

## VI *The Historical Evidences*

Although true faith is essentially a voluntary affirmation independent of proof, the Scriptures nowhere demand committal without some reasonable basis. Between the extremes of gullibility and of chronic skepticism there is a middle ground of belief which may transcend the limitations of scientific logic, but which begins with historic facts. The frequent repetition of the material circumstances of the resurrection indicates that the disciples of Jesus accepted what had initially seemed incredible because they found that His predictions were supported by the events that followed His death. However these occurrences may be explained in the framework of modern psychology, they were convincing to the Lord's immediate associates, some of whom were as little disposed to believe that He would rise as is the most skeptical materialist today.

### **The Certainty of Jesus' Death**

One of the striking features of the Passion narrative is its emphasis on the certainty of Jesus' death. Although the details of crucifixion are sketched only in outline, each of the Gospels devotes at least two paragraphs to the fact of His death and to the burial. They stress the *fact* much more than the *manner* or the *process*.

It may be that the Gospel writers took for granted that their readers would be familiar with crucifixion, which was a common Roman method of capital punishment, and that a full description of the phenomena would be either superfluous or revolting. On the other hand, their selection of material must be considered in relation to their objective. They intended to convey clearly to their readers that the cross was not the end of Jesus' career, for they worshiped Him as a living Lord, not as a dead martyr. Nevertheless, the fact of death was a necessary prerequisite to the resurrection, for if Jesus did not really die, He could not have risen from the dead.

Though the foregoing statement may seem trite or labored, it is not superfluous. Recent attacks on the verity of Christianity have suggested that Jesus' death was either feigned or a mistaken impression drawn from a lapse into unconsciousness. Close logic demands a careful examination of the witnesses to His death.

Although the four Gospels may differ in their accounts of the events at the crucifixion, they agree in almost identical words that Jesus actually died. Mark says, "[he] gave up the ghost" (15:37); Matthew, "[he] yielded up his spirit" (27:50); Luke, "he gave up the ghost" (23:46); John, "he . . . gave up his spirit" (19:30). If one adds to these statements the numerous declarations of the Acts and Epistles that "Christ died . . .," there is unanimous agreement by the earliest witnesses.

Within the Gospel narratives are more detailed testimonies to support the foregoing quotations. The first witness was the centurion who commanded the execution squad at Calvary. He was probably a man of superior intelligence, for centurions in the Roman army were usually experienced soldiers, selected from the ranks on the basis of alertness and ability. Through his experiences on the battlefield and at executions the centurion became an expert in the grim art of killing and would have known whether Jesus had merely fainted or had actually expired. His comment, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39), shows by the tense of the verb *was* that, in his judgment, Jesus was dead.

John does not repeat the verdict of the centurion but preserves the story of the piercing of Jesus' side. Because the Passover Sabbath began late on Friday afternoon, the Jewish authorities had requested of Pilate that the bodies be removed lest their hanging in public view should incur ceremonial defilement. According to Roman custom, victims were usually left on the cross until they expired, and often the bodies were allowed to remain afterward as a warning to other offenders. If they were not already dead, the executioners broke their legs to hasten the end, or to cripple them should they survive. John states that the soldiers intended to follow this procedure at the crucifixion of Jesus. When they came to Him, they found that He was dead already. As a test they pierced His side with a spear, and "straightway there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). The separation of the dark red corpuscles from the thin whitish serum of the blood indicated that death had previously taken place.

When Joseph of Arimathea requested the body for burial (Matt. 27:57,58), Pilate summoned the centurion for confirmation of Jesus' decease. Since men frequently lived on a cross as long as three days, the governor feared that the petition might be a subterfuge. He accepted the word of the centurion as official certification that the execution had been completed. The Gospel statement (Mark 15:43,44) plainly implies that Pilate would not have relinquished the body if there had been any doubt about Jesus' death.

Of the multitude of persons who passed along the road to Calvary on that fateful morning the Gospels mention one outstanding group--the women. Probably not many of the Twelve were present. Matthew and Mark say that they had fled at the time of the arrest in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50), although John and Peter followed to the trial in the chambers of the high priest (John 18:15,16). The women stayed together and were near the cross when Jesus breathed His last. In their group were Mary, Jesus' mother, her sister Salome, Mary of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. Not only did they witness His suffering and death, but they followed the body as it was taken down from the cross, and watched the burial in Joseph's garden (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). The four Gospels aver that on the morning of the first day of the week these same women came to the tomb, bearing spices to complete the preparation of the body for burial. Had they been unsure of His death, they would not have undertaken so disagreeable and dangerous a mission.

The final witness to the actuality of Jesus' death was the burial party composed of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council of the Jewish nation, who had become a follower of Jesus (Matt. 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50,51; John 19:38). Nicodemus, who assisted him, was "the teacher of Israel" (John 3:10), and also a member of the council (7:50). These men would have discerned the difference between a comatose body and a corpse. They could scarcely have handled Jesus' remains without knowing whether there was still life in them or not. If there had been even the faintest evidence of animation, they would not have embalmed Him and buried Him in a tomb.

A consideration of the evidence leaves no room for doubt that Jesus died. The skilled observer, the physical results of the spear-thrust, the official pronouncement of the government, the obvious intention of the women who came to the tomb, and the committal by His aristocratic friends remove any possibility of illusion or deceit.

An important question remains. What became of the body? It could not have been brought out of a coma; it could not have been revived by the action of the disciples; it did not remain in the

tomb long enough to disintegrate and disappear into dust; and yet it can be traced by the continuity of observation from the cross to the last resting-place in the garden. The only acceptable conclusion is that something mysterious and magnificent happened on the morning of the third day to cancel the work of death and to transform the fleshly organism into the instrument of glory.

The verity of so stupendous an event as the resurrection of Christ should not be dependent upon mere hearsay or upon subjective opinion. If it is the basis for a faith which alters the course of human decisions and which becomes the ground of assurance of eternal life, it must have some qualifications for commending itself to the acceptance of intelligent men. Historic proofs cannot compel belief, but they can facilitate it by showing that the words or deeds which call for faith are inherently probable. Faith is fixed on the Person of Christ, not solely on the events; but if the events are real, so is the Person who caused them.

The doctrine of the physical resurrection of Christ would not have been propounded had it not been believed fully by the disciples who first preached it. To assert that Jesus of Nazareth was alive after His crucifixion would be an extremely dangerous statement to make in Jerusalem during the first few weeks after His death, since it would alarm His enemies and evoke their vengeful wrath. He had been executed on the charge of insurrection against Rome, and if He were still at large, those who knew of His whereabouts would be under grave suspicion of promoting a conspiracy.

Furthermore, if He had risen from the dead, His enemies were thereby put in the position of having killed their Messiah--a charge which the early preachers of the church did not hesitate to make (Acts 2:23,36; 3:14,15; 4:10; 5:30,31; 7:52). To voice such an accusation publicly without sufficient evidence to support it would be foolhardy. Why should these followers of Jesus have risked imprisonment and death for a lost cause? Why should they have asserted that Jesus had risen if their opponents could prove that He was still in the tomb? The evidence must have been strong enough from the beginning to make the case for Christian faith unshakable.

The positive evidence for the resurrection may be divided into three categories: (1) the material facts concerning the displaced stone, the empty tomb, and the graveclothes; (2) the physical appearances of Christ described by numerous witnesses; and (3) the historical results, which include the personal transformation of the disciples, the advent of the Holy Spirit, and the origin and growth of the Christian church. From the study of these phenomena one may attain a fair conclusion concerning what actually happened to the body of Jesus. The records, though in some instances fragmentary, are nevertheless independent. They bear every mark of being the product of individual writers who either were eyewitnesses or had access to the reports of eyewitnesses. No one of them possessed a complete knowledge of all facts involved, but their cumulative testimony is too direct and too sincere to be set aside as hallucination or fabrication. On the cardinal facts the accounts coincide, and where differences occur they can be explained by the emotional state or by the circumstances of the witnesses.

The evidences for the resurrection fitted naturally into the framework of the disciples' life in the forty days between the crucifixion and the ascension and were incidental to their current procedure, though these experiences modified that procedure when their significance was realized. For instance, the women discovered that the tomb was empty when they went to anoint the body of Jesus; they were not summoned by an alarm because the body had vanished. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples in the upper room occurred while they were assembled to

discuss plans based on the assumption that He was forever removed from their world; they were not conducting a seance to establish contact with Him. The astonishment which the evidence evoked, and the subsequent change in the disciples' thinking, proved that the events of the forty days were unanticipated and were consequently not manufactured to fit the occasion.

## **The Material Evidence**

### **The Displaced Stone**

The material evidence for the resurrection deals with the physical facts that were immediately apparent to contemporary observers. The first and most obvious of these was the displaced stone. Many of the tombs in Palestine were hollowed out of soft limestone rock, leaving a low doorway for access. Outside the doorway and parallel to the wall of the tomb, a narrow inclined groove was cut in which was set on edge a large circular stone, usually weighing not less than a ton. While the tomb was vacant, the stone was held at one side by a cleat or small block placed beneath it. After a body was placed in the tomb the cleat was removed, and the stone settled into place covering the door completely. Because of its weight it could be rolled back only by the united effort of several strong men, and it made an effective barrier against vandalism or robbery.

All four Gospels agree that the tomb of Joseph was closed in conventional fashion. Matthew (27:60) alone states that the stone was rolled against the door, but the others speak of its removal, which is a tacit admission that it had been placed in position. It could not have been moved by the women, nor could the disciples have moved it without bringing together a group large enough to make secrecy improbable.

Matthew adds that the chief priests and Pharisees demanded sealing of the tomb by the Roman government. Recalling the prediction of Jesus that He would rise from the dead (John 2:19), and fearing that His disciples might attempt to steal the body in order to simulate fulfillment of His words, they asked for official action. Matthew's account of Pilate's reply is ambiguous. Pilate did not take full responsibility for closing the tomb or for appointing a guard. "Ye have a guard," he said; "go, make it as sure as ye can" (Matt. 27:65). It is possible that Pilate sent a delegate with them to seal the stone, if that meaning can be read into "Ye have a guard." It is more likely that he was eager to dismiss the case, and that he was brushing the Jews off by telling them to make their own seal and to appoint their own guard from the Temple police (27:65,66).

Either alternative, however, guarantees that the tomb could not have been opened without incurring the serious risk of immediate detection and prosecution. If the seal were only that of the Sanhedrin, they had the knowledge and consent of Pilate to support them. A handful of disorganized disciples, or the timid coterie of women could scarcely have removed the body if it were watched by an armed band. Matthew also asserts that the removal of the stone was witnessed by the guards, who were terrified by the angelic messenger, and that they immediately hastened into the city to report the weird occurrence to the chief priests (28:11,12).

When the women reached the garden early on the first day of the week, the stone had already been rolled aside. Matthew (28:2), writing from the standpoint of the guard, says that an angel removed it. Mark (16:3) recounts the debate which the women held among themselves, wondering how they would remove the stone, which they knew had been set in place. They were

surprised to find that it had been moved, and that there was ready access to the burial chamber. Luke (24:2) follows the same line of thought, "they found the stone rolled away from the tomb." John (20:1) agrees, though he mentions only Mary Magdalene by name.

The witnesses, therefore, agree unanimously that (1) Jesus was buried in a tomb hollowed out of living rock; (2) a large circular stone was rolled in front of it; (3) the women realized that if they were to complete their sad errand somebody would have to open the door of the tomb; (4) they did not expect to find it open; and (5) when they did, the discovery was a distinct shock to them. If the disciples had plotted to remove the body, as the Sanhedrin had feared, the women had no knowledge of their plan. Certainly they had not the strength to accomplish such a task themselves, nor had they anticipated an attempt.

The disciples could not have opened the tomb without becoming involved in an armed clash with the guard. Even if they had forced their way into the sepulchre, their action would have been reported to the authorities and would have been cause for immediate arrest and prosecution. The excuse of the guards, "His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (Matt. 28:13), was patently false. If the guards were asleep, how did they know what happened? If their charge could be proved, why were not the disciples seized and questioned? How could a small body of men have engaged in a fight and then have carried off the corpse of a full-grown man without having been noticed by at least one person? Finally, if Joseph of Arimathea had placed the body in his private garden, how could this action take place without his knowledge and without interrogation by the Pharisees? Since they knew where the body had been placed, why did they pursue their investigation no further? If, as Matthew (28:12-14) says, they were merely creating a rumor to screen the truth that Jesus had risen, and to cover their own confusion, the narrative becomes coherent. The power of God had intervened to break the seal, and the stone was rolled aside by a divine hand to give mute witness that "the man of mystery had gone his way."<sup>1</sup>

## **The Empty Tomb**

A second aspect of the material witness is that the tomb was empty. The Gospels agree that the body had disappeared. Matthew's narrative says, "And the angel answered. . . . He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (28:5,6). The imperfect tense of *lay* (Gr. *ekeito*, "was lying," or "used to lie") implies that the body had been laid on the stone shelf inside the tomb but was no longer there. The Markan account is substantially like that of Matthew. Luke differs by stating that the women "entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 24:3) before the angelic messengers explained the reason for its absence (24:4-8). John gives the impression that Mary Magdalene's report of the absence of Jesus' body preceded her investigation of the interior of the tomb (20:1,2). She saw that the stone had been removed, and consequently concluded that the body was gone. Peter and John, who followed her, actually looked inside, and corroborated her deduction.

The uniform testimony that the tomb was untenanted is strong confirmation of the resurrection. If the stone had been rolled aside by accident, or if an intruder had been interrupted in the act of robbing the tomb, the body would still have remained in its place. Since the body was not there, it must have been removed. But how? A corpse is not an easy object to transport for any distance, or to conceal. More than one person would have been needed to carry it away, and in

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1 Epigram by Edwin Markham.

multiplying assistants the likelihood of secrecy would have lessened. It is almost incredible that Jesus' body could have been spirited away to another burial place either by Joseph of Arimathea or by the disciples without some hint, dropped accidentally or intentionally.

The unfeigned surprise and concern of the disciples are good proof that they neither anticipated a removal nor were a party to it. Psychologically such action was impossible, for they were too disorganized by sorrow and too fearful of the authorities to attempt the venture. At the betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane "all the disciples left him, and fled" (Matt. 26:56). When they met again after His death they convened behind locked doors (John 20:19) "for fear of the Jews." They were not ready to initiate so bold a coup as the rescue of Jesus' body from the custody of armed police. Since they did not understand Jesus' prediction of His resurrection, they could not anticipate it and would be quite content to leave His body in Joseph's care, for they could scarcely find a better place. Transfer and reinterment would have been farthest from their thoughts.

The enemies of Jesus would not be likely to disturb the body, for their interests would be served best by leaving it in a fixed and well-known grave. If He had predicted resurrection, they could always refute His claim by pointing to an acknowledged burial place. Such, indeed, was their purpose in setting the watch. If He did not rise in three days, He would not rise at all, and their verdict would be justified.

Kirsopp Lake suggests that the evidence of the empty tomb is inconclusive because the women did not visit the place where Jesus was actually buried.

It is seriously a matter for doubt whether the women were really in a position to be quite certain that the tomb which they visited was that in which they had seen Joseph of Arimathea bury the Lord's body. The neighborhood of Jerusalem is full of rock tombs, and it would not be easy to distinguish one from another without careful notes. . . . It is very doubtful if they were close to the tomb at the moment of burial. . . . It is likely that they were watching from a distance, and that Joseph of Arimathea was a representative of the Jews rather than of the disciples. If so, they would have had but a limited power to distinguish between one rock tomb and another close to it. The possibility, therefore, that they came to the wrong tomb is to be reckoned with, and it is important because it supplies the natural explanation of the fact that whereas they had seen the tomb closed, they found it open. . . .

If it were not the same, the circumstances all seem to fall into line. The women came in the early morning to a tomb which they thought was the one in which they had seen the Lord buried. They expected to find a closed tomb, but they found an open one; and a young man . . . guessing their errand, tried to tell them that they had made a mistake in the place. "He is not here," said he, "see the place where they laid him," and probably pointed to the next tomb. But the women were frightened at the detection of their errand, and fled. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Lake concludes this discussion by saying, "The empty tomb is for us doctrinally indefensible and historically insufficiently accredited."

This objection will not bear close scrutiny. The Gospels, as Lake admits, state emphatically that

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<sup>2</sup> Kirsopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), pp. 250-253.

the women witnessed the burial of Jesus and noted the exact spot where His body was laid to rest (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). Had the tomb been one of many in a public burying ground, it is conceivable that in the semi-darkness of early dawn and under the emotional stress of the unusual situation the women could have become confused. Since, however, the interment was in a private garden, they could scarcely have been mistaken. There were several present at the burial, and not all of them would have forgotten the true location in three days' time. Furthermore, the tomb was presumably the only one in the garden, and there would have been no alternative choice.

Lake fails to explain why the "young man" would have been present either in a public cemetery or in a private garden at such an early hour. What conceivable motive would have drawn a stranger there? If he were not a stranger but one of the disciples, conducting an independent investigation, why should his presence have terrorized the women? Mark's account, on which Lake relies, states that he was seated *inside* the tomb, so that he could scarcely have meant that they were at the wrong place when he said (Mark 16:6), "behold, the place where they laid him!" The main implication of his invitation was not that the women had come to the wrong place, but that Jesus was no longer there; they could see where He had been laid, but the body had vanished.

Finally, the empty tomb cannot be explained by the normal disintegration of the body. Decay would only have begun in three days' time and would not have reached the state of complete chemical dissolution. To assume that the body of Jesus evaporated into gases within three days of death is to project a miracle almost as great as the resurrection itself. G. D. Yarnold, in his recent work *Risen Indeed*,<sup>3</sup> suggests that the material body of the Lord ceased to exist, or was annihilated. The presence of the scars on the Lord's body does not accord with his theory, but in any case Yarnold is compelled to conclude that the tomb was empty.

## **The Graveclothes**

Another important factor in the material witness is the state of the graveclothes. When Joseph, with Nicodemus' assistance, took the body from the cross, he carried it quickly to the garden, where he "wrapped [Gr. *enetulixen*] it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb" (Matt. 27:59-60). Mark's language is almost identical, though he says, "wound [Gr. *eneilesen*] him in the linen cloth" (Mark 15:46). Luke (23:53) corroborates these statements, using the same word as Matthew. John says that Joseph and Nicodemus "bound" (Gr. *edesan*) His body in "swathes" or "bandages" (Gr. *othoniois*), using about one hundred pounds of spices, which Nicodemus furnished. He specifies that they followed the usual burial custom of the Jews in the wrapping of the corpse (John 19:39,40).

Is the difference between the Johannine and Synoptic accounts significant? The pressure under which Joseph and Nicodemus were acting would favor a hasty wrapping of the body in a single linen sheet, which would not consume much time. On the other hand, the author of the Fourth Gospel seems to have been well acquainted with Nicodemus (3:1, 7:50, 19:39), from whom he probably derived this information. The "linen cloth" may very well have been a general term, while the "swathes" or "bandages" are more specific names for the materials used in the ceremonies.

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3 G. D. Yarnold, *Risen Indeed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 22.

In preparing a body for burial according to Jewish custom, it was usually washed and straightened, and then bandaged tightly from the armpits to the ankles in strips of linen about a foot wide. Aromatic spices, often of a gummy consistency, were placed between the wrappings or folds. They served partially as a preservative and partially as a cement to glue the cloth wrappings into a solid covering. When the body was thus encased, a square piece of cloth was wrapped around the head and tied under the chin to keep the lower jaw from sagging. John's term "bound" (Gr. *edesan*) is in perfect accord with the language of Luke 23:53, where the writer says that the body was *rolled* (literal translation of *enetulixen*) in linen. John uses the same verb to describe the head cloth, which was found "rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:7). The language implies that the body of Jesus was not carelessly entombed, although Joseph may not have been able to complete all of the fine requirements of preparation. Had he done so, the women would not have come to the tomb on the morning after the Sabbath.

The procedure is confirmed by the account of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:44). His body appeared in the doorway of the tomb "bound hand and foot with grave-clothes [Gr. *dedemenos . . . keiriais*]; and his face was bound about with a napkin [*soudarioi*]." The words "bound" and "napkin" are the same that are used in describing Jesus' burial. If Lazarus were "bound hand and foot" so that he had to be specially released, the same method was doubtlessly employed in the burial of Jesus.

On the morning of the first day of the week the body of Jesus had vanished, but the graveclothes were still there. Neither Matthew nor Mark mentions them specifically in the account of the first visit to the tomb. Their presence may be implied in the angel's words, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6; cf. Mark 16:6), for unless some marker were left it would be impossible to tell where the body had been deposited. A plain stone slab would carry no visible impression. John corroborates this deduction by his statement that Mary Magdalene, on her second visit to the tomb, saw "two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (John 20:12). While custom may have usually decreed the position in which a body was laid, the presence of graveclothes would make it unmistakable. This implication becomes a certainty in the statement that the unnamed disciple and Simon Peter both saw the clothes in the tomb (20:4-9; Luke 24:12).

A careful examination of the Johannine narrative shows that the author attached considerable importance to this evidence. In describing the hurried trip of Peter and John to the sepulchre, he uses three distinct verbs for *see* in relation to the graveclothes. In the sequence of the action, the unnamed disciple, presumably John himself, reached the tomb first. Having heard from Mary Magdalene that the body had been removed, he proceeded to investigate on his own behalf. Bending down to look in through the dark doorway, he could see the outline of the linen graveclothes lying on the shelf. Satisfied that the body must still be there, even though the tomb had been opened, he withdrew to await Peter, who had been following him. He "saw" (*blepei*) the clothes in the same way that he would "see" anything else. His eyes registered that they were visible, and consequently real. The observation was casual, but not inaccurate.

Peter arrived in a few seconds and did not content himself with a cautious glance at the tomb from the outside. Unhesitatingly he entered the sepulchre and stood there gazing at the clothes. The verb translated "seeth" (Gr. *theorei*) implies careful observation, watching for the purpose of apprehending the significance of an object or event. Peter evidently stood for several moments in silent contemplation of the graveclothes--long enough to make his partner wonder why Peter should be spending so much time within the tomb when he, the first comer, had been able to

satisfy his curiosity with a glance.

Why should the condition of the graveclothes excite Peter's amazement? The Fourth Gospel specifies that they were lying just where they were when the body was in them, and that "the napkin . . . was . . . not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:7). Why should this arrangement have seemed peculiar?

There is a strong hint that the clothes were not folded as if Jesus had unwound them and then deposited them in two neat piles on the shelf. The word used to describe the napkin or head cloth does not connote a flat folded square like a table napkin, but a ball of cloth bearing the appearance of being rolled around an object that was no longer there. The wrappings were in position where the body had lain, and the head cloth was where the head had been, separated from the others by the distance from armpits to neck. The shape of the body was still apparent in them, but the flesh and bone had disappeared.

If this hypothesis be correct, and it seems to follow the facts, how was the corpse extricated from the wrappings, since they would not slip over the curves of the body when tightly wound around it? No robbers would ever have rewound the wrappings in their original shape, for there would not have been time to do so. They would have flung the cloths down in disorder and fled with the body. Fear of detection would have made them act as hastily as possible.

While Peter was cogitating over this puzzle, the other disciple entered the tomb. The account says that "he saw, and believed" (20:8). The word "saw" (Gr. *eidon*) implies mental perception or realization as well as physical sight. In modern language, he "clicked." The answer to the enigma was that Jesus had risen, passing through the graveclothes, which He left undisturbed as a silent proof that death could not hold Him, nor material bonds restrain Him.

The Lukan testimony to Peter's visit (Luke 24:12) is uncertain, for it is omitted by the Western text of Codex D, the Old Latin versions, and Marcion, and seems to duplicate the language of John 20:5. It does, however, occur in the text of Aleph and B, two of the oldest uncial manuscripts, and in the "Caesarean text" of Theta. If it is a subsequent addition from John, it represents an early tradition similar to the numerous other "interpolations" that occur in the last few chapters of Luke. Its presence is not necessary to the foregoing argument, nor does its absence detract from it.

The interpretation of these phenomena compels the candid reader to admit that the sudden disappearance of Jesus' body is a mystery not easily resolved by ordinary explanations. The theory of theft was propounded by the Jewish Sanhedrin,<sup>4</sup> and was held by their successors, but it is not adequate to account for the presence of the graveclothes, nor was it coherent as reported by the guard. If, on the other hand, the reality of the resurrection be conceded, can it be reconciled with the known laws of physics? Jesus had unquestionably died, and had passed beyond the possibility of resuscitation from suspended animation. Since the process of death had already begun, as the "blood and water" (19:34) showed, He could not by any ordinary standards have returned to life. It is a truism of the medical profession that if a man is pronounced dead and subsequently regains consciousness, the original diagnosis was incorrect. If Jesus did return to life, some new potency must have operated in Him that not only arrested decay but restored His body to its normal functions.

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4 See Matt. 28:11-15.

Again, if His body passed through the graveclothes and through encircling walls without disturbing the organization of either, there must have been some change in its physical constitution. No ordinary man can try to walk through a wall or through a closed door without leaving some visible effects both upon the wall and upon himself. Nevertheless, after the resurrection Jesus appeared and disappeared at will (Luke 24:15,16,31,36; John 20:19,26), whether on the open roadway where any person approaching could be seen from a distance, or within a room, the door of which was closed and barred.

The Gospel writers formulated no scientific theories to explain the resurrection. Research had not advanced sufficiently in their day to permit hypotheses of the constitution of matter that would provide a reasoned basis for such a phenomenon. Their non-scientific approach confirms their truthfulness, for since they could record only what they had seen, they could not have fabricated the event to fit a preconceived theory. If the various accounts seem disconnected and desultory, they reflect the artless honesty of men who endeavored to describe a unique experience in factual terms, and who were not sophisticated enough to invent a "scientific" explanation.

The apostles did not attribute the resurrection to magic or to necromancy; nor are there in the Biblical accounts superstitious allusions to witchcraft such as characterized similar narratives in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, the Gospels dismiss the thought that these material happenings were the result of hallucinations or the idle dreams of superstitious minds. The disciples themselves were critical of the initial reports and refused to take them seriously (Luke 24:11,23,24,41; John 20:25). They were unwilling to accept the testimony concerning the empty tomb unless they could see Jesus for themselves. Only when the material evidence was supplemented by direct contact with the living Lord did they acknowledge the fact that He had truly risen.

Recent research has supplied two possible ways of accounting for the physical accompaniments, though neither can be established conclusively. The atomic theory of matter propounded by modern physics and generally accepted by scientists contends that matter is not a solid impenetrable block, but that it is composed of points of force in constant motion which are organized by well-defined patterns. These "points," or electrons, neutrons, protons, etc., are comparable to a solar system, in which one revolves about the other with an appreciable space between them. Thousands of these tiny systems or atoms constitute the molecules which, in turn, make up the various types of matter, whether it be organic, like living tissue, or inorganic, like metal, stone, or plastic. Each has its own particular pattern of forces, operating in its own way.

The visible shape of matter may be identical for various materials. For instance, a human body could be duplicated in wax so that if it were motionless, the original would be hardly distinguishable from the copy. The properties of the two, however, would be different, since flesh is living and animate, while wax is dead and inert. Flesh has power of self-locomotion; wax does not. It is conceivable that a body could be composed of matter in an even more animated state, so that its functioning would be on a higher and different level. If its atomic organization were of such a pattern that it could interlace with the pattern of other matter, a body so structured of one kind of matter could pass through a wall of the other without leaving a trace. Perhaps the resurrection body of Jesus was so constituted that it could penetrate other matter without becoming disarranged or disorganized itself.

A somewhat different explanation of the resurrection is based on its possible relation to the

concept of dimension. To a person living in a world of only two dimensions, length and breadth with no height or depth, any stranger moving through that world in a third dimension would be seen only as footprints alternately appearing and disappearing. His three-dimensional bulk would be invisible, and the phenomena of the disappearing footprints would be quite inexplicable. He would be a perennial miracle to the inhabitants of Flatland.

If someone could step out of the eternal world into ours, his advent, career, and ultimate return to the heavenly country would be one constant marvel. He could become visible or invisible at will, changing his relation to suit his convenience or desire in much the same fashion as Jesus appeared and vanished during the period of forty days before His ascension. While this explanation is wholly hypothetical, it possesses a degree of plausibility and is definitely connected with the concept of realities which are not perceivable by ordinary instruments.

The foregoing theories are not proffered as final, nor is there any intention of minimizing the divine aspect of the resurrection by a pseudoscientific explanation. The concepts of atomic interchange and of a fourth dimension are at best only analogies or illustrations of a different category of being which transcends the ordinary plane of living, though it may intersect the phenomenal world of space and time. Unquestionably, the physical evidences of the resurrection mark an event which belongs to this world but did not originate in it. The resurrection of Christ is an integral part of history although it cannot be accounted for by purely natural causes. The displaced stone, the vacant tomb, and the empty graveclothes are the eloquent witnesses that one life has been able to overcome death, and to leave its imprint on the material world.

### **The Physical Appearances**

The case for the validity of the resurrection, founded upon the genuineness and accuracy of Jesus' predictions and upon the facts of the empty tomb and the graveclothes, would be incomplete without the direct witness of His personal appearances. Deductions from the material evidence might confirm the probability of the event but would not make it a reality to the disciples. As one of them stated, "And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not" (Luke 24:24). The failure to establish personal contact with the risen Lord left them in doubt concerning the interpretation of the material evidence. Some further confirmation was needed to make its message convincing.

The acuteness of this problem was recognized by the first preachers of the Christian church. From the outset they had to contend with the false rumor spread by the Jewish rulers that Jesus' disciples stole His body while the soldiers slept (Matt. 28:11-15). Inconsistent as it was, the disciples could not combat it easily unless they had some positive experience to offer as a refutation. Confronting a learned and hostile hierarchy who had opposed Jesus bitterly during His lifetime, the apostles did not dare to make indefensible assertions. To claim falsely that Jesus had risen from the dead would expose them to ridicule and would invite disaster to their cause. They were too astute to offer to the public baseless legends or wild dreams as the initial proof of their new faith.

Eleven manifestations of Jesus are cited in the Gospels and Epistles as evidence for the resurrection. They differ widely in time, setting, persons involved, and results. They agree unanimously, however, that His physical presence was attested by competent witnesses, who were willing to stake their lives on the fact that He had risen.

According to the Fourth Gospel, Mary Magdalene was the first to meet the living Lord. In company with other women she had set out for Joseph's garden, carrying spices to complete the anointing of Jesus' body after the hasty burial. In their nervous excitement and eagerness they had failed to arrange for access to the tomb, and while they hurried through the dim streets they debated how they would obtain entrance. As they approached the site, they perceived that the sepulchre was already open. A comparison of the Gospel records suggests that Mary Magdalene, observing that the stone had been rolled from the door and fearing that the body had been removed, rushed away to inform the disciples (John 20:1,2). Her companions remained at the tomb for further investigation (Matt. 28:11; Mark 16:1-4; Luke 24:1-3,10).

Mary's disconcerting news aroused the disciples, two of whom immediately visited the tomb (John 20:3-10). Finding no trace of Jesus except the empty graveclothes, they concurred in her apprehension concerning the body but could add no positive evidence.

In the meantime, Mary slowly retraced her steps to the garden, drawn by an irresistible desire to visit the place where she had last seen her Lord. Peering through the doorway with tear-filled eyes, she spied two angels who inquired the cause of her sorrow. As she explained mournfully the reason for her errand, she became aware of a person standing behind her. Assuming that it was the gardener, she questioned him, hoping for a solution to the mystery.

Calling her by name, the stranger revealed that he was Jesus. With intense emotion she flung her arms around His feet, as if to hold Him forever. Quietly and firmly He said, "Cease clinging to me! I have not yet made my final ascent to the Father. Go, and tell my brethren that I am still here" (20:17, paraphrased).

Mary's reaction was the natural recoil of surprise, following by the ecstasy of realization. Recognition was not immediate because she did not expect to see Him, and because her tears obscured her vision. Had Jesus been surrounded by an aura of glory or had He spoken in tones of thunder, she would have known Him instantly. She mistook Him for the gardener because nothing in His garb or bearing suggested a supernatural visitor.

On the other hand, it seems scarcely possible that Mary's sorrow and confusion could have prevented the recognition of one whom she had seen alive so recently. It is more likely that the changed appearance of the resurrection body would have been the obstacle. Just as a lapse of time alters the face of an old friend so that he seems unfamiliar until he introduces himself by voice and manner, the resurrection had changed Jesus. The difference in His appearance was enough to prevent instant recognition, but the continuity of personality assured His identity.

The women who had accompanied Mary Magdalene also saw the risen Christ. The Synoptic accounts (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11) differ in some details but agree generally that they entered the tomb and were astounded to find angelic visitants, who conveyed the message that Jesus would join His disciples in Galilee. Overcome by fear, the women fled in panic. Matthew adds the comment that Jesus Himself greeted them as they went to inform the disciples. They seem to have recognized Him more easily than did Mary, perhaps because they were less preoccupied with their own sorrow. Their reaction was like hers for, "they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him" (Matt. 28:9). To them also He was tangible, and therefore real.

A private interview with Peter is included in the series which Paul enumerates in I Corinthians 15. The conversation is not recorded, but there are other references that substantiate the event. Mark quotes the angels' command to the women as follows: ". . . tell his disciples *and Peter*, He goes before you into Galilee" (Mark 16:7). Luke also alludes to a personal appearance which must have taken place on the first day (Luke 24:34). Singling out Peter from the others shows that Jesus had marked him for special attention. Probably He dealt with His vacillating disciple about the denial and cleared away the sense of alienation and loss which had enshrouded him with despair. This contact with the living Lord confirmed the mute testimony of the graveclothes and rendered Peter's joyous announcement to his colleagues remarkably convincing. A reflection of this encounter appears in his subsequent teaching, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . ." (I Pet. 1:3).

The meeting of Jesus with two lesser-known disciples was recorded in detail by Luke (24:13-35). While Cleopas and his companion were walking toward Emmaus, a village about seven miles distant from Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> they were conversing about the shocking reversal of Jesus' fortunes. His dramatic arrival in Jerusalem, climaxing His phenomenal career, had raised public expectation to a high pitch. During the Passover week His original and authoritative teaching and His clever overthrow of opponents' arguments made Him the focus of interest. Undoubtedly a large segment of the populace, as well as His own disciples, were sure that the opportune moment for action had arrived, and that Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel.

The rude shock of His sudden betrayal and ignominious death blasted their hopes, leaving them dazed and disillusioned. They could not reconcile the paradox of His miraculous powers and His meek surrender to His enemies. The rumors of the empty tomb and of the angelic visitors seemed unconvincing, especially since investigation had not yet produced positive evidence that He was alive.

The theme of their discussion was so engrossing that they failed to notice the presence of another traveler. At first they did not recognize Him, for "their eyes were holden" (Luke 24:16). His question, "What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk?" conveyed to them the impression that He was unfamiliar with the news. His apparent ignorance astounded them, for Cleopas' reply indicated that even casual visitors were acquainted with recent events in Jerusalem.

The persistent stranger pressed His question further by inquiring what kind of things had happened. The disciples' answer revealed the limitation of their knowledge and spiritual experience. "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. . . . But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel" (24:19,21). Instead of rejoicing in the triumph of the resurrection they were overcome by the frustration of their hopes. Although there had been some reports that He was alive, these despondent disciples had dismissed them as baseless and were consequently ready to concede that the cause was lost.

Contrary to normal expectation, Jesus did not censure them for failing either to recognize Him or to take the testimony of the women seriously. In strong language, He reproved them for not believing the prophets of the Old Testament. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all

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5 Codex Sinaiticus reads 160 stadia, or seventeen miles. See Emil G. Kraeling, *Bible Atlas* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1956), p. 409. The actual site of Emmaus is disputed.

that the prophets have spoken!" (24:25). The language implies that the Messianic pattern was already fixed in the divine plan and was revealed clearly enough so that the disciples should in some measure have anticipated the Passion. Instead of being disappointed, they should have realized that the divine program was being fulfilled.

The interest of the two disciples increased as the stranger developed His interpretation of the Old Testament, and the familiar prophecies gradually gained a new significance. Fascinated by this mysterious teacher, they were reluctant to part with Him. When they reached Emmaus, because the afternoon was waning rapidly they offered Him the common courtesy of entertainment.

At the evening meal Jesus was accorded the place of the guest who, according to Jewish custom, offered a prayer of thanksgiving and first broke the bread. There may have been a characteristic gesture, or a familiar prayer, that revealed His identity. In the moment of recognition He vanished. Fully assured of Jesus' resurrection, and recalling the compelling force of His teaching, Cleopas and his friend hastened back to Jerusalem to share their experience with the other disciples.

The Johannine narrative of the meeting in Jerusalem adds the pertinent comment that the doors of the room were "shut" for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). While the language does not necessarily mean that the door was locked, the uniform usage of "shut" in the New Testament connotes the effective exclusion of visitors or invaders. The disciples, fearing arrest, had taken every precaution to debar spies from their conference, and the unaccountable presence of a stranger threw them into consternation. As mysteriously as Jesus had disappeared from the supper at Emmaus, He reappeared in the chamber at Jerusalem. Since He could not have entered by the door, the only reasonable alternative, which John evidently purposed to imply, is that Jesus penetrated the walls of the room and became visible.

Jesus' greeting, "Peace" (20:19,21), was intended to remove the tension caused by His miraculous arrival. He reassured the terrified men by showing them His hands and His side, which still bore the scars of the cross. Convinced that their Lord had actually returned from death, their sorrow turned to joy and their terror to confidence.

The marks of the wounds raise the problem of the relation of the resurrection body to the physical body that had undergone death. If it were a reanimation of the original flesh, how did it acquire new powers? If it were a new creation, why should it not be free from the marks of suffering? The obvious intent of mentioning the prints of the nails and of the spear was to dispel the false idea that He was only an apparition (Luke 24:38,39). The resurrection was not an impersonation, but the actual reappearance of the Lord. There was continuity both in appearance and in substance with the body that the disciples had previously known, yet the dynamics were changed.

Jesus demonstrated the material nature of the resurrection more convincingly by an additional test. Upon His asking the disciples whether they had any food available, they offered Him fish and honey, which He ate in their presence to prove that He was not a ghost (24:42,43). The episode was long remembered, for Peter, preaching in the house of Cornelius several years later, recalled that they ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead (Acts 10:41).

Thomas was absent from the company of the disciples when Jesus appeared in the upper room. John's narrative implies that he had remained in Jerusalem, and that the others maintained

communication with him. Possibly he was too overwhelmed by grief to participate in further discussion of Jesus' Passion, and he was certainly unready to accept the report of His resurrection. His scientific mind demanded experimental evidence, and since he had not seen Jesus, he refused to believe. When the others assured him that they had met the Lord, he replied, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the prints of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

In spite of his vehement expression of unbelief, Thomas was persuaded to join the others at their gathering on the following Sunday. The setting was identical with that of the previous week, and Jesus' manifestation was also similar, with one significant addition. Although Thomas' emphatic protest had been spoken to the disciples alone, Jesus' quotation of his words indicated that He may have been invisibly present when they were spoken. In any case, Jesus' acceptance of the challenge overwhelmed him, and his skepticism was replaced by faith and worship.

The reversal of the critical attitude of the disciples, and especially of Thomas, obviates the objection that the resurrection faith was a product of hallucination or gullibility. The disciples were in no mood to accept statements without investigation, and they were compelled to lay aside fixed prejudices in order to believe in so stupendous a miracle. Their final commitment to the proposition that Jesus arose from the dead was founded on incontrovertible experience.

Subsequent to these first six appearances in Jerusalem were others in Galilee, predicted by an angel on the resurrection day (Matt. 28:7; Mark 16:7) and confirmed by Jesus to the women (Matt. 28:8). Since the homes of the eleven apostles were in Galilee, and the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were hostile, they probably did not remain in Jerusalem during the entire span of the forty days. While the Passover pilgrims were in the city, the disciples could mingle with them, but after the pilgrims departed, their presence would be more conspicuous. Precipitate flight would have betrayed their eagerness to leave and would have aroused suspicion. For the first week they remained in Jerusalem, possibly secreting themselves in the home of John Mark's mother or in the house of Nicodemus. Perhaps the women found a haven with Mary and Martha at Bethany. In the second week the excitement over Jesus' death would have subsided, allowing the disciples to return to Galilee unobserved.

The order of the Galilean appearances cannot be established easily. According to Paul's testimony Jesus appeared on one occasion to more than five hundred "brethren" (I Cor. 15:6). Neither the time nor the place is specified. It is unlikely that so large a crowd could have convened in Jerusalem without creating a public sensation, but in the hills of Galilee such a gathering might be almost unnoticed. Quite possibly Jesus' manifestation occurred when a larger body of disciples had assembled to hear the report of the events in Jerusalem. The cumulative value of their resultant testimony is strong. When Paul wrote I Corinthians twenty-five years after the resurrection, he declared that the majority of the witnesses were still living, which implies that he was acquainted with some of them. Perhaps a large number of them were among the converts of Pentecost or became supporters of the Galilean churches (Acts 9:31).

An interview with James, otherwise unidentified, is also mentioned by Paul, who implies that he was living when I Corinthians was written. This man could not have been James the son of Zebedee, for he was executed by Herod Agrippa I about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). James the Less, also called the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), seems not to have been sufficiently prominent or influential to be known by the Corinthian church. James the Lord's brother, who was moderator

of the church at Jerusalem, is the most likely choice. Prior to the resurrection the brethren of the Lord were not believers (John 7:5), but James assuredly was an active Christian in the earliest years of the church (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19). Sometime after the autumn of the final year of Jesus' ministry (the Feast of Tabernacles, John 7:2), his attitude changed. Perhaps this appearance of Christ made the difference.

The apocryphal *Gospel According to the Hebrews* provides an interesting supplement to a statement of Paul.<sup>6</sup> "Now the Lord, when he had given the cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared unto him. . . ." This implies that the event occurred on the day of resurrection, but Paul seems to place it later. If James had not been a believer, it is improbable that he would have remained in Jerusalem after the Passover--if, indeed, he had been there at all. Jesus' committal of His mother to John may hint that His brothers were not immediately available to care for her. Although the chronological data of the apocryphal account may be unreliable, it nevertheless corroborates the testimony concerning an appearance to James during the forty days.

The most detailed and graphic account is contained in the epilogue of John's Gospel (John 21). The author notes that it was the third appearance to the disciples as a group, which may mean that it took place not long after their return to Galilee. Seven of the disciples--Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others who may have been Philip and Andrew--met at the Sea of Galilee. The events in Jerusalem had exhausted and bewildered them, and they naturally sought some activity that would relax their nerves and restore the normal tempo of life. At Peter's suggestion they resumed their old trade of fishing, and embarked in the evening for a night on the lake.

The labor proved fruitless, and when dawn came they were still engaged in a last attempt to catch some fish. A voice from the lakeside arrested their attention: "Boys, you haven't any food, have you?" Thinking that an agent from one of the nearby fisheries wished to negotiate for their catch, they answered, "No." Back came the reply, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find." The proposal was unconventional, for trained fishermen did not usually cast their nets on the right side. Prompted by desperation, they followed the suggestion and were rewarded with a loaded net that nearly swamped the boat.

When the fish were brought to shore, Jesus cooked breakfast for the weary and discouraged men. Though it is not said that He partook of the food, the material evidence confirmed their experience in Jerusalem. If they had been tempted to discount as unreal the prior appearances occurring in a strange environment and under nervous tension, there would be no doubt of Jesus' reality when He fed them in their own surroundings. The combination of physical phenomena and spiritual instruction at the lake of Galilee validates the concept that Jesus could still act and talk on the ordinary human plane as formerly, but that He could enter or leave it at will.

Matthew mentions a prearranged appearance in Galilee on a mountainside, saying, "when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted" (Matt. 28:17). Evidently a few of the eleven were still incredulous either of the trustworthiness of their own senses or of the reality of Jesus' manifestation.

The last twelve verses of Mark contain a similar narrative of a final appearance to the eleven disciples, at which Jesus spoke His parting command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Jerome, *De Viris Illustris* 2.

gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The identity of this occasion with the one in Matthew seems probable, since the final commission is included in both of them. Although the manuscript evidence for the Markan origin of these verses is uncertain, they are still an early witness to the post-resurrection activity of Jesus.

The historical sequence of the Lukan narrative leaves no doubt that the last appearance of Jesus was in Jerusalem, ten days before Pentecost. The Gospel closes with the words, "and he led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). The first chapter of Acts enlarges upon the event by reproducing the colloquy between Jesus and the disciples concerning His plans for their future. He outlined a plan for the age founded upon the resurrection, promising the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) and predicting a long program of witnessing evangelism beginning at Jerusalem and extending to the outmost bounds of earth.

Two other manifestations of the risen Christ which occurred after the ascension should be included. One of these was granted to Stephen, who at death said, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). The vision, which did not involve the bodily presence of Jesus, might be considered subjective because it was seen only by Stephen; nevertheless, to him the sight of Christ was an objective reality.

Similar to Stephen's vision was the subsequent self-disclosure of Christ to Paul, who included it with the resurrection appearances, stating that "last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also" (I Co. 15:8). Did he intend to imply that his encounter with Christ was as objective as that of Peter, of James, and of the Eleven, or that their experiences were merely subjective, as some suppose Paul's was? Paul alluded to his conversion on the road to Damascus, where he and his party were prostrated by a brilliant flash of light (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). An audible voice addressed him, calling him by name (9:4,7; 26:14). His companions realized that a voice had spoken, though they did not understand the language. The objective aspects make this episode a legitimate piece of evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

Certain common elements characterize all of the appearances. No one of the Gospel writers has an artificial or stilted presentation of the return of Jesus from the dead. Their accounts contain no grotesque exaggeration of His powers, nor any acts of exhibitionism or vengeance. The short descriptions of His manifestations treat them as a normal part of His career, so that the ministry of the forty days is no more supernatural than the preceding three and one-half years of public ministry. Although the resurrection was without precedent, it was not abnormal for Christ.

The appearances had definite objectives. Whether Jesus wanted to reclaim Peter, dispel Thomas' doubts, dry Mary's tears, or give extensive teaching to the Eleven, He made each occasion purposeful. He did not reveal Himself simply to evoke amazement or applause. As in the works of healing, the miraculous power was only the tool for the divine program.

The personal contacts with Jesus were convincing. Allowing for the fact that resurrection of the body seemed to many theoretically irrational, and actually impossible in the case of Jesus, it is surprising that so few of the disciples refused the direct evidence or doubted the validity of their own senses. Some, like Thomas, were initially unwilling to concede the reality, and others were hesitant even after they saw Jesus, but nearly all ultimately accepted the fact that He had risen.

The variety of times at which Jesus appeared supports the truthfulness of the narratives. Mary Magdalene met the Master in broad daylight, probably in the middle of the forenoon. Cleopas and his companion walked with Him to Emmaus during an afternoon, with supper about five o'clock. The catch of fish on the lake of Galilee occurred shortly after dawn, with breakfast on the beach. Paul was intercepted by the heavenly voice at high noon. The appearances were not seances held in darkened rooms behind screens, where illusion or fraud could be perpetrated.

There can, therefore, be no reasonable doubt of the objective reality of the evidence. If the Jesus of history actually lived, if He spoke the teachings attributed to Him, and if He performed the works with which He is credited, there is no inherent intellectual hindrance to believing that He lives again. Without using extravagant language or unnatural statements the Gospel writers and Paul acknowledge the resurrection to be miraculous, but as natural to Jesus as walking is to the ordinary man. They take for granted that He rose from the dead because it was the logical and normal prerogative of the Son of God.

### **The Historical Results**

The initial shock of Jesus' rejection by priests and people, the disappointment occasioned by the collapse of plans for a kingdom, and the uncertainty of their personal prospects left the disciples completely bewildered and despondent. Nothing in their immediate circumstances would encourage them to believe that they could begin a successful religious movement, since death had apparently vitiated Jesus' promises. His following realized that they had espoused a lost cause, and that the only procedure remaining to them was a quiet return to their homes and previous occupations.

Disunity threatened the continuance of the group. Their varied temperaments and conflicting ambitions could easily have destroyed their association within a short time had they chosen to perpetuate it. Peter's brusqueness, John's hasty temper, Thomas' pessimism, and Philip's materialism would inevitably clash, and would tend to shatter an artificial unity. Jesus Himself recognized this danger when He urged them in His parting words to "love one another" (John 15:12). He knew that the impending catastrophe would scatter them and that only a force transcending their differences could avail to bind them together.

### **The Transformation of the Disciples**

Between the crucifixion and the day of Pentecost a remarkable transformation took place, involving a complete reversal of the disciples' attitudes. The eleven men, huddled in an obscure upper chamber in Jerusalem "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19), became the active nucleus of a group that openly defied the Sanhedrin and boldly accused it of crucifying its own Messiah. The imprisonment of their leaders and the rejection by the public did not deter them from publishing their testimony in every quarter of the city. They were heedless of opposition and dedicated themselves unreservedly to proclaiming the messiahship of Jesus.

Individual character was suddenly altered. Simon Peter had followed Jesus with an enthusiastic though blundering loyalty. He had openly confessed Him as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16), had vowed that he would never forsake his Master (John 13:37), and had bravely drawn a sword in Jesus' defense against the guard that arrested Him. After the capture in Gethsemane Peter

followed to the house of Caiaphas, evidently intending to support Jesus at the ensuing trial. He failed to fulfill his intentions, for he repudiated any connection with the Lord and finally denied Him with an oath.

The psychological consequence of Peter's failure was a violent emotional reaction. Appalled by his own deed, which could never be retracted, he despaired of obtaining forgiveness. Another interview with Jesus was precluded by the swift succession of the trial and crucifixion. Peter had lost the joy of fellowship and his chief motive for living.

Notwithstanding the dismal failure to maintain his promised loyalty, Peter was completely different a few weeks later on the day of Pentecost. With amazing poise and courage he openly accused the Jewish rulers of having crucified their Messiah, and affirmed that God had restored Him to life. His speech was not merely a rash burst of enthusiasm, for he consistently persevered in his conviction and was ready to suffer persecution. The only adequate explanation for Peter's sudden change was the new viewpoint that the resurrection afforded.

Similar transformations occurred in other disciples. The cynical unbelief of Jesus' brethren (7:5) gave way before the convincing proof that Jesus had arisen, for James later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Thomas' sudden transition from skepticism to worship must have been produced by a powerful impulse, for it was contrary to the entire current of his previous mental habit. He did not even accept Jesus' invitation to touch the wounds and thus satisfy his desire for sensory evidence, but turned immediately from argument to adoration.

The most spectacular instance in the Biblical record occurred in the life of Saul of Tarsus. Like his fellow Pharisees he believed in the principle of resurrection (Acts 23:6,8), but to him Jesus of Nazareth was an impostor who deserved the penalty of death. He undoubtedly had heard rumors that Jesus had risen, but did not credit them. Positive that Christianity was a pernicious heresy, he devoted himself to the task of exterminating it. His fanatical zeal took him to Damascus for the avowed purpose of bringing the believers to court for trial, but he never completed his errand. The manifestation of the risen Lord whom he encountered on the road changed him into a protagonist of the message that he had endeavored to suppress. The reversal of his actions, attitudes, and theology was so drastic that his contemporaries could scarcely believe it (9:21), and accepted his new profession only with hesitancy. He remarked later about the altered values of his life, "What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7).

The transformation of these personalities is indisputable, for they have left a permanent heritage of faith to the Christian church. There was nothing in their previous experience or attitudes to account for the change; in fact, without the resurrection the disciples of Jesus would probably have disbanded, and the world might never have heard of Him through their agency. They had no analogy by which to create the illusion of a resurrection, nor had they the singleness of purpose and the cohesion to launch a crusade. The difference, however, was not due to a gradual recovery from disappointment, nor was it the result of shifting cultural influences. The renewed faith and enthusiasm which these persons exhibited can only be attributed to the truth that Christ had risen and had imparted to them new life.

### **The Descent of the Holy Spirit**

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a second major result of the

resurrection. Prior to the coming of Christ He had been active in restraining moral evil (Gen. 6:3). Under the dispensation of law He was the source of prophetic inspiration (I Sam. 10:5,6) and of power (16:13), but He did not indwell the nation Israel as a whole. The promise of Joel, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy" (Joel 2:28), predicted an enduement exceeding that which the prophet had witnessed in his own era.

The promise of the Old Testament was renewed by Christ in His discourse to the Jews in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. "On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He who believes on me, as the scripture has said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they who believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39). John's explanatory footnote written subsequent to Pentecost states that the believers in Christ would receive the gift of the Spirit, but that this enduement was not immediately available because "Jesus was not yet glorified." In Johannine phraseology, "glorified" referred to the Passion, for Jesus said to the eleven disciples when Judas left their company, "Now is the Son of man glorified" (13:31). The same word is used in John 17:1 concerning the victorious conclusion of His mission. Jesus taught that the advent of the Spirit was contingent upon His ascension to the Father, and the ascension was dependent upon the resurrection.

For this reason the outpouring of the Spirit was proof positive that the Lord had risen. When He descended upon the disciples at Pentecost, in visible and audible manner, He introduced a new epoch in God's dealing with mankind. Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, explained, "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). The truth which Peter declared became the cardinal tenet of the new faith, and its subsequent history is a corroboration of Christ's resurrection.

## **The Church**

The growth of the church cannot be attributed solely to the uniqueness of its teaching. Many of its basic beliefs were inherited from Judaism, which was already well known. Some of its practices were sufficiently similar to those of other religions to obscure the fundamental differences existing between it and heathenism. To the casual observer the gospel of Christ might appear to be only one more Eastern cult, centered around some minor Messiah and shrouded in mysticism. The pagan public probably classed it with the mystery religions which were popular in the empire during the first century.

The Jewish heritage was not wholly advantageous, for it linked Christianity with a displaced and dispersed people. Although the wide distribution of synagogues afforded platforms from which the first preachers could proclaim the true Messiah, the record of Acts shows that they were quite uniformly repudiated by Judaism, and that the synagogues ultimately became their adversaries rather than their supporters. Furthermore, with rare exceptions, the advancing evangelism turned increasingly to the Gentiles, who were hesitant to accept any teaching or influence from the Jews. Christianity's Jewish origins would be as much of a hindrance to its progress as an aid.

Misunderstanding of the nature of the gospel and of the intentions of Christians evoked

persecution. They were accused of being atheists because they did not worship any visible god, and of being antisocial because of their reaction against the immoral practices and amusements of their day. The necessity of meeting for worship in private houses after the normal hours of work created the appearance of furtiveness and secrecy, which immediately aroused suspicion concerning their motives. They were charged with various kinds of debauchery, and imperfect understanding of the nature of the Lord's Supper led to rumors of ceremonial murder and cannibalism.

Another obstacle for the church to overcome was its own divisiveness. Inevitably there were differences of opinion within its ranks over the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine. Alien religious influences combining with some aspects of Christian doctrine spawned heresies and cults claiming the Christian name, but possessing little of its reality. As good coinage suffers depreciation when counterfeited, the church was corrupted by perverse sects, many of which ultimately disappeared.

Unlike other religions, Christianity was not supported by any national culture. Judaism survived the destruction of the independent commonwealth because the Jews retained it as the sole inalienable possession that could preserve their national character. The religions of the Greeks and of the Romans, of the Celts and of the Teutons were integral to the corporate life of their respective peoples and were sustained by pride in state or tribal worship. In contrast, the church from its inception was not attached to any ethnic group. It could claim no connection with patriotism; it was rather despised as antisocial and subversive. During the first three centuries it depended upon the tolerance of the rulers for its survival. Why should it have endured when the cults of Isis, Serapis, Mithra, and other non-ethnic religions perished so completely that their names are now known only to scholars?

Both for its origin and for its survival the church is dependent upon the fact of the resurrection. The conviction of this verity inspired the apostles to proclaim the unique message that God had given to the world a new revelation of His power in the person of Jesus Christ. Faith in Him became the distinguishing mark of the new community, and His personal superintendence of their progress thwarted the schemes of their enemies and opened new doors for their ministry. The constant sense of His living presence rendered the believers impervious to opposition and persistent in witnessing.

After making allowance for all natural causes such as the unique promise of eternal life, the futility of the pagan philosophies, the influence of political patronage, and a growing popular sympathy for a persecuted minority, the rise and growth of the church cannot be adequately explained apart from the resurrection. Maurice Goguel, one of the leading Continental authorities on ecclesiastical history, who does not acknowledge a literal physical return of Christ from death, writes, "The creative source of Christianity was the faith in the risen and glorified Jesus."<sup>7</sup> Although Goguel distinguishes between resurrection fact, which he denies, and the resurrection faith, which he allows, he admits that the faith was essential to Christianity.

In a recent work on *The Protestant Faith*, George Forell says: "It is the faith in the resurrection of Christ which explains the existence of the Christian church. Without this faith the Christian church would never have come into being, and should it ever lose this faith it will not last very long. The resurrection and the message of Christ are mutually interdependent. The resurrection

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<sup>7</sup> M. Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity*, translated from the French by H. C. Snape (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 29.

is God's confirmation of the Gospel. That is why the apostle Paul says: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.'"<sup>8</sup>

These quotations, which could be paralleled from numerous other sources of widely differing viewpoints, agree that faith in the resurrection of Christ is the secret of the church's origin. United by a common conviction that Jesus was not dead but living, the disciples proceeded to proclaim His victory and to win others to their cause. The novelty of this conviction, the assurance of personal security, and its satisfying sequel to the promises and covenants of the Old Testament afforded the basis for a new movement and for a coherent theology that created the church.

Faith in a concept, however, is not a satisfactory explanation of the existence of the church, unless that concept was based on an event. Neither Jewish theology nor Gentile philosophy was predisposed to elevate the crucified prophet of Nazareth to the plane of messiahship or deity. In spite of His wise teaching and His indisputable miracles, His death as a criminal permanently discredited Him in the eyes of His own nation. Rabbinic literature either ignored or repudiated Him, and only within comparatively recent time has Judaism been willing to acknowledge that Jesus made any contribution to its history.

The Gentile attitude was equally skeptical. How could a helpless victim of Jewish spite and of Roman cruelty accomplish the salvation of men? If He could not overcome His enemies, could He deliver anyone else? To the pagan philosophers such a concept would be ridiculous. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, there would be no reason for ascribing to Him a rank higher than any of the philosophers who purveyed their wisdom in the market place and imparted it to their coterie of disciples.

Since "the Easter faith" did not accord with Jewish Messianism or with Gentile philosophy, who invented it? There was no external stimulus in the intellectual world of the first century to produce such a doctrine. Although the concept of a bodily resurrection existed in Pharisaism, it was connected with the remote events of the last day, and not with any contemporary individual.

Only the Easter fact can provide an adequate cause for the Easter faith. Unless the historic Person to whom the disciples had given their initial allegiance actually returned to life and made contact with them, their belief had no rational origin. No abstract process of reasoning would have inspired them to create the message of the gospel, or to preach it persistently and boldly.

The development of the church in the first century confirmed the claims that Jesus had risen. The events chronicled in the book of Acts illustrate this principle clearly, for at each crisis the risen Christ intervened. He instituted the enterprise by sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33). The appearance to Stephen (7:55) endorsed the message which marked the beginning of the separation between Judaism and Christianity. The arrest of Paul on the road to Damascus secured a leader who inaugurated the missionary movement toward the Gentiles and who shaped the development of the church's theology (22:6-15). At the culmination of his career, the Lord's direct word encouraged him to proceed to Rome (23:11). Although a few of these episodes are direct appearances, the narrative assumes active participation by Christ in every phase of the church's life.

The resurrection was indisputably the core of the church's faith and the main cause of its

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8 George W. Forell, *The Protestant Faith* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), pp. 177-178.

inception, affecting every aspect of its theological and ecclesiastical progress. Not only did this concept permeate the teaching of the New Testament; it also influenced the practices of the church in the post-apostolic period.

An outstanding effect of this influence is the Christian observance of worship on the first day of the week rather than on the Sabbath, which was kept tenaciously by all orthodox Jews. Since the first Christian converts came from Judaism, retaining its Scripture and much of its theology, it is unlikely that they would instantly discard all of its customs. Peter and John continued to worship in the Temple at Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost (3:1), and Paul preached in synagogues on the Sabbath during his Asiatic mission (13:14-16,44; 16:13;17:1,2; 18:4). The natural tendency would have been to perpetuate the Sabbath as the day for Christian worship. The opposite was true, however, for Christians worshiped on the first day of the week.

A hint of this change appears in the account of Paul's visit to Troas, where he preached to the assembled Christians "upon the first day of the week" (20:7) when they gathered together to break bread. The text implies that the first day rather than the seventh was the regular time for meeting, which would mean that a transition from Jewish custom to Christian observance had already occurred.

A further statement appears in the *Epistle of Barnabas*. "Ye perceive how He [God] speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead."<sup>9</sup>

Justin Martyr, probably a contemporary of Barnabas, added his confirmation of the practice. "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to his apostles and disciples, he taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration."<sup>10</sup> In spite of the fact that ritual tends to become static, the Christian church changed its day of worship to the first day of the week, in honor of the risen Lord.

Inasmuch as the earliest witnesses attribute the remarkable social and theological dynamic of Christianity to the resurrection, one cannot consistently affirm the effects and deny the cause, unless he can show that some other cause is equally capable of producing the same results. The change of religious and social mores, and the creation of a body of people characterized by a distinctive ethic and possessing a new dynamic, can best be explained by accepting the testimony of the New Testament.

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9 *Epistle of Barnabas* XV.

10 Justin Martyr, *Apology* I, lxvii.