A Resurrection Debate

The New Testament Evidence in Evangelical and in Critical Perspective

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1 Introduction

In 1987 the New York firm Harper and Row published, as a book entitled *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, the record of a 1985 debate between Professors Antony Flew and Gary Habermas at Liberty University (Lynchburg, Virginia), an institution known also as the Baptist College of the American evangelist Jerry Falwell. Habermas teaches theology there; Flew is Emeritus Professor of philosophy at Reading University and known particularly well as an authority on the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume. The book includes a discussion following the debate where Habermas is backed by two Christians as committed as himself--David Beck and the editor of the book, Terry L. Miethe. Of a panel of five philosophers, appointed to judge the content of the debate, four declared Habermas the winner and the fifth voted for a draw. A second panel of five professional judges of debates adjudicated on the argumentation technique of the two contestants and voted three to two in favour of Habermas.

The book also prints comments on the debate by a religious philosopher--Charles Hartshorne--and two theologians--Wolfhart Pannenberg and James I. Packer, who is described as 'one of the best-known evangelical theologians of our time' (p. xv). Habermas, as the acknowledged winner of the debate, concludes the book with a
response to their comments.

A debate, where the speakers--after their initial prepared statements--have to rely on what comes to mind on the spur of the moment, is not a good way of discussing complicated issues. The desire to score points leads almost inevitably to muddle. For instance, Flew, referring (p. 12) to Paul's statement that the risen Jesus had been 'seen' by Peter, James and others as well as by himself, said that Paul is clearly taking it that their visionary experiences were of the same type as his own, and not crediting them with having had the kind of physical contact with the risen Jesus that is alleged in the gospels. Habermas, however (ever anxious to bring gospels and epistles into harmony), thought (p. 62) that Flew was here conceding the opposite. Again, we may meaningfully discuss what time gap there is between the dates of events alleged in a document and the date when the original of this document was written. We may equally meaningfully discuss what interval there is between this latter date and the date of the oldest extant copies. What is not meaningful is confusion of these two topics, as when Habermas declares (p. 67) that, as we feel no unease because our oldest copies of Plato are a good thousand years later than the originals (topic 2), we have no reason to jib at the accuracy of the creed outlining the appearances of the risen Jesus which is quoted by Paul only decades after the actual events listed in it (topic 1).

The discussion after the debate is somewhat repetitive, each side pressing home points already made. Flew, as the solitary atheist, adumbrated some good points throughout, but did not have all the New Testament evidence and its problems immediately to mind. And he was up against opponents whose speciality lies in that very field. To those well-informed on these matters, who can supplement his suggestions from their own knowledge, his case will appear more persuasive than it did to an audience relying exclusively on what they heard. When one finds one of the philosopher judges deciding at the end that it was time he 'began to take the resurrection seriously' (p. xiv), it is obvious that educated people are still susceptible to theological blandishments, which therefore need to be exposed in extenso.

On one matter both sides in this debate are agreed, and their agreement is to be welcomed: namely, that the kind of theological writing on the resurrection which abandons its historicity yet affirms its significance is 'nonsense', and that 'there is no meaning if there is no event' (p. ix). This is directed against theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann, and although we may agree to deplore their thinking, what inspired it--and this is something that Habermas never indicates was the conviction that vindicating the resurrection as a historical fact on the basis of the New Testament evidence was a well-nigh hopeless task. Habermas does, however, allude to the difficulty of such an undertaking when he says: 'Perhaps'--only perhaps!!--'even a majority of the German theologians' (notably more sceptical than the British) '... believe that Jesus was raised from the dead' (p. 62). So we are to understand that at any rate a minority of Christian theologians finds such a position no longer tenable.

I propose in this paper to discuss only literary evidence, not the Holy Shroud of Turin, nor the philosophical question of whether miracles are possible, although both these matters were raised in the debate. Concerning the shroud, I would, however, note Habermas' statement that 'microchemical analyses revealed no paints or pigments' on it (p. 119). He must have known when he said this that the microscopist W. McCrone had stated, on the basis of his examination of the cloth that 'the entire image was produced by an artist using iron earth and vermillion pigments in a tempera medium during the middle of the fourteenth century'.[1]

2 The Reliability of the Gospels

Habermas expresses great confidence in the general reliability of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (pp. 43, 58). He does not argue such matters, but names scholars who take this view. It would be equally easy to name numerous Christian scholars who think otherwise. If one were to trust in their authority, instead of in that of their more conservative colleagues, one would at least have the justification that Christians would be unlikely to make such concessions unless there were compelling evidence for them.

In the discussion Miethe claimed that the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (written, as is universally agreed, by the same author) have both been found to be 'reliable historical accounts . . . about the methods of travel, about the time it took to travel from place to place', so that it is quite unreasonable 'immediately to rule them out when they talk about something "spiritual" ' (p. 110). So if I write a story in which a man travels from
one place to another in a plausible number of hours and by a feasible method of transport, I am to be believed if I say that persons who, on the way, touched his handkerchief were cured of disease (Acts 19:11-12). Miethe also claimed that, according to 'the testimony of scholars throughout the . . . world', Luke-Acts offers reliable information about 'what was happening politically'. In actual fact their author is in such complete confusion over the chronology of events that occurred in Palestine in the first half of the first century as to suggest that he was not close in time or place to them.

Let me give examples. In Acts 5, where the scene is Jerusalem about the mid-30s, Gamaliel reviews bygone Messianic risings and mentions that of Theudas. But we know from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (who lived in this first century AD) that Theudas' Messianic promises were made when Fadus was procurator (AD 44-46) and so could not have been known to Gamaliel at the time when he is represented as speaking. So conservative a Christian as F. F. Bruce--who is appealed to at every turn by Habermas and his supporters--does not think that Josephus had got the date wrong, but supposes instead that there was another Theudas, who did much the same as the one in Josephus, but a few decades earlier.[2] Gamaliel continues by saying that after Theudas there was a Messianic rising under Judas the Galilean at the time of the census. Luke knows of only one census, that under Quirinius (Luke 2:1-2) of AD 6--forty years before Theudas. In his gospel Luke compounds the muddle by dating this census of AD 6 under Herod, who died in 4 BC. The Catholic scholar Fitzmyer concedes that such serious errors in the dating of Palestinian events of the first half of the first century show that 'on many of these issues Luke's information was not the best'.[3] Habermas, however, unhesitatingly accepts (p. 109) the verdict of writers like Sir William Ramsay, the archaeologist who began his book St Paul the Traveller (1895) by declaring Luke to be as reliable a historian as Thucydides.

There is a great deal of talk (not argument) by the Christian side in this debate about the gospels being written by eye-witnesses of the events described, or at any rate being based on eyewitness accounts. Habermas claims, for instance, that the opening verses of Luke's gospel 'assert that eyewitness testimony was a major source of information' (p. 164). In fact what Luke there says is that 'the eye-witnesses and ministers of the word' (this latter phrase means 'preachers') reported 'to us'--i.e., to Christians--the events which 'have been accomplished among us'; whereupon 'many' (not alleged to have been eyewitnesses) undertook to record them in writing. The original followers of Jesus thus wrote nothing down but merely preached. The author owns that he himself is writing even later than the 'many' who first made a written record, but he claims to have 'followed all things accurately from the beginning'. 'Followed' cannot be taken to mean 'participated in' (thus making the author a companion of Jesus), for one cannot participate in events 'accurately'. One can follow them accurately only in the sense of investigating them thoroughly, and the author is claiming no more than to have made a proper scrutiny of what his sources say about the relevant events from their inception onwards. As Fitzmyer concedes (p. 289), 'Luke writes as a third-generation Christian'.[4] Only one of Luke's sources is now extant, namely the gospel ascribed to Mark; and if Luke had really regarded it as reliably based, he would not have contradicted it as freely as we shall see he in fact does.

Habermas sternly tells Flew that, if he denies that there is eye-witness testimony in the gospels, he is 'going to have to argue with eminent scholars such as Raymond Brown', whose major commentary on the fourth gospel 'concludes that the Apostle John is the chief contributor to the historical tradition' behind it (p. 55). And this gospel includes not one but 'two chapters concerning the appearances of the risen Jesus'. Habermas says in this same context that John's gospel is 'perhaps'--he repeatedly uses this adverb to avoid conceding or claiming too much--'the most disputed of the four'; so obviously, I may add, is it incompatible with the other three--'startlingly different' from them in its presentation of Jesus', in Brown's formulation.[5] Habermas's implication is that, if eye-witness testimony is conceded in this case, it can hardly be denied in the others, which are less controversial. It would be truer to say that, if John has got the record right, the others must have got it badly wrong.

Brown, like Fitzmyer, is a Catholic priest, and both are very undogmatic writers. Since Habermas believes (p. 40) that the New Testament narratives of Jesus' birth and infancy are defensible as history, he himself is 'going to have to argue' with Brown, who has given a very full demonstration that they are legendary.[6] What he says about the fourth gospel is more guarded than Habermas suggests. Let us study it.
Brown distinguishes five stages in the composition of the gospel of John. First, he says, there existed 'a body of traditional material pertaining to the words and works of Jesus', similar to what has gone into the other three gospels but independent of it. (Hence the great divergence between John and them.) This material was then developed in accordance with the theology of a particular Christian community (which for convenience can be called the Johannine community); then it was organised into a consecutive gospel, which the author later secondarily edited. The fifth and final stage was an 'editing or redaction' by someone else which included the addition of chapter 21 (one of Habermas' two chapters describing resurrection appearances). John the son of Zebedee was 'probably'--note that Habermas has omitted this qualifying adverb--the source of the material constituting stage 1; but as the gospel represents tradition that has gone through so much development, Brown allows that we cannot say for certain that any of it goes back to an eyewitness, although he is impressed by the testimony of second-century Fathers that this is the case, and by the gospel's own claim in two passages (John 19:35 and 21:24) to this effect. On his own showing, however, neither of these passages can carry much weight; for, as we saw, he endorses the (very widely accepted) view that the whole of chapter 21 is 'an addition to the gospel and belongs to the final redaction'; and 19:35 he regards as 'a parenthesis, probably added in the editing of the gospel'.[7] Even so, he adds, the attribution of the gospel tradition to an eyewitness disciple 'would seem to represent the view prevalent in Johannine circles at the end of the first century'. What was believed by a group of Christians at that time about the origin of the material is hardly conclusive evidence as to its true origin.

If Brown here in effect concedes that the evidence within the gospel is indecisive, in a work of some ten years later he surrenders the external evidence, the testimony of the early Fathers, saying: 'Second-century information about the origins of the Gospels (often reflecting scholarly guesses of that period) has not held up well in modern scholarship. . . . There is a set tendency in the second-century information to oversimplify the directness of the connection between the evangelists and the eye-witnesses.' He adds that he no longer believes that anything in the fourth gospel goes back to 'one of the Twelve, John son of Zebedee', although he holds to the view that the person called 'the beloved disciple' in it was 'a companion of Jesus'.[8] Many scholars disagree with this for the following reasons. The fourth gospel is anonymous up to the end of its chapter 20, which is clearly meant as a solemn conclusion. Only the appended chapter 21 identifies the author as 'the beloved disciple', and only the fourth gospel mentions such a person, making him figure in three incidents in earlier chapters: the last supper, the crucifixion, and the discovery of the empty tomb. The intention of chapter 21 in ascribing the whole gospel to this allegedly close friend of Jesus is to represent it as the writing of an eye-witness. But this suggestion carries no weight, not only because it occurs in an appended chapter, but also because all three incidents where the beloved disciple figures in the fourth gospel have parallels in the other three where he plays no part. The reasonable inference is that, at these points, the fourth gospel drew on source material similar to that which underlies the other three, but reworked it so as to introduce the beloved disciple.[9]

It was what the Toronto theologian F. W. Beare calls 'second-century guesses' that gave the gospels the names by which we now know them. They were, as he justly says, originally 'anonymous documents', of whose authors 'nothing is known'.[10] Even as they now stand, there is nothing within them to indicate who their authors are, and to this the fourth gospel is, as we saw, only apparently an exception. The earliest Fathers allude to and quote them without ascribing them to named authors. Justin Martyr, for instance, was in about AD 150 well acquainted with at any rate the first three of them, but does not name them. However, once Christian communities had come to acquire more than one gospel, it was natural that they should give them titles as a means of distinguishing them.[11] It was equally natural that these titles should not be colourless (such as 'document A' and 'document B') but ascriptions to persons believed to have been companions of Jesus, or at any rate of the earliest apostles. And so we find Irenaeus (bishop of Lyons in about AD 180) naming all four as they are now named, and as the first to do so.

Brown makes it clear that he does not believe that the first three gospels were written by eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry. The gospel ascribed to Matthew is, after all, a reworking of that ascribed to Mark, which is itself, on any account, a Greek gospel of a non-disciple; and in a note added to what was said in the debate Habermas admits (p. 180, n. 3) that Matthew's is 'perhaps' the gospel 'with the least apostolic acclaim among critical scholars'. As for Luke's gospel, this was supposed to have been written by a companion of Paul; but, as Brown
notes, 'the distance of Luke/Acts from Pauline thought makes it unlikely that a direct disciple of Paul wrote those works'.[12]

What Brown has called the 'set tendency' of second-century Christians to link the evangelists with eye-witnesses is very evident in the case of Mark, the earliest surviving gospel, ascribed by the Fathers to a Mark who drew his information from the Peter who, according to all four gospels, had accompanied Jesus. For Brown this is again a 'highly unlikely' hypothesis because of the attitude to Peter in this gospel.[13] The hypothesis seems to have resulted from uncrirical harmonisation. Once the gospel had come to be ascribed to someone named Mark—as Nineham notes, 'the commonest Latin name in the Roman Empire'—readers of the first epistle of Peter, whose author introduces himself as 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ', would note the affectionate reference in it to 'my son Mark' (5:13) and identify this person with the evangelist; for, as Nineham says, the early Church was 'in the habit of assuming that all occurrences of a given name in the New Testament referred to a single individual'.[14] Today, however, most scholars agree with Kümmel that there are 'decisive arguments' for regarding the epistle as 'undoubtedly a pseudonymous writing' of ca AD 90—beyond the life-span of the apostle Peter—showing no acquaintance with the substance of the gospel.[15]

Mark's gospel is not an account of Jesus' life such as a biographer (whether or not a personal acquaintance) would write. As Nineham says, it 'consists of a number of unrelated paragraphs set down one after another with very little organic connexion, almost like a series of snapshots placed side by side in a photograph album'. The evangelist has sometimes tried to link these paragraphs by composing a short phrase between them, but essentially each one is an independent unit, complete in itself, undatable except by its contents, and usually devoid of any allusion to place' (pp. 27-8). Many theologians have come to realise that the reason for this is that Mark's material, as it reached him, was community tradition fragments, oral and written, which had been used in the teaching and preaching of the church, handed on from preacher to preacher and consisting of stories about Jesus deemed of doctrinal importance. When these stories do include a reference to a specific time or place—to, for instance, the sabbath, the night, the mountain, the sea or the temple—it serves 'a practical purpose', that is, 'it is necessary for the full understanding of the contents of the paragraph' (p. 28n). Nineham adds that all this is exemplified in Mark's third chapter, where 'the successive paragraphs are so essentially separate that their order could easily be interchanged without doing any violence to the chapter as a whole'.

The attempt to trace each gospel paragraph or 'pericope' (a Greek word meaning 'section') to one or other of the literary forms to which preachers would naturally resort (e.g. parables or miracle stories or stories inculcating some moral point) is known as form-criticism. If the tradition prior to Mark was formed in accordance with what Nineham calls 'practical religious considerations', the same is true of the way all four evangelists handled it. What is called redaction criticism tries to ascertain what aims and presuppositions guided the redactor or editor who brought the individual units of tradition together to form a gospel, or who redacted a gospel compiled from such units by a predecessor. Each gospel, says Nineham, 'was produced to meet some specific practical and religious needs in the church of its origin' (p. 29). This does not inspire confidence in its trustworthiness. The early preachers may well have shaped their material to fit their sermons—we have no information concerning their scrupulousness—and Mark may equally well have modified and embellished what he derived from them. Indeed, if he treated his predecessors as he himself was later to be treated by Matthew and Luke, this will certainly have happened. Nevertheless, Habermas and his supporters suppose that the established view is that the evangelists were eye-witnesses, and that the onus is upon Flew to offer evidence against it (p. 104).

3 The Question of Miracles

Habermas has no difficulty in finding an authority who believes that there is 'eyewitness testimony' of Jesus' miracles (p. 41). As Flew suggests (p. 63), there are plenty of miracles in which no one now believes which are much better attested than those of Jesus. The classic essay of T. H. Huxley amply illustrates this. Huxley discusses the writings of Einhard (a historian of intelligence and character at the court of Charlemagne) who about AD 830 reported numerous miracles from either first-hand or second-hand knowledge: for instance, a demon had taken possession of a girl and, speaking through her mouth in Latin to an exorcising priest, named
himself 'Wiggo'. After the priest had cast him out, the girl could speak no more Latin, but only her own tongue.

Huxley comments:

If you do not believe in these miracles, recounted by a witness whose character and competency are firmly established, whose sincerity cannot be doubted, and who appeals to his sovereign and other contemporaries as witnesses of the truth of what he says, . . . why do you profess to believe in stories of a like character which are found in documents of . . . the authorship of which nothing is certainly determined. . . ? If it be true that the four gospels and Acts were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all that we know of these authors comes to nothing in comparison with our knowledge of Einhard. . . . If, therefore, you refuse to believe that 'Wiggo' was cast out of the possessed girl on Einhard's authority, with what justice can you profess to believe that the legion of devils were cast out of a man among the tombs of the Gadarenes? [Mark 5:1-20 and parallel passages in Matthew and Luke] . . . It cannot be pretended . . . that the Jews of the year 30 AD, or thereabouts, were less imbued with the belief in the supernatural than were the Franks of the year 800 AD. The same influences were at work in each case, and it is only reasonable to suppose that the results are the same.

And so, 'where the miraculous is concerned, neither considerable intellectual ability, nor undoubted honesty, nor knowledge of the world, nor proved faithfulness as civil historians, nor profound piety, on the part of eyewitnesses and contemporaries, affords any guarantee of the objective truth of their statements when we know that a firm belief in the miraculous was ingrained in their minds and was the presupposition of their observations and reasoning'.[16]

It is understandable that by the time the gospels were written, miracles had come to be attributed to Jesus. According to Jewish tradition, demonic power was to be crushed in the Messianic age, and Mark's miracle stories, where Jesus casts out demons from persons in whom they had lodged, were told--I quote the theologian Howard Kee--'in a community in which Jesus is regarded as an agent who has come in the end of time to defeat the powers of Satan'.[17] Paul, however, the earliest Christian writer extant, took a quite different view and held that Jesus had vanquished these powers not by standing up to them openly with miraculous displays of supernatural strength, but by submitting to a shameful death at their instigation, only to rise again in triumph over them.

In this connection Flew makes the important point (p. 11) that, if we wish to find out what the earliest Christians believed about Jesus, it is essential to study the extant documents in the order in which they were written, not the order in which they are printed in Bibles, where the gospels are placed first. The earliest documents are those of the letters ascribed to Paul which were genuinely written by him (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and possibly also Colossians), followed only a little later by two pseudo-Paulines (2 Thessalonians and Ephesians) and by the letter to the Hebrews and 1 Peter. The epistle of James and the three letters of John may also be as early as these. In none of these documents is there any suggestion that Jesus worked miracles, even though in some of them miracles are regarded as of great importance for the spread of the Christian message. Nor is there mention of any miracles of Jesus in the writings of the earliest Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna--known as the 'Apostolic Fathers' because they were believed to be the immediate successors of the apostles). Paul even comes close to actually denying that Jesus worked miracles when he insists that he can preach only 'Christ crucified'--a Christ who submitted to a shameful death, not a Christ of signs and wonders (1 Corinthians 1:22-3). It is no answer to say, with Habermas, that 'the purpose of the epistles was not to present history' (p. 43). Of course no writer can be expected to mention things that are irrelevant to what he has chosen to discuss. But if we believe the gospels, there was much both in Jesus' behaviour and in his teaching that would have been relevant to the situation of the epistle writers and which they would have been glad to mention, had they known of it. Furthermore, Habermas' reply ignores the fact that epistles of later date than the gospels, although their purpose is not to 'present history', do nevertheless allude to what had by then come to be regarded as Jesus' 'history' in arguing their various concerns.
Habermas triumphantly proclaims that 'within 100 to 150 years after the birth of Christ approximately eighteen non-Christian . . . sources from secular history mention . . . almost every major detail of Jesus ' life, including miracles, the Resurrection, and his claims to be deity' (p. 43). It is all the more striking that so many of the earliest Christian documents do not do the same, but say nothing of any item in his biography except his crucifixion and resurrection (both in unspecified circumstances). And, contrary to Habermas' suggestion, there is no early non-Christian evidence concerning the resurrection. As the theologian Ulrich Wilckens has noted, 'for the first century we are, without exception, forced to rely on the testimony of the Christians' on this matter: 'There are no non-Christian witnesses of any sort who could give us information about the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances, or comment from a non-Christian aspect on the statements made about the resurrection by the early Christians'.[18] As for Jesus’ ‘claims to be deity’, these are not merely absent from but even incompatible with the earliest Christian documents, where he figures as a supernatural personage higher in status than the angels, yet subordinate to the Father, to whom he will finally deliver up the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24 and 28), and himself then be merely the first-born among many brothers (Romans 8:29). Both sides in the debate in this volume seem to think (pp. ix, 3) that the resurrection, if a fact, would prove Jesus to be God, but this was certainly not the view of Paul, nor of other early Christian writers.

One of Habermas' eighteen secular sources on the life of Jesus is Thallus, who mentioned 'the darkness and the events surrounding the Crucifixion . . . about AD 52' (p. 106). This piece of effrontery seems to have taken Flew by surprise. Thallus' History has not survived, and only a few references to it in Christian writers are extant. Of these, the one that Habermas has in mind is Julius Africanus' statement in the third century, apropos of the three-hour darkness from noon which covered the earth at Jesus' crucifixion (Mark 15:33 and parallels in Matthew and Luke): 'Thallus says, wrongly, it seems to me, that this darkness was an eclipse of the sun' - a wrong explanation, Africanus adds, because there is a full moon at Passover, when Jesus died, and so the moon cannot then lie between the sun and the earth. Jacoby, who prints Africanus' statement and who comments on it in a companion volume, notes that Thallus may in fact have made no mention at all of Jesus or Jewish history, but simply have recorded (as other chroniclers did) the eclipse in the reign of Tiberius for which astronomers have calculated the date 24 November A.D. 29.[19] It may have been Africanus who introduced Jesus in retorting that this was no eclipse but a supernatural event. This possibility is conceded by R.T. France, who writes in his The Evidence For Jesus, 1986, p. 24: "Unfortunately he [Africanus] does not give Thallus' words, so that we do not know whether Thallus mentioned Jesus' crucifixion, or whether this was Africanus' interpretation of a period of darkness which Thallus had not specifically linked with Jesus". Hence when Africanus says that in his opinion Thallus was wrong ('wrongly, it seems to me'), he may well mean that the darkness we now date at 24 November A.D.29 is not to be classed, as Thallus supposed, with those that are naturally caused, but is to be recognized as the one that was supernaturally occasioned at the crucifixion. Murray H. Harris, who makes as good a case as he can for Thallus' supposed testimony, is not justified in claiming that "both Thallus and Africanus take it for granted that there had in fact been an unusual darkness at the time of Jesus' crucifixion" (see his article in Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels, ed. D. Wenham, Sheffield, 1985, p.344. My italics).

If, however, Thallus did mention the death of Jesus, then his testimony would be important if it antedated the gospel traditions. But France rightly rejects the confident statement that Thallus wrote as early as A.D.52, and says that "his date of writing is not known", so that any reference to Jesus he perhaps made may have been "drawn from Christian sources". Harris allows that his source might well have been any one of the synoptic gospels" (p.361). Putting his date of writing as early as A.D.52, is based on identifying him with a wealthy Samaritan mentioned by Josephus as being a freedman of the Emperor Tiberius. Even F.F. Bruce admitted that this identification is "doubtful" (Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament, London, 1974, p.30n.); for the manuscripts of Josephus have to be amended to yield the name 'Thallus' at all: allos, meaning 'another' Samaritan, has to be changed to thallos. L.H. Feldman, the editor of the Loeb edition of this section of Josephus, has retained the unamended text. Without the amendment there is no evidence that the historian Thallus was a Samaritan, or a freedman of Tiberius.

The date of A.D.52 is sometimes supported by claiming that, according to the fourth-century Christian historian
Eusebius, Thallus covered world history up to that date. In fact, however, as Harris admits (p.360), Eusebius avers that Thallus went only as far as the 167th Olympiad (112-109 B.C.). Harris favours the "conjecture" that 167th should be corrected to 207th (even though the figures are not strikingly similar in the Greek), bringing the date to A.D.52. He adds that 'fall agree that Eusebius's date is in error'. This is not so. What is agreed is that, if Eusebius' date is right, and if Thallus nevertheless mentioned an eclipse of A.D.29, then "his work must have been later extended" (art.'Thallus' in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd edition, 1970).

Jacoby says that Christian writers were drawn to Thallus' History because it 'was the latest thing and appeared only in the second century. Thus if he mentioned the crucifixion at all, he probably derived his information from what Christians were already saying, and is therefore not an independent witness. Conzelmann's article on Jesus in a standard religious encyclopaedia notes curtly that 'Thallus cannot be considered as witnessing' to events in the life of Jesus.[20] Conservative Christian scholars continue to make much of him because there is no other testimony to be had from a non-Christian gentile of the first century.

5 The Resurrection in the Gospels

Habermas' method in dealing with the gospel evidence is to dazzle his audience with what they may be expected to take for scientific thoroughness. He introduces his account of the textual evidence with an allusion to the tools of 'form and redaction criticism, (p. 19)--as if they had strengthened the case for orthodoxy![21]--and proceeds to name (on a single page) sixteen theologians (even though many of them were sceptical about the resurrection) because some of them 'refuted each other's theories, leaving no viable naturalistic hypothesis' (p. 20), so that the resurrection must be accepted as a supernatural event. (One of the second panel of judges very appositely commented (p. xv) that 'Habermas' citations of so many scholars kept him from spending more time on the content of his argument'). The obvious 'naturalistic' hypothesis is that the whole thing is a legend, but one way in which Habermas disposes of this view is by saying that Otto Pfleiderer (a radical enough theologian) 'was critical' of it and 'even admitted that it did not explain Jesus' Resurrection' (p. 21). Habermas is not always to be trusted in the use he makes of the numerous authorities he mentions. In the pages of Pfleiderer to which he refers, the resurrection is expressly called a 'Christian myth', and all that is conceded is that it is not totally explicable in terms of parallels with dying and rising pagan gods, but 'had its most direct source in the historical fact of the death of Jesus and the following visions seen by his disciples'.[22]

One of Habermas' sixteen is Karl Barth, according to whom we 'rightly turn up our nose' at the 'many inconsistencies' in the attempts of liberal theologians to explain belief in the resurrection naturalistically. If inconsistencies are ground for scornful rejection, then it will fare ill with the New Testament accounts of the resurrection. A. E. Harvey notes in his The New English Bible Companion to the New Testament (Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970, p. 297)--hardly a sceptical work--that 'all the gospels, after having run closely together in their accounts of the trial and execution, diverge markedly when they come to the circumstances of the resurrection, and it is impossible to fit their accounts together into a single coherent scheme'. The theologian R. H. Fuller (to whose book I have referred in note 21) gives a brief summary of what he calls the 'palpable inconsistencies' (pp. 2-5), and early this century they were set out in detail by the Zürich theologian P. W. Schmiedel, who gives ample evidence that on this matter 'the canonical gospels are at irreconcilable variance with each other' and that the non-canonical notices 'serve to show how busily and in how reckless a manner the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus continued to be handed on'.[23] As Habermas later admits (p. 55), Karl Barth's position--I should rather say his way out of all this--is that 'we ought not to ask for evidence for the Resurrection; we should believe on faith alone'; to which another theologian, Paul Badham, has appositely replied: 'A faith which claims that something which happened in the past is important, cannot evade historical scrutiny of that claim'.[24] Habermas would not dispute this. Indeed, he is quite confident that the evidence settles the matter in his sense.

Strauss emphasised how glaring the contradictions are when he declared, of the resurrection: 'Rarely has an incredible fact been worse attested, and never has a badly attested one been intrinsically less credible'.[25] One evangelist makes Jesus' appearances to his disciples occur exclusively in Galilee, while another sites them
exclusively eighty miles away at Jerusalem. I know that witnesses of an event can give discrepant accounts of it, but one would not expect the discrepancies to extend to essentials. If one witness of a street accident affirmed that it took place in London, we should not expect another to site it in Birmingham. If we were faced with such discrepant reports, and also had no other evidence that there had been any accident, we should dismiss the whole thing. But this is our position in regard to the resurrection. As the theologian Keith Elliott has said, 'There is no independent witness to the Easter events outside the New Testament'.[26]

Miethe protests that it was not only Jesus' followers who saw him (p. 107). But the documents make it clear that the Christophanies were not vouchsafed to enemies, only to those who either already believed or subsequently became believers. As Elliott puts it, 'Jesus in his resurrected state is visible only to those who have faith' (p. 86); or, in the wording of the New Testament itself, only to those 'who were chosen by God as witnesses' (Acts 10:40-1). It is quite naive of Habermas to suppose that, because only disciples or converts are said to have seen the risen Jesus, this 'rules out legend or mythological theories' (p. 26).

Miethe also claims that the appearances of the risen Jesus 'went on for forty days'. This feature is unique to Acts and contradicts even Luke (by the same author), which ends with Jesus leading his disciples on Easter day, after numerous appearances to them, from Jerusalem to the neighbouring locality of Bethany, where he solemnly blesses them with uplifted hands before 'he parted from them and was carried up into heaven'—on that same day. Some manuscripts have only 'he parted from them', but Fuller concedes, after discussing the manuscript evidence, that the words reporting the ascension are 'textually Lucan and integral to the narrative' (p. 122). Evidently some copyists deleted them in order to represent the parting as only temporary and thus avoid contradicting Acts where the author seems to be drawing on a tradition not available when he wrote his gospel, and one on which he gladly seized because, while occasional appearances of the risen one might be dismissed by sceptics as hallucinations, a sojourn of forty days, during which he presented I many proofs' (Acts 1:3), was more substantial.

Habermas concedes that there are 'apparent discrepancies' in the evidence for the resurrection (p. 156), but maintains that these do not affect his apologetic because certain cardinal facts are independent of them: all the accounts agree, for instance, that Jesus was crucified and subsequently raised (p. 25). But this amount of agreement is frequently found in stories admittedly mythical. Historians agree that William Tell is a legendary figure, but there are chronicles enough telling discrepant stories of how he founded the Swiss Confederation. Reverting to my example of a street accident, I would note that Habermas' position implies that, although those who claim to be witnesses disagree even as to where it happened, and although there are no injured people, damaged vehicles, or indeed any evidence apart from their discordant testimony, we are nevertheless to believe that an accident did occur. The few scholars who today still defend Jesus' virgin birth as historical fact are obliged to resort to this manner of arguing. The event is documented only in the two nativity stories of Matthew and Luke (not elsewhere in the New Testament), and each of these stories is incompatible with the other, as well as being full of its own difficulties. But they agree in alleging that Jesus was virgin born. Such minimal agreement between narratives with no historical basis is, however, what one would expect if for some reason certain beliefs—about Jesus and about Tell—had come to be accepted and if believers then, independently of each other, tried to envisage historical circumstances which would justify these beliefs.

The discrepancies in the gospel accounts of the resurrection events are not mere muddle but arise because one evangelist pursues theological purposes alien to another. For Luke, Jerusalem is of great theological importance,[27] and in order to place the appearances there he amends the Marcan narrative at two points. First he omits the record at Mark 14:28 of Jesus' prediction at the Last Supper that after his resurrection he would go before his disciples into Galilee. Then he rewords what Mark had recorded as the instruction to the women at the empty tomb, as follows:

Mark 16:7

Go, tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

Luke 24:6-7

Remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be . . . crucified, and the third day rise again.
Having thus eliminated the instruction that the disciples should go to Galilee, Luke goes on to make the risen Jesus tell them to remain in Jerusalem 'until ye be clothed with power from on high' (24:49), which he represents (at Acts 2:1–4) as happening at Pentecost--i.e. some fifty days later. Theologians speak in this connection of Luke's 'editing' of Mark; but we can hardly feel confidence in a writer whose theological purpose leads him to edit a source so as to obliterate its plain meaning. As the theologian C. F. Evans has said, 'it is not natural confusion but rather the lack of it, and the influence of rational reflection and apologetic' which have given rise to such contradictions.[28]

The best manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8. The remainder of chapter 16 is an appendix (distinguished as such in the Revised Version, the American Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible) which makes the risen Jesus promise (among other things) that believers will be able to handle snakes and drink deadly poison without coming to harm. Up to 16:8 there have been no appearances of the risen one. The women visitors to the tomb have discovered it to be empty, and have been instructed there by 'a young man arrayed in a white robe' to tell the disciples to go to Galilee to experience an appearance. (In Luke, the 'young man' becomes 'two men in dazzling apparel', and in Matthew he is called an 'angel'. Commentators point out that this is the meaning in all three gospels, as 'young man' sometimes designates an angel in ancient Jewish literature, and in the New Testament men in white and/or radiant clothes are always heavenly beings.) Mark continues by representing the women as too afraid to deliver the 'young man's' message to the disciples, so that 'they said nothing to anyone'. It has often been suggested that Mark's motive for making the women keep silent was to account for the fact that, as he well knew, there was no already existing tradition about an empty tomb when he wrote. As G. W. H. Lampe says, 'The fact that the women do not pass the message on may suggest that the evangelist, or his source, knew that the story of the tomb and the angel was not part of the original Easter proclamation and had only developed at a relatively late stage in the tradition.'[29]

Whatever Mark's motive may have been, Luke reworded this passage so as to make it lead in to the Jerusalem appearances he has added to Mark:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mark 16:8</th>
<th>Luke 24:9</th>
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<td>And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid.</td>
<td>And they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.</td>
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I do not mean to suggest that Luke is here concocting a narrative he knew to be false. As he was convinced that it was 'beginning from Jerusalem' that the Christian mission went forward to 'all the nations' (Luke 24:47), he will naturally have supposed that his predecessor had got his facts a bit wrong, and so will have amended the Marcan narrative in perfectly good faith. One thing that this kind of 'editing' clearly indicates is that Mark's gospel was not regarded as authoritatively based on reliable eye-witness information.

If we turn from Luke to Matthew, we find similarly a narrative shaped by conscious purpose. Matthew has decided to have the sepulchre guarded by Jewish soldiers so as to prevent the Jews from alleging, when it is later seen to be empty, that disciples stole their master's body and merely pretended that he had risen from the dead (Matthew 27:62–6). In consequence, Matthew cannot accept Mark's statement that the women expected to enter the tomb (to anoint the body) and has to represent them as intending merely to visit it (28:1). Before they can look inside it, the guard has to be put out of action, hence the need for the 'great earthquake' of the next verse--caused not by any natural seismic conditions, but by the descent from heaven of 'an angel of the Lord' who both rolls away the stone sealing the tomb and petrifies the guards with fear. But why did not these Jewish soldiers, once they had recovered, tell what they had seen and thus make it difficult for the Jews to deny the fact of the resurrection? To provide a plausible answer to this question, Matthew has it that the chief priests persuaded the guards with bribes to pretend that they had slept on duty and thus given Jesus' disciples a chance to steal the body. The guards 'took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews and continueth until this day' (28:15). This is psychologically quite incredible. 'Whoever has seen an angel
descending from heaven, with an appearance like lightning (28:3), is not going to say--even for a considerable sum of money--that he was asleep and saw nothing.'[30] The phrase 'until this day' betrays the whole narrative as a late apologetic, accounting, to both Jews and Christians, for the silence of alleged Jewish witnesses. Lampe has noted that what he calls Matthew's 'legend' of the guard has 'no historical value', is 'very much in the manner of the later apocryphal gospels', and reflects controversy with the Jews (p. 51).

Habermas refers (p. 24) to what he calls C. H. Dodd's claim that two passages in Matthew's account (28:8-10 and 16-20) are based on really early tradition. Dodd does not in fact claim quite as much as this, and says only that they 'represent the "formed" tradition, stereotyped through relatively long transmission within a community', and express 'the corporate oral tradition of the primitive Church'.[31] As usual, Habermas does not indicate their content, but merely names chapter and verses. When we look them up, we find that in the first the women have just been told at the tomb (as in Mark) that the risen one will appear in Galilee, whereupon (diverging from Mark's account) they 'run to bring his disciples word', but are intercepted by the risen Jesus. Matthew may have added this detail because he feared that the testimony of the angel at the tomb, which is all that Mark offered, could be dismissed as hallucination. It is hard to see any other reason for this added episode, for in it Jesus effects no more than to repeat the angel's message that he will appear in Galilee. The women, however, introduce something hovel in that at this point 'they took hold of his feet and worshipped him'. This kind of physical contact with the risen one is characteristic of the stage of tradition represented by the gospels, but excluded, as we shall see, by Paul, who also knows nothing of appearances to women. These, by the way, are also unknown to Luke. He records the women's visit to the tomb and their encounter there with 'two men in dazzling apparel' (24:1-10), but says nothing of any appearance to the women, and goes on to imply (24:22-4) that, up to that point, no one had seen Jesus.

In Dodd's second Matthaean passage the risen Jesus instructs the eleven on a Galilean mountain 'to make disciples of all the nations'. Such words could have been put into his mouth only when the fierce controversy about the gentile mission that dominates the earliest Christian literature was not only over and done with, but even barely remembered. The eleven are here further instructed to baptise all the nations 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'. This again can only be late, for there is no suggestion in the early literature--not even in Acts' account of the Church's early history--that this formula was used. At Acts 2:38 Peter urges converts simply to 'be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ'.

Matthew's risen Lord also instructs the eleven to teach converts 'to observe all that I have commanded you'. This represents a special theological interest of Matthew, who presented his gospel, with its five carefully constructed Jesuine discourses, as the new Torah; and all that I have commanded you' is meant to refer back to these (cf. Fuller, pp. 88-9). It is with such facts in mind that Evans has said (p. 67) that, not only does the risen Lord not say the same things in any two gospels, but also it is hardly the same Lord speaking: "In Matthew it is evidently a Matthaean Lord who speaks, in Luke a Lucan Lord and in John a Johannine Lord." Each gospel was written for a different Christian community, and--as Fuller puts it (p. 172)--'the words spoken by the Risen One are not to be taken as recordings of what was actually spoken by him, but as verbalizations of the community's understanding of the import of the resurrection'.

This second Matthaean passage also represents the risen Jesus as declaring that 'all authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth'. Dodd allows that the intention here is 'clearly to introduce the risen Christ as King of the World'. He suggests that the passage nevertheless has a ring of authenticity because it is 'notably sober and almost matter-of-fact in tone', entirely lacking 'the conventional symbolism of apocalypse' (pp. 116-7). Dodd also holds that, apart from these two passages in Matthew's chapter 28, even the remaining accounts of the resurrection events merit careful attention because, in Habermas' wording (p. 24), they 'lack the mythical tendencies of much ancient literature'--this when, in these remaining accounts, an angel is said to descend from heaven, roll away the stone sealing the tomb, and sit on it (Matthew 28:1-6). Although Dodd is certainly concerned to represent these narratives in the best possible light, in his 1971 book on Jesus--widely hailed on its appearance as the distillation of a life-time of study--he concedes that whether 'Jesus had in some way left his tomb' is a question on which 'the historian may properly suspend judgment'.[32] Flew is quite right to say (p. 37) that, if we are to accept the miracle of the resurrection, we need grounds more positive than this.
If Jesus' tomb was empty, he did not leave his flesh and bones in his grave; and so either they had been transformed into something different, or else he rose in physical body. Paul (as we shall see) takes the former view, and the gospels (other than Mark's, which gives no evidence either way) the latter. They refer to the 'flesh and bones' of the risen Jesus (Luke 24:10), who 'eats and drinks' with his disciples (Acts 10:41) and invites Thomas to touch him (John 20:27; cf. Luke 24:40, where he invites the eleven to 'handle' him). It is on the basis of such evidence that the fourth of the Church of England's thirty-nine articles affirms that he ascended into heaven (where he now 'sitteth') with 'flesh and bones'. His risen body also to be solid enough to support clothes, as no one supposes that the gospels would have us believe that he manifested himself naked. Yet, as the Bishops of the General Synod of the same Church of England have recently noted, this risen body must have been 'of a very unusual kind'; for, according to these same gospels, it enabled him to arrive within closed doors and vanish at will.[33] Badham has stressed what he calls the 'internal incoherence' of the narratives here (p. 37): the body is represented as solid for some purposes but not for others. None of this worries Habermas. For him, the resurrected Jesus, like the resurrected believer, has a 'spiritual body' which, we learn, means 'a new body that is more closely linked with God' (p. 156). Flew justly noted that 'spiritual body' is a contradiction in terms and 'sounds like a body but with an adjective saying it's not' (p. 64).

6 Paul's Account of the Resurrection

Habermas' whole argument depends on harmonising epistles with gospels and thereby eliminating the significance of the gap in time and circumstances between them. Paul, he says, quotes an already existing Christian creed which lists Jesus' appearances; and Luke, who knew Paul personally (p. 58), wrote a gospel which described these appearances -- he, like other evangelists, being an eye-witness to such events or at any rate having access to eye-witness reports. Furthermore, as Paul admits to having visited Peter and James in Jerusalem, he in all likelihood obtained the creed he quotes from them, and they, according to the gospels, had known Jesus personally. So unless the appearances were hallucinations, we could hardly have stronger evidence for the resurrection: a creed based on statements by men who had known both the historical and the risen Jesus, and promulgated by men who were prepared to die for their beliefs (p. 59).

This final point carries little weight as, apart from the fact that we are today familiar enough with religious and political fanatics prepared to die for their various faiths, Christianity originated in a Jewish environment where martyrdom was highly prized. Beagley has recently endorsed Bousset's description of the Jewish religion as 'a religion of martyrdom . . ., born of the martyrdom and suffering of the pious ones of the Maccabean time'.[34] 1 Maccabees, written probably about 100 BC, records (1:62-3) that in 167 BC many Jews chose to die rather than eat what the Mosaic law stipulates to be unclean food. 2 Maccabees, written about 50 BC, tells of Jews who died rather than eat, or even pretend to eat, swine's flesh (6:18-31; 7:1-42), and indicates that some of these died in the hope of a resurrection--a factor also of importance as part of the background to earliest Christianity. In any case, Habermas exaggerates the extent of martyrdom in early Christianity. That many suffered the death penalty is not borne out even by the Church's own account of its early history in Acts, where, for instance, most of the twelve quickly disappear from the narrative. Habermas' statement that 'most of the apostles' died for the resurrection message (p. 154) far outruns the evidence.

I have commented already on Luke as an eyewitness. That he was a companion of Paul is, for Habermas, indicated 'by such signs as' references in Acts to 'we' or 'us', meaning Paul and his companions. (Note the characteristic suggestion that there is far more evidence than this particular sign and that 'we could, an if we would.'). Each of the 'we' sections begins with a sea voyage with Paul and in part reads like a diary entry kept by one of the voyagers. Commentators have shown that by the first century AD it was a convention of Greek literature to relate sea voyages in the first person, whether or not the author was an actual participant in the voyage, in order to make the description more vivid.[35] Another possibility is that the relevant passages may have been present in some travel diary (not the author's own) from which he drew, and that he retained the 'we', and even inserted it into some passages where it is obviously inappropriate,[36] in order to suggest that these narratives have an eye-witness basis. In any case, a linkage between Paul and Luke is out of the question, as what is said of Paul in Acts is quite incompatible with what Paul himself says in his epistles. As the theologian...
Vielhauer said in 1950, there are 'crass contradictions' between these two sources which 'concern both historical fact and theological doctrine'.[37] I have gone into all this in detail elsewhere,[38] and although I am trying in this paper to do more than merely appeal to authorities, I would note that A. J. Mattill concludes his survey of the relevant evidence by saying that the dominant view today, and the one which 'has succeeded in putting the burden of proof on others', is that the historical Paul of the authentic epistles is quite different from 'the legendary Paul of Acts'.[39]

The next item in the construction of Habermas that I have summarised above is that Paul 'took great care to interview the apostles personally in order to ascertain the nature of the Gospel, which includes the Resurrection (Gal. 1:18-20; 2:1-10)' (p. 56). In fact, whatever Paul's purpose was in visiting the apostles, it was certainly not to ascertain the nature of the gospel; for in the very context here adduced he stresses that his gospel is dependent on no human authority, but came to him through a direct revelation: 'For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ' (Galatians 1:11-12; cf. the opening verse of this epistle).

Paul's detailed statement on the resurrection events is as follows (1 Corinthians 15:3-8):

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
4 and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures;
5 and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve;
6 then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep;
7 then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles;
8 and last of all, as to one born out of due time, he appeared to me also.

The reference to Jesus' burial (verse 4) need not be taken to imply knowledge of a tomb, still less (pace Habermas, p. 71) of a post-resurrection empty tomb. Paul may simply be emphasising the reality of Jesus' death, as when we say someone is 'dead and buried', (cf. Evans, p. 75 and note). That he was actually buried is important theologically for Paul, who regarded the death, burial and resurrection as reflected symbolically in Christian baptism of total immersion: into the water constitutes death; under the water, burial; and out of the water, resurrection (Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12, where references to Jesus' burial are explicit).

As we have seen, in the gospels Jesus' tomb is said to be empty because he rose in physical body. Paul, however, has a quite different view of rising from the dead and (as Flew intimates, p. 90) roundly declares--in the same chapter of the epistle where he writes of Jesus' resurrection and subsequent appearances--that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50). It is 'clear enough', says Archbishop Carnley, that in verses 3-8 Paul understands Jesus' resurrection as 'a truly representative sample of the resurrection of all believers', to which he makes reference in this later verse.[40] In the same context (verse 43) he writes of the dead being raised 'in glory'; and at Philippians 3:21 be argues directly from the resurrection body of Christ to the future resurrection body of believers: Christ 'will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body'. As Fuller has noted (p. 20), if Paul believed that Christ's physical body had been transformed he could not have accepted any tradition that Jesus rose in physical body and ate and drank.

In the course of the discussion Flew's opponents make much of the fact that the Greek of 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 translated as 'he appeared to' is, in a more literal rendering, 'he was seen by'--the verb being horaō• (I see). David Beck, for instance, held that this rules out the possibility that Paul was 'referring to some kind of vision'. He 'is using ordinary observation terms' and is thus 'referring to a physical body' (p. 97). But at Colossians 2:18 Paul denigrates some rival who made too much of his 'visions'--in more literal translation, 'of the things he had seen'--using the same Greek verb where the reference is clearly to fanciful imaginings. Fuller notes that, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that has greatly influenced the New), this same verb is used of appearances of angels and of God, and that the question whether what appears is seen 'with the physical eye or with the eye of the mind or the spirit is left entirely undetermined' (p. 30). Habermas, after the debate, the
discussion and the voting, allowed that 'horaō' does not specify either bodily or visionary sight' (p. 165).

Of course, if Jesus rose he will have left his tomb empty even if his body had been transformed into something quite different. But whether Paul had any actual knowledge of an empty tomb is another matter. In 1 Corinthians he is writing to men who were denying that there was a resurrection, and had he known of an empty tomb, he would surely have been glad to adduce this as evidence of resurrection, instead of merely saying, as he does, that Jesus was buried and then raised. Habermas tries, not uncharacteristically, to establish the historicity of the empty tomb by intimidation through numbers: 'Craig lists forty-four critical scholars who argue for the empty tomb' (p. 71). In 1986 even the Bishops of the Church of England (who include some very uncritical scholars) published a statement (to which I refer in note 33) which allows that the gospel stories of the empty tomb may not be historically true.

As Conzelmann notes in a standard religious encyclopaedia, Paul seems to suppose that Jesus ascended to heaven at once on being resurrected, and with a body of heavenly radiance, so that his subsequent appearances were made from heaven. So much is implied even in Acts' version of Jesus' appearance to Paul, who sees 'a light out of heaven' (Acts 9:3ff) and hears a voice, which his companions also hear, although they see no one. Later, at Acts 22:9, his companions are said to have seen the light, but not to have heard the voice. The implication of both passages may be that all saw the light, but only Paul saw the figure of Jesus in it. However construed, all this, as Flew points out (p. 51 etc.), is quite different from the physical appearances recorded in the gospels. Habermas' sole retort was that 'we don't know exactly' what Paul's companions in the narrative of Acts saw.

Paul would surely have rejected as blasphemous any claim to have eaten and drunk with the exalted one. Luke's story of the risen Jesus consuming broiled fish (Luke 24:41-3) represents later apologetic, relevant to a situation where Christians were replying to Jewish and gentile incredulity with a narrative which established the physical reality of his resurrection, but which today can only strike many readers as more than slightly ridiculous.

The theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose 'Response to the Debate' is printed with it, takes Flew's side on this issue, agreeing that

the Gospels, especially Luke, present the reality of the Risen One in a such more earthly fashion than the report in Acts on Paul's conversion by the light and the voice coming to him from heaven. . .

. The Easter narratives in the Gospels, however, represent a such later stage of the tradition than Paul's own remark (Galatians 1:15), which fits the story in Acts. (p. 131)

He adds that it is 'not possible to deny legendary elements' in the resurrection narratives, and so he cannot 'consider the Gospels in every respect as historically reliable sources, as Professor Habermas says they are' (p. 132). Pannenberg also does not believe that Jesus--on three separate occasions according to Mark--predicted his own resurrection, and notes that most scholars share his scepticism. In the debate, Flew pointed out that, had Jesus made such predictions, the disciples could not have regarded the crucifixion as the end of all their hopes. Miethe replied that they had not understood Jesus, and had thought that 'the temple was what he said would be torn down and then raised' (p. 89). One basis for this ingenious exegesis is, of course, the statement--of 'false witnesses', not of disciples--at Jesus' trial that he had said he would destroy the temple and in three days 'build another not made with hands' (Mark 14: 57-8).

Habermas insists that the appearances Paul records cannot be hallucinations. Such a theory, he says, suffered a 'major decimation' at the hands of Theodor Keim (p. 21). In fact quite a number of theologians since Keim have subscribed to it. Archbishop Carnley notes that today 'even a relatively conservative scholar such as James Dunn admits that the subjective vision hypothesis is a possibility given the evidence we have' (p. 244). The late J. A. T. Robinson (author of Honest to God) tentatively held it in 1973, when he hinted that the disciples experienced hallucinations which made them love one another.[43] One reason for Habermas' rejection of anything of this kind is his conviction that, as the crucifixion had dashed the disciples' hopes, they could not have been predisposed to imaginings restoring them (p. 26). This has been contested, for, as Carnley notes,

Most of those who have argued for the subjective nature of the visions contend that psychological disturbance induced by the guilt of having deserted Jesus sufficiently accounts for them. The
presence of the guilt is hinted at in the New Testament traditions at least in the case of Peter, whose denial of Jesus (Mark 14:66-72) may have had psychological repercussions, and Paul, whose persecution of Christians may have been a contributing factor to his experiences (Acts 26:9-11). The fact of the temporal dispersion of the experiences might count against the possibility of the visions being caused by brief mass hysteria following close upon Jesus’ death, but not if, in the passage of time, nagging guilt was a basic contributing factor. (p. 71)

One important factor which Habermas leaves unmentioned is that, when Paul wrote, Christian leaders established their authority by claiming to have seen the risen Lord.[44] For Paul, an 'apostle' was precisely a person who had had such a vision and been called to the Lord's service in consequence of it, for it is on this basis that he declares himself to be as much an apostle as were rival Christian teachers: 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 Corinthians 9:1). Hence, far from the psychological predisposition to such visions being absent, there was a strong motive for claiming them.

According to Paul, Jesus appeared to more than one person on a given occasion, and Habermas insists that hallucinations are not collective (pp. 25, 50). It is of course true that, even when induced by some common physical means, they will not be the same for different people, since they depend not only on the present physiological state but on the stock of memories in the mind of each individual. But inasmuch as the appearances were vouchsafed to groups such as the five hundred and more of 1 Corinthians 15:6, who may, like Paul, never have known Jesus personally, the agreement between what each person experienced could have been minimal yet sufficient for all to say that they had seen a vaguely conceived risen Jesus. Furthermore, the evidence offered by sworn 'eyewitnesses' at witchcraft trials does not support Habermas' contention that hallucinations are never collective. What people observe depends at least as much on their habits of thought as on what is actually there. A firm belief in the miraculous and in the ceaseless efforts of the devil was the presupposition of the observations and reasonings of witnesses and judges alike at these trials, and, as Huxley noted (see above, p. 15), the number of witnesses counts for very little when all are affected by the same underlying beliefs.

Flew said repeatedly that we have no means of checking whether the risen Jesus actually appeared to groups or crowds, as we have only a document alleging that such extraordinary things happened. In any case, Habermas' standpoint hardly does justice to group psychology. The non-conformist is mistrusted, and so every individual, whatever he may inwardly feel and believe, may try to give the impression that he believes what those around him seem to believe. These conditions prevail not only in crowds--where every member is ready to sink his private view in deference to what he takes to be the general opinion, as soon as he thinks he has ascertained it--but wherever people feel that their actions may be subjected to public scrutiny. And with early Christianity we are dealing with a social phenomenon where unbelief is a cardinal crime (John 3:18, 36) for which whole communities are to be most frightfully punished (Matthew 10:14-15). 'He that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed' (James 1:6).

What is striking about the whole passage I have quoted from 1 Corinthians 15 is, as Elliott says (p. 83), that Paul 'does no more than provide a list. There are no details of how, where or when the Easter encounters took place or what happened.' His own encounter with the risen one may well have taken place at Damascus, for he says elsewhere that he returned there after spending the first period of his Christian life in Arabia (Galatians 1:15-17). That the risen Jesus met him 'on the road to Damascus' (as both sides in the debate assume) is specified only in Acts' romantic version, and only a minority of scholars suppose that the author of Acts had more than sketchy knowledge of Paul, filled out with conjectures. And the items in Paul's list correlate very poorly with the record of appearances in the gospels. Beare says in his commentary on Matthew that Paul's account of the appearances 'has no relationship with any of the accounts in the gospels' and is not reflected in them 'in any shape or form'.[45] Let us study the details.

The gospels know nothing of the appearance to above five hundred simultaneously. When Flew pointed this out, Habermas replied that Matthew 'does say that Jesus appeared on a hillside' and 'more may have been there than just the eleven disciples'. But no other audience is mentioned, and it is the eleven alone that Jesus here addresses and instructs (Matthew 28:16-20). Again, Paul places an appearance to Peter (alias Cephas, verse 5) as the first in
time of all those which he records, whereas (as Flew notes, p. 36) in the gospels Peter plays only a very minor role in the appearances. They contain no account of an appearance to him. At Mark 16:7 an appearance to ‘the disciples and Peter’ is promised by the angel in the empty tomb; and Luke 24:34 mentions, in a surprisingly casual manner, that an appearance to Peter has occurred without making it clear whether this was the first the risen Jesus made. The other two gospels are completely silent on the subject of an appearance specifically to Peter.

Paul also records in verse 5 an appearance to 'the twelve'. Critical theologians have given weighty reasons for doubting whether this means the twelve who, according to the gospels, accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry. One of their arguments is that it is universally agreed that Paul's words here are not his own composition, but that he is quoting an already existing creed about the resurrection events, for the passage is full of un-Pauline words and phrases.[46] He never mentions 'the twelve' elsewhere--only in this one passage which, for him, was a quotation--but he could hardly have avoided doing so had he known them as the companions of Jesus' ministry. He knows nothing of 'twelve' as leaders of Jerusalem Christians, whom he names as Cephas, James and John.[47] For him, then, the twelve could only have been personages named in a creed which specified witnesses of the appearances. And the Christian community which formulated this pre-Pauline creed would have known these twelve not as companions of Jesus, but as a group of enthusiasts who, having heard of the appearance to Peter, thought that it presaged a general resurrection of the dead (cf. below, page 49). In the exalted state of mind which went with such expectation, the group would have become convinced that Jesus had appeared also to them, but have fallen apart when the hope that had led to its inception was not fulfilled. If it had persisted as an important group, Paul would surely have mentioned it again, and not merely named it once in a creed he quoted. That his mention of the group he calls 'the twelve' is not dependent on knowledge of the traditions which were later recorded in the gospels is readily explicable if the event is in fact unhistorical. The earliest Christians will simply have asserted that Christ died and was raised, and will have embodied these convictions in the kind of preaching formula that Paul here quotes. The next stage in the development will have been to offer supporting evidence by listing recipients of appearances, and this stage is represented in the Pauline passage. Such visions are, as Flew notes (p. 35), quite in accordance with religious psychology,[48] and Paul himself records that he and others were prone to supernatural visions (Colossians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). The next stage in the developing tradition was to give actual descriptions (not mere listings) of the appearances, as in the canonical gospels. Finally, in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, there is a description of the resurrection itself.[49] Flew is perfectly justified in saying that, in the course of the developing tradition, the claims about the resurrection 'become different sorts of claims' (p. 112). The theologian John Hick admits that the earliest references to the resurrection simply allege Jesus to be risen, and that the gospels elaborate this message into a catena of incompatible stories characterised by 'progressive degeneration from history to legend', so that we cannot tell whether he did actually emerge from his grave, or whether this was merely an idea based on 'a series of visions' of him 'as a glorified figure of exalted majesty'.[50] In other words, the stories of the appearances (the stage represented in the gospels) do not record events on which the resurrection faith was based, but are clumsy attempts to justify this faith by allegations of underlying events. That such divergent accounts could be written by authors who had already come to believe (for reasons that need to be investigated) that Jesus rose from the dead.
is perfectly plausible: that their narratives provide any basis for such belief is not.

7 Epistles and Gospels as Different Strata of Tradition

Habermas allows that there are 'thirty-five to sixty-five years' between the gospels and the events they record (p. 160). I find the historicity of many of these events questionable, and in this connection stress the gap both in time and in milieu between Paul's epistles and the gospels. Between them, as Flew implied on a number of occasions, lies the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which will have made it almost impossible for even Mark, the earliest evangelist, to have, from his non-Palestinian and gentile orientation, accurate views on earlier events there. By the time he wrote, the freedom of gentile Christians from the Jewish law, which had posed such serious problems for Paul, was established and taken for granted. He betrays an ignorance of Palestinian geography hardly compatible with any real knowledge of that country,[51] and he wrote for a Christian community so remote from Jewish ideas that he has laboriously to explain Jewish practices (e.g. at 7:3-4). Luke and Matthew 'edited' his gospel, each in a different way. Luke, for instance, rewrote Mark's thirteenth chapter so as to give specific reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, and also so as to avoid implying that it presaged the end of the world. (Jerusalem is to remain in gentile hands 'until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled', Luke 21:24.[52]) The reasonable inference is that years had passed since the destruction of the city. The earlier (pre-gospel) Christian literature knows Christians only as groups much given to quarrelling among themselves about their relation to Judaism and about the ontological status of Jesus (his relation to other supernatural powers, good and evil), but not as followers of a prominent teacher and wonder-worker who had thrown the Roman Empire into turmoil. It is only by harmonising this literature with the gospels and with Acts that Miethe can suppose that 'the claims of seeing Jesus's resurrected body are close enough in time to the original event that we have dozens, dozens of eyewitnesses running around, the church is causing all this havoc, the Roman empire is being affected, so much so that Caesar's household is involved, and Christians are being persecuted' (p. 102). Miethe can then triumphantly ask why, if such epoch-making claims were untrue, someone did not put a stop to them by disproving them. When Flew countered by asking why such epoch-making events were not remarked upon at all by writers of the time, he was told that he was in error, that they were indeed noticed--by Thallus (pp. 106-7).

8 The Origin of the Resurrection Faith

Defenders of the miracle of the resurrection take comfort in the thought that 'the legends created by excessive criticism have been less credible than the biblical reports themselves' (p. 134). What is here (as elsewhere in this book) being alluded to is the theory that Jesus did not die but merely 'swooned' on the cross, recovered consciousness in the cool tomb, crept out unnoticed when the earthquake rolled the stone away, and showed himself from time to time to his followers. Such nonsense is not the result of 'excessive criticism', but of yielding up only some of the traditional assumptions while clinging obstinately to others. In this example, belief in miracles has been surrendered, but the view that the gospels are based on eye-witness reports is retained, so that the miracle of resurrection is construed as a misunderstanding on the part of Jesus' entourage.

Flew points out (pp. 36, 82) that it is unsatisfactory to trace gospel resurrection narratives to deliberate lies by eye-witnesses of the crucifixion who concocted resurrection stories they knew to be false. Schmiedel shows how such stories as the sepulchre guard (unique to Matthew) and the empty tomb could have arisen in stages in perfectly good faith.[53] He imagines a Christian confronted with the charge that the disciples had stolen the body. The obvious retort would be: 'The Jews, we may be quite certain, saw to the watching of the sepulchre; they could very well have known that Jesus had predicted his rising again on the third day.' Another Christian, hearing this, might take it not for conjecture, but for a statement of fact, and pass it on as such. But if Roman soldiers guarded the tomb, they must have witnessed the resurrection. What, then, did they see of it? The attempt to answer this would give rise to the story of the angel coming down from heaven and rolling away the stone. This again might well have originated as conjecture, but have been passed on as fact. And in order to explain why the soldiers did not tell of their experiences, it would be said that the Jewish authorities bribed them to suppress the truth and circulate instead the rumour that the disciples had stolen the body. A similar series of processes could have led to the story of the empty tomb. If Jesus was risen, his grave must have been empty. Therefore no
hesitation was felt in declaring that, according to all reasonable conjecture, the women who had witnessed Jesus' death had wished to anoint his body and thus had come to know of the emptiness of the grave.' But why should not the disciples have gone to the sepulchre? Schmiedel answers: 'The earlier narratives represent them as fleeing and deserting Jesus at Gethsemane (Mark 14:50, Matthew 26:50), and remaining in concealment while they were in Jerusalem.' Luke's narrative changes this by very significantly omitting Mark's statement that they dispersed at Jesus' arrest, and by saying that 'certain disciples' (24:24) did in fact go to the sepulchre. John expands this, naming the visitors as Peter and the beloved disciple, and reporting on their rivalry. It is clear that if, for some reason, the belief that Jesus was risen was once established, all these other traditions could have arisen in the way indicated.

What, then, occasioned this belief in the first place? Habermas declares that Flew has no 'viable naturalistic theory' to explain the appearances (p. 71). Our psychologists are not very successful in explaining even ordinary mental phenomena, so one must not expect too much. Furthermore, both sides in this debate accept that Jesus was crucified ca AD 30 and that the gospel account that persons who became convinced of his resurrection included some who had known him before his death is not to be challenged. I do not myself believe that the earliest (pre-gospel) literature supports either of these premises, but I do not wish to make my account here in any way dependent on my rejection of them. So let us inquire how belief in Jesus' resurrection could have arisen among disciples who had known him personally.

Flew suggests (picking up Paul's statement that the raising on the third day occurred 'according to the scriptures') that the earliest Christians may have been led to this belief from their study of the Old Testament (pp. 8-9, 82). It is of course true that they could not fail to believe that so significant an event had been foretold. Every careful reader of the New Testament must notice how its authors twist and torture the most unpromising passages from the Jewish scriptures into meaning something about Jesus. But, as Elliott has noted, 'the resurrection seems to have baffled them, and no adequate Old Testament quotation is ever produced' (p. 82).

Nevertheless, the Jewish Wisdom literature does seem to have influenced the earliest Christian thinking on the resurrection. Proverbs 3:19 and 8:22-36 represent Wisdom as a supernatural personage, created by God before he created heaven and earth, mediating in this creation and leading man into the path of truth. In the Wisdom of Solomon (from the Old Testament apocrypha) Wisdom is the sustainer and governor of the universe who comes to dwell among men and bestows her gifts on them, although most of them reject her. 1 Enoch tells that, after being humiliated on earth, Wisdom returned to heaven. It is thus obvious that the humiliation on earth and exaltation to heaven of a supernatural personage, as preached by Paul and other early Christian writers, was well represented in the Jewish background. And it is not just that such ideas could have influenced Paul; they obviously did, for statements made about Wisdom in Jewish literature are made of Jesus in the Pauline letters. 1 Corinthians 1:23-5 comes very near to expressly calling the supernatural personage that had become man in Jesus 'Wisdom'.

There is another factor. Paul uses the phrase 'first fruits' apropos of Christ's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20) and also of the gift of the spirit to the Christian community (Romans 8:23). Both Jews and early Christians expected the end of the world to come quickly, and thought it would be presaged by a general resurrection and by the gift of the spirit. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that some persons should, as Paul records, come forward with 'gifts of the spirit' and make ecstatic utterances. But if the presence of the spirit was a sign that the first fruits of the harvest and of the end-time had already been gathered, then the resurrection must also be nigh. It may have been partly on this basis that early Christians came to believe that Christ risen, that resurrection happened, to this extent, already begun; and that a pledge had thus been given that a general resurrection of mankind would shortly follow.

In this connection I may mention Goguel's discussion of Talmudic evidence for the belief that the general resurrection will occur three days after the end of the world. Early Christians affirmed a close and direct relation between the resurrection of Jesus and this general resurrection, and so, he says, 'it is natural that the resurrection of the Christ was placed in a chronological rapport with his death similar to that which was thought would occur between the end of the world and the general resurrection'.[55] Fuller notes that this implies that Paul's reference...
to Jesus' resurrection 'on the third day' is not a chronological datum, but a dogmatic assertion: Christ's resurrection marked the dawn of the endtime, the beginning of the cosmic eschatological process of resurrection' (p. 27).

It is in any case clear that the earliest Christian thinking on the resurrection occurred within the context of Jewish apocalyptic thought: soon the end would come, the dead would be resurrected and judged, the righteous would then enjoy eternal blessedness, and the wicked would be punished. As the theologian J. L. Houlden says, 'in its origins the resurrection faith was part and parcel of a conviction that the last days, as foreseen in apocalyptic, were in process of realisation and soon to be consummated. In its totality that conviction was not borne out by events'.[56] Elliott suggests how this apocalyptic framework facilitated belief in Jesus' resurrection among disciples who, after his death, felt that he was still guiding them:

Resurrection was the natural first-century Jewish way of describing this continuing influence. . . . Some people thought that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead (Mark 6:14ff), and that Elijah's spirit lived on in Elisha (2 Kings 2:15) and legends exist in the New Testament telling of people who were raised from the dead by Jesus and, later, by Peter and Paul. All these provide the environment in which belief in Jesus' resurrection took shape and flourished. These Jewish ideas would and did find favour in the Hellenistic world outside, where stories of dying and rising gods were part of the native folk myths. Thus to talk of the resurrection of Jesus would not have seemed so strange. (p. 90)

Elliott adds that the earliest impression of Jesus' abiding power after his death may have been felt at his disciples' communal meals. 'It is significant how many of the Easter narratives have a eucharistic setting.' Many theologians understandably find this kind of explanation more acceptable than believing the muddled evidence for a supernatural event.

9 Conclusion

I find it impossible to resist Archbishop Carnley's conclusion that:

One of the most conclusive results of contemporary redactional studies of the New Testament traditions of the appearances, no less than of the empty tomb, is that an original nucleus of tradition has been developed during the course of its transmissions and that the resulting diversity can be explained by reference to apologetic motives and concerns along the way; the modification of the tradition is an inevitable by-product of the attempt to communicate and defend resurrection belief in different contexts to different people with different preconceptions and concerns. All this conditions what is said. The diversity of the resulting traditions cannot just be added together to form one synthetic account of what is supposed to have happened at the first Easter. (pp. 67-8)

He also finds that 'fundamentalist writers and ultra-conservative popularisers of the Easter faith do the church no lasting service by nervously seeking to defend a superficial harmony of the gospel narratives' (p. 27). His own conviction that 'our present experience of the Spirit of Christ convinces us that the stories of the empty tomb and appearances are substantially true' (p. 249n.) will not recommend itself to rationalists.[57] But his account of the New Testament evidence, and of what theologians since the end of the eighteenth century have made of it, is both full and fair. His book, like many of those to which I have made reference in this paper, shows how much students outside the faith can learn from the work of serious Christian scholars.

Notes

Once details of a work have been given in a note, subsequent references to it are given simply as page references in my text.

concerning the precise nature of this technique. In Chapter 9 of my own *The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, Buffalo, NY, 1982, I discuss the bearing of the gospel passion narratives on the evidence of the shroud. (This book, although published in the United States, is available from Pemberton Publishing in London.)


[4] Concerning the 'us' in the opening verse of Luke's gospel, Fitzmyer notes that it 'denotes the people who are now affected by salvation-history. . . . It includes the "many writers" as well as "the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" from whom Luke distinguishes himself in verse 2. It undoubtedly includes also Luke and other third-generation Christians, which is the sense of "us" in verse 2' (p. 293). On all this see further E. Haenchen's essay on the 'we'-passages in Acts in his *Gott und Mensch* (a collection of essays, including ten on the New Testament), Tübingen, 1965, pp. 262-3; also Haenchen's *Der Weg Jesu*, 2nd edn., Berlin, 1968, pp. 1-4.


[6] R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah. A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, Garden City, NY, 1979. Although Brown demonstrates conclusively that these infancy narratives, taught as literal truth for hundreds of years, are legendary, he none the less insists that they are 'worthy vehicles of the Gospel message' (p. 8) One of his reviewers is quoted by his publisher as finding that he has redressed 'the error . . . of a rationalism that was too blind to recognize the theological significance of the infancy narratives'. So now we know that, although they are untrue, they have a theological message of great significance, and there must be no more of what Brown calls 'rationalistic scoffing' (p. 25).


[11] Thus E. E. Ellis says in his commentary on the gospel of Luke (in the series New Century Bible, London, 1966, p. 63) that the title 'According to Luke' originated 'where a Church had two gospels and desired to distinguish them, or, at the latest, when the gospels were a collected unit'.

[12] Brown, op. cit. in note 5; cf. below, pp. 32-3.

[13] Ibid.


[15] The arguments for regarding 1 Peter as a pseudonymous work of *ca* AD 90 include its 'cultivated Greek, which employs many rhetorical devices' and the dependence of all its Old Testament quotations and allusions on the Greek Old Testament, not on the Hebrew original. If these two factors exclude authorship by a Galilean fisherman, its dependence on Pauline ideas shows that it cannot derive from the Peter who was completely at loggerheads with Paul and whom Paul dismissed as a hypocrite (Galatians 2:11ff). Even more decisively, '1 Peter shows no evidence at all of familiarity with the earthly Jesus, his life, his teaching, and his death, but makes reference only in a general way to the "sufferings" of Christ'. And 'it is scarcely conceivable that Peter would neither have sought to strengthen his authority by referring to his personal connections with Jesus nor have referred to the example of Jesus in some way' (W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, English translation of 17th revised edition, London, 1975, pp. 423-5).


[21] On form criticism and redaction criticism, see above, p. 14. The tools of redaction criticism are applied throughout R. H. Fuller's The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives, London, 1972, and his conclusion is that 'they have altered our whole understanding of the gospel narratives', which 'can no longer be read as direct accounts of what happened, but rather as vehicles for proclamation. . . . The Christian cannot be required to believe that the Risen One literally walked on earth in an earthly form, as in the Emmaus story [Luke 24:13-32], or that he physically ate fish as in the Lucan appearance to the disciples at Jerusalem, or that he invited physical touch as in the Thomas story' (pp. 172-3).


[27] In the first fifteen chapters of Acts, every area missionised is subordinated to Jerusalem in one way or another, and one reason why the author thus exaggerates the city's authority is his desire to show that Christianity had not lightly or readily broken away from its Jewish foundation. For details, see E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, English translation, Oxford, 1971, pp. 100ff, 461. (This book is a work of outstanding scholarship. The German original has gone through a number of editions.)


[38] See my The Historical Evidence for Jesus (as cited in note 1) chapter 7.


[42] Lampe notes that Luke's references to the physical reality of the risen Jesus 'reflect controversies about the Easter appearances. It was evidently being objected that the appearances may have been hallucinations, or that what the disciples saw was merely a ghost. In answer to this it was being asserted that the presence of the risen Lord was corporeal, tangible, and possessed of flesh and bones: this despite the obvious inconsistency with the Pauline tradition and with elements incorporated in Luke's own narrative, namely the sudden appearance within a room' (op. cit. in note 29, pp. 50-1).

[43] J. A. T. Robinson, The Human Face of God, London, 1973, pp. 130-1. Habermas would like to claim Robinson as an ally, but he can say no more of his than: 'I think he believed that some literal and objective experiences occurred to the disciples' (p. 117).


[47] On the twelve, see my Did Jesus Exist?, 2nd edn., London, 1986, chapter 5, where I refer to the arguments of W. Schmithals and G. Klein, which, as Beare has noted (see his commentary on Matthew, p. 240), are not to be lightly dismissed. Earlier theologians who denied (or at least doubted) that Jesus selected twelve as companions include J. Wellhausen (Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien, Berlin, 1905, p. 112; 2nd edn., 1911, pp. 138ff) and R. Bultmann (Theologie des Neuen Testaments, 6th edn., Tübingen, 1968, p. 40).

[48] Isaiah (6:1ff) was called to God's service by a vision of the Lord. Initiation into the pagan mystery religions involved 'a personal meeting with the God', and Isis afforded 'comfort through visions' (R. E. Witt, Isis in the Graeco-Roman World, London, 1971, pp. 153, 189).

[49] The stages in the developing tradition are summarised by Fuller, op. cit. in note 21, pp. 28-9, 66-7.


[51] To go (as Jesus is said to in Mark 7:31) from the territory of Tyre by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee 'is like travelling from Cornwall to London via Manchester' (H. Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, New Century Bible Series, London, 1976, p. 192). Again, Mark's 'references to movements across the Sea of Galilee are impossible to trace sequentially. Mention of specific locations near the sea are either unknown sites . . . or are patently inaccurate' (H. C. Kee, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 102-3). That place-names in Mark caused perplexity among early readers is shown by the wide range of variants in the textual tradition.

[52] On Luke's rewriting of Mark's chapter 13, see my The Historical Evidence for Jesus, as cited in note 1,
chapter 4. Fitzmyer concedes that 'Luke has modified his Marcan source in the light of what little (he knew about
the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans' (vol. cit. in note 3, p. 54).

[53] P. W. Schmiedel, art. cit. in note 23, paragraph 24e.

[54] I would merely note in this connection that neither Paul nor any other pre-gospel Christian author gives any
indication of where or when Jesus was active or of what he did. They do not, for instance, locate the crucifixion
as to time, place, or attendant circumstances. The fact that Paul believed Jesus' ghost to have been seen by
himself and his contemporaries tells us nothing of his convictions concerning the time and circumstances of
Jesus' death and of his resurrection three days later.

[55] M. Goguel, La foi de la résurrection de Jésus dans le christianisme primitif, Paris, 1933, pp. 169ff; quoted
in English translation by Fuller, p. 26.

'The apocalyptic hope provides the cultural and linguistic context in which the resurrection of Christ could be
proclaimed in the kerygma of the early Christian community.'

[57] Carnley states his position more fully on p. 248: 'The tradition of the "heavenly visions" of the raised Christ
did not stand alone in the experience of the first Christians. ... They had access to a second empirical anchor of
their resurrection belief and eschatological hope', namely 'the continuing presence of a reality in the life of the
Christian community which is identified as the "presence of Christ".' 'This additional datum is one to which we
have direct access in the present, so that it grounds our continuing Easter faith no less than theirs.'

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Infidels, Inc. All rights reserved.
Resurrection or anastasis is the concept of coming back to life after death. In a number of religions, a dying-and-rising god is a deity which dies and resurrects. Reincarnation is a similar process hypothesized by other religions, which involves the same person or deity coming back to live in a different body, rather than the same one. The resurrection of the dead is a standard eschatological belief in the Abrahamic religions. As a religious concept, it is used in two distinct respects: a belief in Resurrection debate. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. by Neil Godfrey. Historian Richard Carrier and theology scholar Jake O’Connell debate whether Paul believed that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body that died, or in a new body, leaving his old body behind to rot in the grave. access this site: On Paul’s Theory of Resurrection: The Carrier-O’Connell Debate (2008). From the above debate site