

Regarding the Resurrection and Miracles. (These are reflections on two books, both listed in the essay.)

The Risen Jesus & Future Hope, and *In Defense of Miracles* afford intellectually and theologically robust arguments for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and for God's action in history. Among the important topics studied, the "minimal facts" approach, some practical implications of the resurrection and a variety of defeaters against naturalism stand out as particularly satisfying both in devotional and apologetic content. And this seems most beneficial for the Christian apologist, as proclaiming and defending the gospel proceed most joyously in proportion to the rich confidence one possesses in Christ, "in whom all the fullness of the godhead dwells in bodily form." (Col. 1:19)

The "minimal facts" approach to deciding the historicity of the resurrection is one of removing what can be some rather laborious burdens. Our modern to postmodern culture does not too quickly embrace propositional truth. Hence elucidating the inspiration of scripture or "thus saith the Lord" demands prohibitive time for the apologist engaging the contemporary skeptic. Far worse is the prospect of compassing about the many claims of contradiction and confusion pressed into service against scripture. Neither does one become entangled in Gnostics gospel and Davinci Code speculations by use of this very practical method. Habermas interacts with a list of twelve facts "accepted as historical by virtually all scholars who

research this area, regardless of the many differences in their thought" (*Risen Jesus*, p. 9). Given our widely endorsed twenty-first century pluralism, this offers the pleasant aroma of "tolerance", as a number of groups contrary on some critical issues, here accede to a core set "facts" that demand a best explanation. Agreement on these most salient points can be disarming and brings focus to the discussion, which may otherwise drift aimlessly. Habermas adds to the simplicity of the method when he "view[s] the case for resurrection when the historical evidence is arbitrarily reduced to this bare-bones level" (p. 27). The six facts (bare bones) he arbitrarily chooses are indeed sufficient to insist upon the resurrection of Jesus.

While scholars are united in their acknowledgement of these minimal facts, best explanations of the same in no way enjoy the same unanimity. Habermas' chapter, *A Theistic Universe*, further explores the implications of rationality and design as relates to the resurrection. "As such, the resurrection most likely would be an orderly act of God, performed for the purpose of bringing about a specific goal. It would not be a random event, but would be characterized by order, design and purpose". (*Risen Jesus*, p. 63) Hallucination theories and any number of naturalist theories end up either entirely *ad hoc*, or are predicated on theories that fail to cohere in the absence of a theistic structure that makes space for rationality, and detection and recognition of design. Therefore, while hallucination theory deals with the disciples' experience at one level, the mind created non-physical event that such theories propose cannot explain why those hallucinations should have any meaning

at all given the epistemology that fails to obtain in a naturalist paradigm. For without rationality and purpose, why should there be any connections of one thing to another? No, this represents order and precision and these cannot be situated in naturalistic theories. The collection of essays in *Defense of Miracles* more thoroughly explicates this truth.

Hume insisted that supernatural and miraculous claims are “observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; ...or that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors.” (*DOM* p. 36) Of course this retort simply dismisses out of hand any evidence to the contrary. This is the fruit of Hume’s naturalist bias, which thoroughly prejudices his examination of such claims and evidences of supernatural or miraculous activity. It is also characteristic of skeptics to forget that those who report events that are miraculous recognize those events to be spectacular! Now if the supernatural was reported in such a way that it did not seem remarkable to the ones reporting, one might be more sympathetic to the skeptic’s complaint. For in that case, the charge may be rightly levied that the ignorant and barbarous cannot differentiate between the natural and supposed supernatural. People living two thousand years ago may well have been in a pre-scientific age, but neither was a science class necessary to conclude that turning water into wine was tremendous.

Other essayists in this book render Hume’s argument superfluous and self-refuting. Winfried Courdan reminds, “while it may always be possible to come up

with a way of justifying any explanation, the attempt to do so may torture our capacities for credulity beyond what is reasonable". (*DOM* p.109) We may adjudicate between rival explanations of observable phenomena with deference to that which bears the greatest explanatory force. Why rule the supernatural out of order when theism is well evidenced in the universe? Would that David Hume were alive today to respond to W. David Beck who wrote, "The crucial thing about DNA is that it has to exist before there are intelligent creatures, and yet it has the character of encoded information which can only be produced by an intelligence". (*DOM* p.157) Ronald Nash engages a similar line of argumentation. Summarizing C.S. Lewis, he wrote, "metaphysical naturalism excludes the possible existence of anything beyond nature...but the process of reasoning *requires* something that exceeds the bounds of nature, namely, the laws of logical inference" (p.127). He makes the additional excellent point that our sense organs and perceptions are of things that have nothing to with themselves –they are conduits of information external to themselves. Therefore they aid us in finding out "truth" about other things, which of course has no meaning or grounding in naturalism.

The resurrection of Jesus is breath taking in part as it demonstrates God's satisfaction with the atoning, sacrificial death of His only begotten son. Yet there is an additional host of "practical issues" of the resurrection that Habermas commends. He writes, "Nothing changes the basic fact that dying is something that we all must do by ourselves" (p. 174). Fear of death need not seize the redeemed,

rather one may often contemplate that event with the full assurance that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”. By contemplating the reality of the resurrection and eternal life, we “apply psychological assurance to factual data.” (p. 174).

Jesus made profound and controversial claims throughout the course of his earthly ministry. He also gave “exceeding great and precious promises”. Is he believable? Is He trustworthy? That God raised Jesus from the dead is the surest grounds upon which we may build glad confidence in all that Jesus said and did. For the Jews practiced divinely ordained remediation of false prophets – death by stoning. And God also demonstrated his most convincing vindication of His true prophet Jesus – by rolling away the stone! I have shared this meditation with a few brethren recently, and the meditation of it has been equally sweet to them. In all circumstances - sickness, temptation, loneliness, grief and a daily host of others, the words of Jesus (and the entire bible by extension) fix our hope. The risen Jesus is our daily portion, our future hope, and our best thought by day or by night.

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