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MAPPING THE RECENT TREND TOWARD THE BODILY RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS IN LIGHT OF OTHER PROMINENT CRITICAL POSITIONS

Gary R. Habermas

Tracking theological trends can be a rewarding enterprise. Observing not only recent movements but the ebb and flow of subcurrents reveals much about the state of contemporary research. This essay will map recent developments in research on the resurrection appearances of Jesus.¹ Admittedly, such an attempt in so brief a space necessarily requires some broad sketching and sometimes sweeping statements.

Jesus' resurrection often occupies the center of Christian theology, whatever one's theological persuasion or inclination. For the careful observer, various tendencies and alignments are emerging. Over the past five years, I have tracked well over two thousand scholarly publications on the resurrection. Each source appeared between 1975 and the present, in German, French, or English, written by a wide range of critical scholars.

From this contemporary scene, I will outline four broad positions regarding the nature of Jesus' resurrection appearances. These distinct camps range from natural to supernatural positions, with some significant shifts between these views during the past few years. In this essay, I will attempt to categorize the four positions, including naming two alternative proposals that seem to have avoided such recognition.

Then I will identify where most current scholarship rests, though I will not attempt to explain these shifts.

The Crux of Resurrection Studies

The latest research on Jesus' resurrection appearances reveals several extraordinary developments. As firmly as ever, most contemporary scholars agree that, after Jesus' death, his early followers had experiences that they at least believed were appearances of their risen Lord. Further, this conviction was the chief motivation behind the early proclamation of the Christian gospel.

These basics are rarely questioned, even by more radical scholars. They are among the most widely established details from the entire New Testament. As such, to address the enigma of the appearances, these early Christian convictions need to be explained. Why are these concessions standard scholarly fare? An entire series of reasons lies behind this critical recognition, reasons that will be summarized only briefly here.²

For example, among the earliest New Testament writers, Paul states that he experienced personally one of these resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Further, soon after his conversion (Gal. 1:15-16), Paul traveled to Jerusalem and discussed the gospel message (which included the resurrection appearances, 1 Cor. 15:1-8) with two other apostles, Peter and James, the brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:18-24). Later, Paul returned to Jerusalem specifically to verify his gospel message with these two apostles plus John (Gal. 2:2), who confirmed it (2:9-10). Paul stated that he also knew what the other apostles were teaching concerning the resurrection appearances, which he said was the same message (1 Cor. 15:11). So it is widely recognized that Paul's testimony brings us very close to the earliest apostolic gospel message.

Moreover, the majority of recent scholars concede that James was an unbeliever until he experienced an appearance of the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7). For the seeming majority of scholars who recognize early creedal passages in the Acts preaching, this adds to the potential testimony to the appearances.³ Many of the apostles were willing to die specifically for this message, which differentiates their transformation

from those, then or today, who are willing to die for an *ideology* that often is not linked to events, and for which the convert is not in a position to check out the nature of the claim. For the lesser number who think the tomb was empty (still the majority of scholars), this also favors some sort of experience.⁴

Now we must be careful here. It does not directly follow that, after his death, Jesus appeared to his followers. What most scholars grant is that some or all of these reasons indicate that Jesus' followers *thought* that Jesus was raised, and a number *claimed* that they had seen him, both individually and in groups. This has been a mainstay of critical thought since nineteenth-century German theology.

For instance, as Reginald Fuller remarked decades ago, that Jesus' disciples believed he was raised from the dead "is one of the indisputable facts of history." That they indeed experienced what they thought were Jesus' appearances "is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree."⁵ Accordingly, Fuller concluded that these experiences must be adequately explained. This "requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the 'rise of the Easter faith' but the *cause* of the Easter faith."⁶

More recently, James D. G. Dunn agreed: "It is almost impossible to dispute that at the historical roots of Christianity lie some visionary experiences of the first Christians, who understood them as appearances of Jesus, raised by God from the dead." But Dunn cautions that these early believers were not merely relating an internal realization or conviction: "They clearly meant that something had happened to *Jesus* himself. God had raised *him*, not merely reassured *them*."⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, more skeptical scholars often still acknowledge the grounds for the appearances as well. Norman Perrin writes: "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."⁸ Helmut Koester is even more positive: "We are on much firmer ground with respect to the appearances of the risen Jesus and their effect. . . . That Jesus also appeared to others (Peter, Mary Magdalene, James) cannot very well be questioned."⁹

The *crux* of the issue, then, is not *whether* there were real experiences, but *how we explain the nature* of these early experiences. What

best accounts for the early Christian belief that Jesus had appeared after his death?

As Peter Carnley explains: "There is no doubt that the first disciples interpreted the Easter visions or appearances as signs of the heavenly presence of Christ. *Why* they should be minded to do this *with the degree of conviction that is so clearly reflected in the early testimony* is what we must seek to explain."¹⁰ Along a similar line of thought, Bart Ehrman writes: "Historians, of course, have no difficulty whatsoever speaking about the belief in Jesus' resurrection, since this is a matter of public record. For it is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution."¹¹ This early belief in the resurrection is the historical origin of Christianity.

Scholars widely agree that some of Jesus' early followers claimed to have seen him alive after his death. The main point of contention comes when we ask, with scholars like Fuller and Carnley, how these early Christian experiences are best explained. Historically, the major disagreement marking this broad range of explanations, of course, is between those scholars who hold that natural hypotheses can explain the historical and other data better than the supernatural thesis that Jesus appeared alive after his death.

I propose that these two broad explanations should each be subdivided once, with agnosticism occupying the ground between them. At the expense of oversimplifying, this will allow us to map the major critical reactions to the nature of the disciples' experiences into a total of five categories, four of which I will describe in some detail.¹² The purpose, again, is to ascertain the scholarly lay of the land as well as to note a few recent shifts across this terrain.

Let us begin with those who hold that natural hypotheses can best explain the data. Some of these scholars appeal to the internal, subjective states of the early Christians, arguing that this best unlocks the secret of the appearances. While agreeing with the likelihood of a natural explanation, other scholars prefer more external, objective solutions, involving events and conditions outside the early Christians. Both groups agree that Jesus did not rise from the dead and that the phenomena in question can best be explained another way. I will name these two perspectives the *natural internal* and the *natural external* theses, respectively.¹³

Many other scholars disagree, holding that reasons such as those outlined above indicate that the early believers' had actually witnessed appearances of the risen Jesus. With Dunn, they agree that something happened to Jesus and not just to his followers. But there is a secondary distinction here as well. Some of these scholars, emphasizing faith, prefer "luminous," often heavenly, manifestations of Jesus that did not involve Jesus' physical body, bolstered by several of the above reasons. Others, placing more emphasis on the evidence, hold that Jesus appeared in an external, bodily form. Both share the conviction that Jesus was raised from the dead and really appeared to his followers. I will name these positions the *supernatural internal* and the *supernatural external* theses, respectively.¹⁴

In between these two large categories is another view. While acknowledging perhaps even most of the reasons outlined above, scholars who hold this view conclude that they just are not sure how to best evaluate the data. Further, they often explain that it is not crucial to decide what probably happened—Christianity can survive just fine without giving an answer to this question. This is the agnostic position.

The crux of the issue, then, is that the early Christians fully believed in Jesus' resurrection. Some of Jesus' disciples taught that he had appeared to them after his death. This is at the center of several acknowledged facts regarding the end of Jesus' life and the beginning of the early church. While scholars explain this data in various ways, the appearances are the starting point.

I have argued elsewhere that, while they still hold a decidedly minority position among the total number of commentators, recent decades have revealed a slight increase in scholars who espouse naturalistic hypotheses to account for Jesus' resurrection.¹⁵ Some of us had predicted this occurrence for years, so the increase was not a shock. Much more surprising, however, are the latest developments among those who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead in some sense.

Mapping Natural Theories

During the past two or three decades, a number of scholars have embraced various naturalistic alternatives to the New Testament report

that Jesus was raised from the dead. After a lengthy lapse, and without new evidence emerging that favors these alternatives, it is difficult to account for this trend. With few exceptions, the theses parallel the nineteenth-century German lives of Jesus, along with some occasional new twists. Many of the suggestions have been published by scholars, although many others have been espoused in popular writings. Some have been developed in detail, while others have been mentioned only briefly. These natural hypotheses come in both internal and external varieties.

Natural Internal Theories

Scholars in this category hold that Jesus' appearances are best explained as a result of the *internal, subjective states* of the early Christians. As it was at the end of nineteenth-century German liberalism, as well as at the end of the twentieth century, probably the single most popular alternative to Jesus' resurrection was the hallucination, or subjective vision, theory. The disciples became convinced that they had seen Jesus alive, even though nothing had actually happened to him.

This option may have been largely prompted by the trends that we have already noted. The critical community has long acknowledged that the disciples *believed firmly* that Jesus had appeared to them after his death. While not the only theory in this category, the internal theses move to the heart of the issue—explaining the disciples' belief.

After a hiatus of many decades, arguably almost a century, the subjective vision theory has made a comeback. Hallucinations involve a mistaken perception that is not linked to the real world. They are defined as "false sensory perception not associated with real external stimuli."¹⁶ German theologian Gerd Lüdemann has argued the most influential version of the subjective vision theory. Lüdemann appeals to "stimulus," "religious intoxication," and "enthusiasm" as the mental states leading to the visions seen by Peter and the others, but he is clear that nothing actually happened to Jesus.¹⁷ There was a notable response, often an outcry, that was vociferous in its opposition.¹⁸

Another seemingly nameless internal thesis is what I have termed the *illumination* theory. In this theory, championed by Willi Marxsen, through some almost entirely nondescript internal process, Peter is

the key to the other disciples becoming convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Peter's insights provided the initial impetus, and his contagious enthusiasm persuaded his friends that Jesus was alive. Rarely are more specifics provided.¹⁹ Strangely enough, in a later volume, Marxsen conceded that he was no longer sure whether Jesus' vision (or visions) was subjective or objective.²⁰

Although not moving as far as what I have called the illumination thesis, Rudolf Pesch's early work typifies the view of a few scholars who thought that Jesus' precrucifixion authority, teachings, and influence were enough to cause his followers to survive the crucifixion with their faith intact.²¹ However, Pesch later changed this view, recognizing that the appearances of the risen Jesus could be established by careful research.²²

The hallucination, or subjective vision hypothesis, and the illumination thesis are the chief instances of internal naturalistic theories. Championing the power of inner faith and enthusiasm, they have sought to explain the disciples' subsequent experiences.

Natural External Theories

Various recent attempts have sought to explain the New Testament accounts of Jesus' appearances in terms of the *external states and conditions* of the early Christians. Some of these explanations are rather incredible and even fanciful.

One old standby, the *swoon or apparent death* theory, has even appeared in a few places recently, although it is seldom espoused by scholars. One scholarly exception is a very brief article by Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor Lloyd Davies that postulates that Jesus lost consciousness, leading bystanders to conclude that he was dead. When removed from the cross, however, Jesus revived and was treated. Quite surprisingly, according to this theory, the appearances apparently were caused not by Jesus actually being seen later but by some unspecified sort of "perceptions," raising once again the possibility of hallucinations.²³ Physicians reacted immediately against the Davies' stance, offering multiple demonstrations that Jesus really died by crucifixion.²⁴

Overall, the swoon or apparent death theory has been rare ever since David Strauss's critique in 1835.²⁵ By the turn of the twentieth century, it was treated mainly as nothing more than a historical curiosity.²⁶

Other scholars have questioned the Gospel accounts of the burial and empty tomb, sometimes by returning to hypotheses that reflect older German efforts. The best known is John Dominic Crossan's thesis that Jesus' dead body was either simply left on the cross or buried in a shallow grave. Either way, "the dogs were waiting."²⁷ Other-tomb theories have also been proposed.²⁸

As at the end of the nineteenth century, various versions of the legend theory also existed at the end of the twentieth century. Of course, most critical scholars employ legendary *elements* without postulating full proposals of this sort. But others have stretched legendary accretion to a far greater extent. One of the best known and most radical is the view offered by G. A. Wells, who holds either that Jesus never lived or that he was an obscure, ancient individual who cannot be dated even to the first century C.E. Wells thinks that the Gospels are largely fabrication and explains the resurrection appearances as the growth of legend.²⁹

A popular thesis at the close of the nineteenth century was that of the history-of-religions school, which attributed New Testament teachings to the ancient mystery religions. Evan Fales, a rare recent representative of these scholars, agrees with them that the best approach is to study Near Eastern mythical figures, such as Tammuz, Adonis, Isis, and Osiris.³⁰

Another naturalistic hypothesis—what I will call the *illusion* theory, for lack of a recognized name—is often treated as a relative to hallucinations but needs to be cataloged differently. It is clearly an external alternative response because it is concerned particularly with perceptions in the objective world, although this is seldom recognized. As discussed earlier, hallucinations are subjective in nature. An illusion, however, is a mistaken substitute of one condition for its actual object—the "misperception or misinterpretation of real external sensory stimuli."³¹ Unlike hallucinations, then, the illusion theory builds on situations where persons, either singly or in groups, mistake actual phenomena for something other than what they are in reality.

Michael Martin enumerates several illusions that he thinks parallel the early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection appearances. His examples include some exceptionally curious cases—for example, UFOs, cattle mutilations, along with reports of witchcraft and related phenomena in colonial America.³² G. A. Wells mistakenly refers to

such illusional data as hallucinations.³³ Michael Goulder also employs some odd illusional incidents, concentrating especially on stories of Bigfoot!³⁴

I could provide other examples of naturalistic theories that have been suggested during the last few decades, but this demarcation should provide enough of a framework for observing the differences between internal and external natural alternatives. While they have made a bit of a comeback, these theories remain a minority of the scholarly views that have appeared during this time.

Each of the naturalistic theories was attacked piece by piece by the liberal scholars in the nineteenth century, as each criticized the others' approaches.³⁵ In the twentieth century, critical scholarship has largely rejected wholesale the naturalistic approaches to the resurrection. For example, while discussing these naturalistic approaches to the resurrection, Raymond Brown calls the attempts "gratuitous charges" and points out that they are at odds with the information we have on these subjects.³⁶ N. T. Wright treats a number of what he terms "false trails" and concludes that the problem with each attempt is that it runs up against "first-century history."³⁷ Similarly, James D. G. Dunn asserts that "alternative interpretations of the data fail to provide a more satisfactory explanation" than the New Testament message that God raised Jesus from the dead.³⁸

Certain philosophers agree; for example, Steven T. Davis writes: "All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out. . . . The alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence."³⁹ Richard Swinburne concludes the matter: "Alternative hypotheses have always seemed to me to give far less satisfactory accounts of the historical evidence than does the traditional account."⁴⁰

Exhibiting an amazing amount of consensus, most researchers across a very wide conceptual spectrum have rejected naturalistic approaches as explanations for the earliest Christians' belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Even a small sample of these scholars over recent decades forms an impressive list.⁴¹ Accordingly, the path of natural alternative theories is definitely a minority approach.

Mapping Supernatural Theories

Though nuanced, the theses that postulate that Jesus was raised from the dead in a supernatural manner vary less. What these views share is the belief that, after Jesus' death, something actually happened to him rather than merely to his followers. The theses differ in the way in which Jesus appeared—whether as a luminous (or other) vision or as a spiritual body.

Supernatural Subjective Theories

Toward the end of the era of nineteenth-century German liberalism, in his major work *Die Geschichte Jesu von Nazara* (The History of Jesus of Nazara), Theodor Keim challenged David Strauss's subjective vision theory. Convinced that Strauss's thesis was severely lacking, Keim first forcefully restated the hypothesis. He then followed with a multifaceted critique that is often credited as the chief refutation of Strauss.⁴²

Keim postulated what came to be called the *objective vision* theory. This view proposed that although subjective visions ultimately fail, these appearances still must be explained because all the data indicate that the disciples still saw Jesus in some sense. Agreeing with Strauss and others, Keim rejected the Gospel accounts of the women's role on Easter Sunday morning and removed the appearances to Galilee in order to avoid having to explain the empty tomb. Turning to the appearances, or "visions," Keim concluded that they must be the "objective" work of God, who cooperated with the glorified Jesus himself. So Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples in the form of heavenly "telegrams," revealing his glorified state and convincing them that he was alive and well. Keim realized that his theory was supernatural and involved a miracle.⁴³

This general approach, minus a few of Keim's details, tremendously influenced critical theology in the second half of the twentieth century. Hans Grass's 1956 work *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (Easter-event and Easter-reports) favored a similar proposal—that the empty tomb accounts are legendary but that Jesus did appear in Galilee in a noncorporeal but supernatural manner that cannot be explained in natural terms.⁴⁴ Grass's much-cited work influenced

theology and brought conceptions of the resurrection like Keim's to the forefront of discussion.

Few scholars described this phenomenon more thoroughly than Reginald Fuller. Accepting the historicity of the empty tomb, contrary to Keim and Grass, Fuller defines the appearances as "visionary experiences of light, combined with a communication of meaning."⁴⁵ Fuller notes some similarities to Keim's position here, as well as some dissimilarities, such as his qualifying the use of the term *objective*.⁴⁶

For a few decades after Grass, what I have termed the *supernatural subjective* characterization of the resurrection appearances grew in popularity, becoming at least the most influential, if not also the most popular, approach. Many major scholars took this position.⁴⁷ It was usually characterized by an emphasis on nonbodily visions, most likely from heaven, where the risen Jesus communicated his message to his disciples (perhaps by imparting meaning without literal words). While Jesus was actually raised as an act of God, it was usually said that this event cannot be historically demonstrated, although there may well be some decent arguments in its favor. But despite this position's popularity, another view had begun to gain influence by the end of the twentieth century.

Supernatural Objective Theories

Even before the publication of N. T. Wright's monumental volume *The Resurrection of the Son of God* in 2003, the tide had begun to turn toward the view that Jesus not only was raised miraculously from the dead but also appeared in a spiritual body.⁴⁸ So, the resurrection is an event that happened to Jesus, rather than either an internal experience or a natural occurrence. The risen Jesus featured both bodily continuity, including qualities that could be observed and perhaps even touched, as well as transformed discontinuity. Thus, Jesus appeared as far more than a vision of light from heaven. Further, it was usually held that firm historical evidence accompanied these appearances.⁴⁹

Intriguingly, some commentators who still reject the facticity of Jesus' resurrection, such as Gerd Lüdemann, still acknowledge that the New Testament authors held this view, because of the manner in which Jesus appeared to his followers. For Lüdemann, even Paul thought that

Jesus appeared to him "in his transformed spiritual resurrection corporeality," signifying both bodily and transformed elements.⁵⁰ This is striking given the direction of recent conceptualizations of Paul's appearance that tend to favor the view described earlier as supernatural, glorified, or luminous visions.

Likewise, John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed agree that, for Paul, Jesus' appearance to him was also bodily in nature. They state, "To take seriously Paul's claim to have *seen* the risen Jesus, we suggest that his inaugural vision was of Jesus' body simultaneously wounded and glorified." Regarding the Lukan claim of a luminous vision, Crossan and Reed propose that "we bracket that blinded-by-light sequence and imagine instead a vision in which Paul both *sees* and hears Jesus as the resurrected Christ, the risen Lord."⁵¹ If such critical scholars as Lüdemann, Crossan, and Reed are correct, any position that takes seriously the early Christian teachings should at least address the nature of their claims.

Another particular effort that signals a change in this direction is the 2002 volume entitled *Resurrection*, edited by Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker.⁵² The eighteen contributors argue repeatedly that the resurrections of both Jesus and believers will be embodied, with most also holding some form of reconstitucionalism.⁵³

N. T. Wright furthered the argument yet another step. For more than five hundred pages in his recent volume, he argues very persuasively that, among *both* pagans and Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world up until the second century C.E., the term ἀνάστασις almost uniformly meant that the *body* would be raised. So ἀνάστασις and its cognates (such as ἐξανάστασις) along with related words (such as ἐγείρω) almost without exception referred to bodily resurrection. Even the ancients who rejected the doctrine still used the relevant terms in this manner. Conversely, if they spoke about the soul or spirit being glorified or otherwise living after death, they used terms other than *resurrection*.⁵⁴ Moreover, even Paul, who is most often said to have taught otherwise, held strongly to Jesus' bodily resurrection, as did the rest of the New Testament authors.⁵⁵

Not to be missed or glossed over lightly is that, on the two earlier occasions when Tom Wright and Dom Crossan dialogued on this subject, as well as here, Crossan noted his essential agreement with

Wright's major emphasis on the meaning of bodily resurrection, especially in a Jewish-Christian context.⁵⁶ As it turns out, Crossan "was already thinking along these same lines."⁵⁷

Crossan and Reed are helpful here too. They agree that the early Christian hope, like the major Jewish interpretation, was bodily resurrection. Paul clearly takes the bodily position when addressing the Greek Platonists at Corinth, who opposed Paul's teaching of "the materiality of Christ's bodily resurrection." Paul countered the Greek arguments several ways, chiefly by teaching his concept of the spiritual body, whereby Jesus was raised in a real body that was still transformed by divine empowerment, as the beginning of the resurrection of the dead. Paul taught the same view to the Thessalonians.⁵⁸

Thus, current theological trends at the close of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first century may reflect some areas of general agreement. Especially given the current popularity (see below) of what I have termed the *supernatural external* view, it seems that fairly traditional views have again moved to the forefront of research and discussion. While sporting a few new wrinkles as well as some improvements, the view that Jesus was raised bodily is currently the predominant position, if judged in terms of scholarly support. Moreover, some scholars who reject this view still hold that it was at least the New Testament position, including Paul's own teaching.⁵⁹ This is a marked change from recent decades when Paul's view was often interpreted far differently.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset, this study has admittedly and necessarily been sketchy. It consists chiefly of a brief survey of recent trends on the subject of natural and supernatural theories designed to explain the resurrection appearances of Jesus. Even many scholars seem to have missed the distinctive history and especially the current distribution of these theses.

My chief goal was to map a wide range of stances and, particularly, to differentiate four categorical explanations—the natural internal and external theories, and the supernatural internal and external

approaches. I also named and described two of the naturalistic theses—the illumination and illusion views—that are seldom, if ever, either identified or qualifiedly differentiated from other views.

Though the recent upturn toward opting for naturalistic alternatives has not been overly popular, and is still far from the most common option, the numbers are noteworthy. Not surprisingly, virtually none of these natural paths has been traveled by the scholarly pens of the most influential writers contributing to the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. On the other hand, recent years have shown a stronger migration to one of the supernatural camps.

How do current scholars line up? In my own survey of recent resurrection sources mentioned at the start of this chapter, less than one-quarter of critical scholars who addressed the historicity question offered naturalistic theories, of either the internal or external varieties. More surprisingly, only a few specifically identified themselves as agnostic on the issue, but one suspects that there are reasons for such a low number.⁶⁰ The almost three-quarters of remaining scholars hold either of the two views that Jesus was raised from the dead in some sense.

Further, if my survey of recent resurrection sources provides an accurate gauge, the subcategories may also be estimated, even if generally. Taken as a separate entity, the natural category was subdivided into the internal theories, such as hallucination (about a third of these particular scholars), and the objective theories, such as legend (about two-thirds). Among the supernatural positions, we have the further subdivisions of those who prefer more visionary views (less than one-quarter of these particular scholars) and those who take the position that Jesus was resurrected in a real, though still transformed, body (more than three-quarters).

Some intriguing trends have emerged. One may quibble or even disagree with the estimated percentages here, but certain broad movements seem clear.⁶¹ On the natural side, the overall position is held by a distinct minority of scholars. Within this perspective, while hallucination theses are arguably the single most popular option, the external category as a whole is decidedly more popular (approximately two to one).

The supernatural view that Jesus rose from the dead in one of two senses is a distinct majority position over the natural option (almost

three to one). Very surprisingly, while the supernatural internal category (the old “objective vision theory”) was the most popular among scholars through the middle to late twentieth century, it has been relegated to a minority response in recent years, in favor of bodily appearances of the risen Jesus (more than three to one).

This essay concerns recent trends. Rather than demonstrating any particular view, it serves as a general indication of the current scholarly climate.

4. *The Trend toward Bodily Resurrection Appearances*

1. For a more detailed look at this material, particularly the broader range of current attempts to popularize naturalistic theories, see Gary R. Habermas, "The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection," *Trinity Journal*, New Series, 22 (2001): 179–96.

2. For details on each of these points, including critical attestation and agreement, see Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), ch. 1.

3. The most popular choices are drawn from Acts 1:21–22; 2:22–36; 3:13–16; 4:8–10; 5:29–32; 10:39–43; 13:28–31; 17:1–3; 17:30–31.

4. For more details here, see Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, esp. 21–25; see also Gary R. Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection," forthcoming.

5. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 142.

6. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), 169 (emphasis added).

7. James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1985), 75 (emphasis in original).

8. Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 80.

9. Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 84. Koester does not explain the sense in which he thinks that Jesus appeared.

10. Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 246 (emphasis added).

11. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

12. We will not discuss in any depth the agnostic position.

13. It should be noted carefully that both of these views postulate that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Therefore, neither "internal" nor "external" has any reference to supernatural workings. These terms simply describe the direction of the disciples' sensory stimulation.

14. It also should be noted carefully that both of these views postulate that Jesus actually rose from the dead. Thus, "internal" is not to be taken in the sense that the resurrection appearances were only subjective in nature. Rather, it is usually contended that even when the risen Jesus manifested himself to groups of persons, he did so in a nonbodily manner, perhaps communicating telepathically with each witness, without thereby casting doubt on the reality of the resurrection appearances. While "external" is a reference to Jesus' bodily appearances, it does not specify further differences between commentators.

15. Habermas, "Twentieth-Century Resurgence," esp. 184–86.

16. Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, and Jack A. Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, 7th ed. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1994), 306–7.

17. Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 106–7, 174–75, 180. A popular version is Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Ozen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

18. See Hansjürgen Verwey, ed., *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995). Another example of such a critique is the lengthy book review by Andreas Lindemann in *Wege zum Menschen* 46 (November–December 1994): 503–13.

19. Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), esp. 88–97. The prototype was an earlier essay by Marxsen, "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," in C. F. D. Moule, ed., *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1968), 5–50.

20. Willi Marxsen, *Jesus and Easter: Did God Raise the Historical Jesus from the Dead?* trans. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1990), 70–74.

21. Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 153 (1973): 219–26; Rudolf Pesch, "Materialien und

Bemerkungen zu Entstehung und Sinn des Osterglaubens," in Anton Vogle and Rudolf Pesch, *Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975), 157–68.

22. Rudolf Pesch, "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu: Ein neuer Versuch," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 30 (1983), esp. 87; see also John Galvin, "The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 27–35, for an excellent summary of the shift in Pesch's thinking.

23. Margaret Lloyd Davies and Trevor A. Lloyd Davies, "Resurrection or Resuscitation?" *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (April 1991): 167–70.

24. "Letters to the Editor," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 25 (July 1991): 268–72.

25. David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, 4th German ed. (1835; reprint, n.p.: Sigler, 1994), esp. 678–79; see also 734, 737–39. See also Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (1906; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1968). Schweitzer describes Strauss's attack (56–57) and does not list any nineteenth-century proponents of the swoon theory after 1838. Actually, Strauss's later critique, published in 1864, was even more influential in denouncing the apparent death thesis. See his *A New Life of Jesus* (Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1879), 1:408–12.

26. See Eduard Rignebach, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907), 48–49; James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (1908; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1965), 92; George Park Fisher, *The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner, 1909), 193.

27. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 152–58; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 392–94.

28. For examples, Michael Martin, *The Case against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95; A. N. Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), 242.

29. Wells develops this thesis in volumes like *Did Jesus Exist?* 2nd ed. (London: Pemberton, 1986), esp. chs. 2 and 3; *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1988), esp. chs. 1 and 4; *A Resurrection Debate: The New Testament Evidence in Evangelical and Critical Perspective* (London: Rationalist Press, 1988), esp. chs. 5, 7, and 8.

30. Evan Fales, "Successful Defense? A Review of *In Defense of Miracles*," *Philosophia Christi*, Second Series, 3 (2001): 29–34.

31. Kaplan, Sadock, and Grebb, *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, 307. See also Jerrold Maxmen and Nicholas Ward, *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment* (New York: Norton, 1995), 483–85.

32. Martin, *Case against Christianity*, 92–95.

33. Wells, *A Resurrection Debate*, 39–40.
34. Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), 52–55.
35. For several examples, see Habermas, "Twentieth-Century Resurgence," esp. 180–84.
36. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 163–66.
37. N. T. Wright, "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem," *Sewanee Theological Review* 41 (1998): 118–22.
38. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 76.
39. Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?" *Philo* 2 (1999): 57–58.
40. Richard Swinburne, "Evidence for the Resurrection," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 201.
41. Some examples include Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), vol. 2, esp. 155–56; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 4:340; Michael C. Perry, *The Easter Enigma* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 120–33; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 181–85; A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ*, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1961), 48–53; A. M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 111–12; Helmut Thielicke, "The Resurrection Kerygma," in *The Easter Message Today*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Darrell Likens Guder (London: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 87–91, 103–4; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 186, 198–200; Neville Clark, *Interpreting the Resurrection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 99–105; Joachim Jeremias, "Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation," in *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Scribner, 1971), 302; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 123–25; Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation*, trans. A. M. Stewart (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1977), 117–19; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 2nd ed., trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 88–97; Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 120–26; Hugo Staudinger, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Saving Event and as 'Object' of Historical Research," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 326; Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 57–71; John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper &

- Row, 1986), 106; David Samuel, "Making Room in History for the Miraculous," *Churchman* 100 (1986): 111; John Macquarrie, "The Keystone of Christian Faith," in *If Christ Be Not Risen . . . : Essays in Resurrection and Survival*, ed. John Greenhalgh and Elizabeth Russell (San Francisco: Collins, 1986), 18–22; C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Expository Times* 101 (1990): 171; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 99–107; Paul Barnett, Peter Jenson, and David Peterson, *Resurrection: Truth and Reality* (Sydney, Australia: Aquila, 1994), 27; Paul Maier, *In the Fulness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 193–96; Anthony Baxter, "Historical Judgement, Transcendent Perspective and 'Resurrection Appearances,'" *Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 22–23, 28, 37. See also the recent scholars listed in notes 36–40 above.
42. Published in Berlin in three volumes between 1867 and 1872, this critique is made in vol. 3 (1872), esp. 594–600. The English version is translated by E. M. Geldart and A. Ransom (London: Williams & Norgate, 1883); see esp. 361–65.
43. Keim, 600–605.
44. Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962), 93, 118–19, 242, 279.
45. Fuller, *Resurrection Narratives*, esp. 48–49, 179–82.
46. One concern to both Fuller and Grass is the term *objective* (for example, see Fuller, *Resurrection Narratives*, 202n48). Although Fuller apparently notes approvingly that the word refers to God's activity, he wants the eschatological implications to be made clear as well (33).
47. Besides Grass and Fuller, just a few examples of these scholars include Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, esp. 92; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, esp. 198; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, esp. 308, 310; Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament: According to Its Major Witnesses, Jesus—Paul—John* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1973), 103–4; Gerald O'Collins, *What Are They Saying about the Resurrection?* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 54–55; and Wilckens, *Resurrection*, 112, 119.
48. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; London: SPCK, 2003).
49. For just a few of these scholars, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), esp. ix–xi (following Karl Barth), 25–26, 87, 164, 171; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 423; Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), chs. 12 and 13; Stephen T. Davis, "'Seeing' the Risen Jesus," (126–47); and William P. Alston, "Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection" (148–83) in Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins, *The Resurrection*; William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 325–47; with some qualifications,

see also Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), 127–29, for instance.

50. Lüdemann with Özen, *What Really Happened to Jesus*, 103.

51. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 6–10 (emphasis in original).

52. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker, eds., *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

53. For examples, see the conclusions in the essays by Robert John Russell (25), Michael Welker (38), John Polkinghorne (49), Jeffrey P. Schloss (68–71), Peter Lampe (105–10), and Hans-Joachim Eckstein (116–23). At least the latter two authors also raise a few questions for the reconstitucionalist view (Lampe, 110–14; Eckstein, 120–21).

54. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, xvii–xix, 31, 71, 82–83, 200–206.

55. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (on Paul) chs. 5–8, esp. 273, 314, 350–74; (on the other New Testament authors) chs. 9 and 10, esp. 424, 476–79.

56. As noted in Crossan's main lecture, "Bodily-Resurrection Faith," included in this volume as the appendix; see pp. 174, 176f., and 216n3 below.

57. Crossan, "Bodily-Resurrection Faith," 216n3, and as noted in his opening statement, pp. 24–26 above. Compare also John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Its Jewish Context," *Neotestamentica* 37/1 (2003): 29–57, esp. 37–40, 46–49, 55.

58. For these ideas, see Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 133–35, 173–74, 296, 341–45.

59. I am implying not that Lüdemann, Crossan, and Reed hold this supernatural external view themselves but that they are among those who acknowledge that both Paul and the Gospel authors taught that Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared bodily.

60. This could be for more than one reason. Maybe this is why some scholars do not state their own positions, though this sounds suspiciously like an argument from silence. However, it appears more likely that while agnosticism may not be the first option, it becomes a default setting when some scholars are pushed to provide an answer.

61. Of course, I am not claiming to have done an exhaustive study of the scholars who answer this question. Still, my survey was quite extensive.