel writers claimed to see Jesus alive and in perfect (better so actually) three days later. Jesus was also buried in wrappings with near a hundred pounds of spices. Nothing in the extant evidence contradicts that Jesus died by

crucifixion. I am aware of no reasonable explanation as to how Jesus survived the event, are you?

There was not simply a belief, a doubt and a reaffirmation. The resurrection accounts for the origin of the disciples' belief that Jesus rose from the dead! There was no expectation of an immediate resurrection – only of one at the end of the age. How does any plea of special interest interfere with the reality that seeing a dead person alive would have a profound impact?

With respect to Paul and his status as a most disingenuous person, there is no evidence to support that. There is however, biblical evidence to support that Paul met with the other apostles on at least two occasions to affirm that the message he taught about the resurrection was accurate. Also, 1 Cor 15:3-5 represents what the full range of scholars and even skeptics insist is a very early creedal statement, perhaps within two years of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

- d. Once again, contrary opinions do not render a claim moot, or the contrarians would suffer the same fate, i.e. their contrary claims would be mute because others held contrary opinions to their contrary opinion! (Yikes!) Neither do the vested interests of the parties as you have said and I believe I have refuted in "a." above. Please offer an opinion by any scholar that Jesus did not die of crucifixion. Also please offer any consensus opinion that succeeds against the apostles claims from the first century. There are none, or at least none that we possess. One must account for the evidence. And we need no further corroborative evidence that we demand of any other writing of antiquity.
- e. As noted above, 1 Cor. 15 records what was very early tradition. Furthermore, that Acts was recorded "half a century later" is no defeater itself against that history which is being recorded and that took place half a century earlier. Luke is well respected as an historian. And Acts makes claims that are not refuted by other evidence that we have from historians. For example, Paul met with Festus and Agrippa. Paul was put to death around 62 AD. This is only thirty years after Christ, and it would seem bizarre that Acts, if written any later, would not record the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

No amount of time seems sufficient to convince yourself of something like the resurrection of a dead man, does it? Even to the point of dying for that proclamation? Why would it take half a century in the event of a miracle? No, the transformation would be instant, especially since the resurrection has a specific context – one that proves God's actions among man and intervention in their affairs, not to mention that Jesus, as he claimed, fulfilled all of the scriptures. God's raising him from the dead vindicated everything that Jesus said.

Since the claim that Jesus died and rose from the dead was very early, we have no reason to expect a decomposed body anywhere. The burial place was known and could have been refuted by those with a "vested interest" in silencing the apostles and stopping the movement.

- f. I am unsure as to what vested interest you are referring to that Paul had with respect to James. Paul gladly submitted to James eldership and recognized him as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Paul considered himself to be the apostle to the Gentiles – no problem there. Also, Luke wrote Acts and quite often accompanied Paul.
- g. (Note – in your email, you repeated the letter “e” here). It is confirmed in the NT and not refuted elsewhere that Paul persecuted Christians unto death. That point is not in contention that I know of. And yes, Paul did claim to see Jesus and spend time with Him, and Luke records miracles performed through Paul with theological context – Jesus! And of course, Paul was beheaded in Nero’s administration for proclaiming Jesus as Lord and the gospel.
- h. (Second “f” in your email). Jesus claimed to be more than a “sacred king.” He claimed to be God to the exclusion of all other Gods. Have others made that claim? Have others been raised from the dead so as to vindicate that claim. Does any claim of resurrection of any other person enjoy the kind of multiple, independent attestation that the NT does with respect to Jesus? Does any fulfill previous prophecy in the way that Jesus did in his life, death and resurrection? Does any claim to? No. The sacred king claims to which you refer are vastly different in essence, structure, content and meaning. Comparing Jesus to these others because they may share some characteristics in some peripheral way is indeed apples to oranges. You referenced John 2. (What is 0090-1020?) If that is reference to date of authorship, I would mention that Mark (agreeably, the earliest gospel) alludes to this in 14:58.
- i. (Your second g.) The point remains that people were proclaiming the resurrection early and that it was codified in creeds within 2-5 years of the event.
- j. (Second H). Again, nothing in the extant data looks anything like myth. I am not familiar with Sacred King writings, but neither does that change the status of the evidence in the NT and that which is widely acknowledged to be historical reliable. I am concerned with the best explanation of the evidence.
- k. (I) What I am arguing for is that these six points meet the same degree of historical validity as that which we demand of other writings from ancient history. And as I wrote above this is across the full spectrum scholarly representation. Unless you embrace a strictly empiricist epistemology, (which I will argue is self refuting) that which you call “hearsay” is by and large, an account of first hand eyewitnesses, or those associated with those witnesses. I agree that there are differences in those types of evidence. I am not offering any DNA. The NT writers made factual claims. The enemies of Christ gave no refutation. The changed lives of the apostles speaks clearly to an experience that either was a miracle, or they saw appearances that are best explained by a naturalistic hypothesis that they mistook for a miracle. No naturalist hypothesis to date adequately explains that evidence, and given the overwhelming evidence for a theistic universe, miracles indeed are fair game.
- l. (J) I appreciate your thorough approach, which includes gospel dating and claims of “radical disagreement”. Of the former, the Book of Acts ends with Paul’s imprisonment awaiting trial, indeed much of the latter part of Acts focuses here. It is entirely reasonable to accept that the book was written around 62 AD. just before Paul’s death. Luke writes

nothing of the death of Paul and as I mentioned the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Also, it is obvious from internal evidence that Acts was a sequel (so to speak of the book of Luke, who authored both Luke and Acts.). Therefore, Luke was written before Acts. Furthermore, most agree that Mark preceded Luke and was used by Luke as a source. Mark was possibly using Q (if it exists) as a source, as well as received oral traditions, which could also be verified and which were very early. Very likely then, Mark was written in the late fifties, but of events that took place in the life of Jesus. I think that these argue for the earlier dates over and against the later dates as you have summarized. Though I concede that there is no unanimity on this subject.

As to the latter charge of the resurrection accounts being in radical disagreement, I do not see how that conclusion has sufficient force. While indeed the accounts "differ" in various respects, nowhere do we find contradiction (AKA radical disagreement). And I agree that Mark, for whatever reason does not have a full resurrection account in the earliest manuscripts.

But each gospel (in its place) has women and disciples at the tomb, and each has an empty tomb, and the other three record appearances by Jesus. Each has appearances and pronouncements by angels. The feature of them all is a resurrected Christ and all that entails as explicated above. And of course, Paul, whom I acknowledge, has not your trust. And yet I might mention that you have invested significant passion against this fellow whom you have no more evidence for the "facts" (by your standard) of his ministry than you do anything else in the NT. Bit I might be confusing two things there.

Craig Blomberg writes, "As long as hostile witnesses to the life of Christ and the formation of the church were still living, such a rebuttal [of the claims] was always possible. But there is no record anywhere that anyone ever made such a charge."

Finally with respect to dates, even 50 or 60 years from an event is not remarkable and does not typically allow legend to accrue over and against local tradition. Earlier sources surely could be reliable and were continued in the gospels. Alexander the great is a nice contrast here. We have no writings about his life until several hundred years after his death. But those authors depended on earlier unknown witnesses and are considered trustworthy, though not flawless. This does not lead to confusion, at least over the major points as I have laid them out. There is uncertainty in a number of areas as to timing and varying emphasis by the writers, but this does not amount to confusion.

Conclusion:

We could argue whether or not the Pauline church was in total keeping with the church Jesus is head over. Of course, I would argue from scripture that Paul taught many things Jesus did, especially with respect to salvation, justice, caring for the poor and needy, and reaching the gentiles. And above all, he taught of the resurrection – even we disagree on

these other things. Paul knew Jesus as the resurrected God man, in spite of queries concerning sacred kings, and the messiah expected by Ezrain scribes.

By the way, I do not believe that the adductive-deductive scientific method is verifiable by its own standard. That is, the adductive-deductive method does not get us to science as the sole arbiter of historic inquiry. Perhaps I have misunderstood you.

I truly appreciate your candor and your passion to be critical. That is a slowly sinking ship in our day. However, I need not overcome your other objections to Christianity or so called Christian conduct. I am only pressing for a good alternate explanation – one that has more force than the resurrection hypothesis, and that for the reasons I have just summarized. You do not have the actual writings of early Greeks, yet you find them entirely reliable and trustworthy. I for one am quite glad we do not have the actual handwriting of Jesus – imagine what organized (so called) religion would do with that given their history!

I think that the resurrection does clearly survive critical analysis. Critics have analyzed it for centuries and it has withstood counter claims by many a philosopher and critic. I think these have provided a good foil against which to refine thinking and arrive at trustworthy conclusions.

I do not think that Paul ever thought 2,000 years would pass without the Lord's Second Advent. His letters to the churches were instructional, doctrinal and pastoral. Keep in mind also that Paul was not merely repeating hearsay, he claims to have experiences of the risen Jesus Christ and to have been taught directly by him. He stopped killing Christians and died as a Christian. I think we can adduce-deduce from this that something profound happened. Even your remarks about his "convoluted polemic on circumcision" do not capture all that he taught, including the more weighty matter of spiritual circumcision that he addresses in his epistle to Roman believers.

The claims with respect to the six points (I know you resist fact) deserve serious critical inquiry. They are not difficult. The claims are indeed remarkable, but I am concerned with the likelihood of their trustworthiness. And something must account for these multiple lines of evidence. You have offered rejoinders that address certain aspects, but your objections do not bear the critical weight to render the claims superfluous, or to better explain the textual evidence and personal transformations and sacrifices that mark the history of the Christian church proper.

Thanks friend,

Pat

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