

The Reliability of the Resurrection Narratives

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es herrscht eine weitreichende Übereinstimmung unter Theologen, dass die Aufzählung der Auferstehungserscheinungen, welche Paulus im 1. Korintherbrief 15:3-8 angibt, als historisch zuverlässig anzunehmen ist. Allerdings neigen nicht alle Wissenschaftler dazu, auch die Auferstehungserzählungen der Evangelien als verbürgt anzuerkennen. Der vorliegende Aufsatz vertritt die Zuverlässigkeit dieser Erzählungen und konzentriert sich dabei auf die Betonung, welche die Kirche auf Überlieferungen von Auferstehungserscheinungen aus der

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RÉSUMÉ

Un large consensus parmi les spécialistes reconnaît comme historiquement fiable la liste des personnes à qui Jésus est apparu après sa résurrection (1 Co 15.3-8). La plupart des spécialistes n'est cependant pas encline à considérer comme fiables les récits évangéliques de la résurrection. L'auteur défend leur fiabilité en se concentrant sur l'importance accordée par les Églises aux traditions concernant les apparitions du Ressuscité dans la

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SUMMARY

There is widespread agreement among scholars that the list of resurrection appearances provided by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 should be accepted as historically reliable. However, most scholars are not inclined to accept the reliability of the Gospels' resurrection narratives. This essay argues for the reliability of these narratives by focusing on the emphasis the church placed on traditions of the resurrection appearances during the

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Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed an increased amount of literature on the question of whether there is convincing evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The list of Christians who have recently authored books arguing for the historicity

Zeit zwischen dem Dienst von Jesus und der Abfassung der Evangelien legt. Da jene Berichte innerhalb dieses Zeitraums als ungemein bedeutend erachtet wurden, ist es nahe liegend, dass sie exakt überliefert wurden, und somit ist es wahrscheinlich, dass die Auferstehungserzählungen zuverlässig sind. Dabei werden mögliche Einwände gegen dieses Argument berücksichtigt, die auf dem Markusschluss und offensichtlichen Widersprüchlichkeiten in den Evangelien beruhen. Nach der eigentlichen These des Aufsatzes geht es zur Bedeutung, die Irenäus für die Zuverlässigkeit der Auferstehungserzählungen hat.

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période intermédiaire entre le ministère de Jésus et la rédaction des Évangiles. On accordait à ces récits une telle importance qu'il est vraisemblable qu'ils ont été transmis avec fidélité. Il est donc probable que les récits évangéliques de la résurrection sont fiables. L'auteur considère les objections qu'on peut opposer à cette thèse sur la base de la finale de Marc et de la présence de contradictions apparentes dans les Évangiles. Puis il montre l'apport significatif d'Irénée pour confirmer la fiabilité des récits de la résurrection.

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period between Jesus' ministry and the writing of the Gospels. Since these stories were regarded as tremendously important during this time period, it is likely that they were passed on accurately. Hence it is likely that the resurrection narratives of the Gospels are reliable. Possible objections to this argument based on the ending of Mark and the presence of apparent contradictions in the Gospels are considered. In an appendix I consider the significance of Irenaeus for the reliability of the resurrection narratives.

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of the resurrection of Jesus is headed by William Lane Craig, Richard Swinburne, Stephen Davis, Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, and N.T. Wright.¹ Wright's book made such a splash in the world of biblical scholarship that the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* devoted an entire issue to it. The apologists for the resurrection have been

countered by the publication of *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*,² which contains fifteen essays from various contributors arguing against the resurrection. And Dale Allison has made a valuable contribution to the discussion with his essay "Resurrecting Jesus" which discusses the possible relationship between the resurrection appearances and contemporary reports of encounters with the deceased.³

The verdict of scholarship: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is reliable

When we inquire as to what material from the New Testament may be accepted as historical,⁴ we find that there is essentially unanimous agreement that the list of resurrection appearances related by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 stands very close to the actual events.⁵ The primary reason for this judgment is Paul's close proximity to the events. It is clear from various places in Paul's epistles that he knew a number of people who participated in these appearances, including the leaders of the Jerusalem church, where this information was first formulated and controlled. For example, in Galatians 1:18 Paul tells us that after his conversion he spent two weeks in Jerusalem with Peter, during which time he also saw Jesus' brother James. Thus when Paul relates this list, he does so having had first hand contact with a number of people who took part in these appearances. Paul is therefore simply too close to the events for these appearances to be considered legendary.⁶

Several other factors can also be cited in support of the historicity of this material: First, Paul says that he received the material (15:3) and thereby indicates that the material originated prior to his conversion (no more than about five years after the crucifixion). Second, Paul here uses words which are uncharacteristic of his vocabulary, a fact which supports the notion of a pre-Pauline origin for the material.⁷ Third, some of the Corinthians apparently knew Peter (1:12) and they thus could have asked him for confirmation for the appearances he related. Fourth, Jews living outside Palestine (such as in Corinth) routinely went up to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts, at which time they could verify the accuracy of Paul's statements with the Jerusalem church. Fifth, some of these appearances are related in the Gospels, a fact which indicates that the stories circulated widely and were not merely limited to Paul and his co-workers.⁸

Thus it seems quite clear that the appearances

listed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 are historical.⁹ Hence, even non-Christian scholar Pinchas Lapide states that this list "may be considered as a statement of eyewitnesses",¹⁰ and Gary Habermas in his survey of over 2,200 publications on the resurrection, reports that the data Paul relates in these verses is "frequently taken almost at face value" by scholars.¹¹

Since Paul's close proximity to the events prevents us from dismissing the material of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 as legendary, and since virtually no one is willing to propose that the disciples just made the whole thing up,¹² we have to acknowledge that the people mentioned in this list really did believe that Jesus had appeared to them. Thus, these appearances "happened", however we explain their happening.¹³

The resurrection narratives: are they reliable?

However, while affirming the historicity of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 provides us with valuable information about the appearances (in particular, we are told who were involved, that some appearances occurred to groups and that there were multiple appearances), it still leaves the historian with something to be desired, because 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 provides no description of just what the appearances were like.

In order to find such descriptions we have to turn to the resurrection narratives of the Gospels. But here the historian's quest encounters some difficulty. In contrast to the consensus on the historicity of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, many scholars are sceptical of the historical reliability of the resurrection narratives. This scepticism is largely a result of the fact that there are serious doubts about who wrote the Gospels and how close the authors were to the events. Dale Allison probably speaks for most scholars when he comments on the task of demonstrating the essential historicity of these narratives: "But how could it be done? I have been reading the secondary literature for a long time, and I do not know. To my knowledge, no one has pulled off the trick yet."¹⁴ In fact, even among those who argue for the historicity of the resurrection, it is uncommon to find a defence of the general reliability of the resurrection narratives; the usual procedure seems to be to argue for the historicity of the resurrection by relying primarily, if not solely, on the material of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.¹⁵ Even Wolfhart Pannenberg, a staunch defender

of the historicity of the resurrection, declared that the resurrection narratives “have such a strongly legendary character that one can scarcely find a historical kernel of their own in them”.¹⁶

How can we show that the resurrection narratives are reliable?

There is good reason to reject the prevailing scepticism. Once a couple of factors are taken into account, the historical reliability of these narratives will seem much stronger. Thus, I propose the following two-step argument for the reliability of the resurrection narratives:

1) It seems to be widely accepted among scholars that the Gospels are, at the very least, fairly reliable sources. By “fairly reliable” I simply mean that the Gospels contain quite a lot of accurate information. In contrast to, for example, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the canonical Gospels are not so overridden with legend that they constitute merely a collection of fables. Craig Evans, a prominent historical Jesus scholar, tells us that there is a “remarkable amount of consensus in recent scholarship” that the Gospels yield “significant historical data”.¹⁷ Likewise, Evans states that “the Gospels are now viewed as useful, if not essentially reliable, historical sources”.¹⁸

Indeed, the fact that most scholars consider the Gospels to be fairly reliable is evident from the wide acceptance of the criterion of multiple attestation.¹⁹ Since a claim is not more likely to be historical if it is multiply attested by largely unreliable documents, this criterion only makes sense if the Gospels are fairly reliable. For example, no one thinks that the historicity of Jesus’ descent into hell is rendered more historically likely because it is multiply attested by the Apostle’s creed and the Gospel of Nicodemus. These documents are not good historical sources and consequently the fact that they both attest to a given event does not make that event any more likely to be historical. By contrast, if we argue (as most scholars do) that the odds that Jesus used the term “The Son of Man” are raised if we find it attested by all four Gospels, we make the implicit assumption that the Gospels are at least fairly reliable.

2) Further, I propose that during the period between Jesus’ ministry and the writing of the Gospels (c. AD 30-70),²⁰ the stories of the resurrection appearances were regarded as at least equally significant to, if not more significant than, any other Jesus tradition (“Jesus traditions” being stories

about or sayings of Jesus). This fact becomes an argument for the reliability of the resurrection narratives when it is combined with the fact that the Gospels are fairly reliable. If the Gospels are fairly reliable, this means that many traditions about Jesus were reliably transmitted up to the time of the writing of the Gospels. Now, if the early church regarded the stories of Jesus’ resurrection as among its most important Jesus traditions, and the early church was able to accurately preserve many Jesus traditions (as evidenced by the fact that the Gospels are fairly reliable), then it is likely that the resurrection traditions were accurately preserved. This is because it would make little sense for the church to transmit its most significant traditions inaccurately while it transmitted its less significant traditions accurately. My argument so far may be outlined in syllogistic form as follows:

1. The Gospels are fairly reliable.
2. Therefore, the early church was able to accurately transmit many Jesus traditions.
3. The early church would likely transmit the Jesus traditions it valued the most at least as accurately as the ones it valued less.
4. The early church valued traditions of the resurrection appearances the most.
5. Therefore, the traditions of the resurrection appearances were transmitted accurately.
6. Therefore the resurrection narratives of the Gospels are essentially accurate.

Were traditions of the resurrection appearances considered significant?

There are four reasons for thinking that traditions of the resurrection appearances were regarded as tremendously significant during the period AD 30-70:

1. The resurrection as the climax of Jesus’ life and Israel’s history

The early church believed that Jesus’ resurrection served as the climax of Jesus’ life and that Jesus’ life itself served as the climax of Israel’s history.²¹

a) That the resurrection was considered the climax of Jesus’ life during the period AD 30-70 is clear from the fact that Paul, our primary source for this period, focuses far more on the resurrection than he does on any other historical event associated with Jesus. Excluding the resurrection, Paul’s references to the events of Jesus’ life are relatively sparse, the main exception being his account of the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. By contrast, ref-

erences to Jesus' resurrection are numerous in Paul, e.g. Romans 1:3; 4:24; 6:4; 7:4; 8:11; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 5:15; Galatians 1:1; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; and most prominently 1 Corinthians 15, to which we shall return.²² In addition to the sheer quantity of references, a number of passages make it clear that Jesus' resurrection was considered foundational to the faith. Jesus' resurrection makes possible our justification (Romans 4:25), belief in his resurrection constitutes the grounds of our salvation (Romans 10:9), and his resurrection serves to guarantee our own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Hence, Reginald Fuller is correct that: "The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the central claim of the church's proclamation. There was no period when this was not so."²³

b) The notion that Jesus' life was the apex of Israel's history is prevalent throughout the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 26:54; Luke 24:27; Acts 2:16; 13:32; 1 Corinthians 15:3),²⁴ and Israel's history was certainly regarded as a narrative story of God's intervention in the affairs of humankind.²⁵ God creates human beings, destroys the world with a flood, frees the Hebrews from Egypt by performing miracles, punishes Israel by allowing the Babylonians to destroy them and raises up Cyrus to facilitate the Jews' return to the Promised Land. The early church was sure that this story had finally been brought to a climax by the coming of Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

Thus, since Israel's history was a narrative story and Jesus' life was the climax of that story, we should expect that from its beginning the early church placed emphasis on narrating the events of Jesus' life. Since the resurrection was the climax of Jesus' life, we should expect an emphasis on the narration of the resurrection appearances during the first decades of Christianity.

2. The apostle Paul

We have just argued that Jesus' life was considered the climax of Israel's history and thus that the earliest Christians likely emphasized the events of Jesus' life. Further, since the early Christians considered the resurrection to be the climax of Jesus' life, this means that they would also have emphasized the resurrection appearances. Hence, even if we had no explicit statements from our pre-70 sources affirming the importance of the resurrection appearances, we would still be justified in positing that the appearances were regarded as very significant. But in fact we do have explicit statements. 1 Cor-

inthians 15 provides compelling evidence that the early church considered the resurrection appearances to be extremely important.

We may begin by explaining Paul's general aim in the passage. Paul tries to set straight those in Corinth who are denying the future resurrection. To make his argument, Paul first appeals to that which he describes as of "first importance" (v.3), and what constitutes the essence of the Gospel (vv.1-2):

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (NASB)

After enumerating the list of witnesses to the resurrection appearances, Paul argues from the fact of Jesus' resurrection to the absurdity of the Corinthians' denial of the general resurrection. Here he goes into detail concerning the point he makes elsewhere (Romans 8:11; Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:14): Jesus has been raised as the first fruits of the general resurrection; he has been raised so that the rest of humanity will eventually be raised as well. Paul argues that if there is no general resurrection, then the purpose of Jesus' resurrection would be defeated, and so a denial of the former is essentially a denial of the latter. But Jesus' resurrection is the very foundation of the faith, and since the Corinthians affirm Jesus' resurrection, it is absurd for them to deny the general resurrection.

Paul's argument makes it clear that he considers the resurrection of Jesus to be tremendously important. He states that if Jesus' resurrection did not occur then the Christian's faith is in vain (15:14) and he assumes that the Corinthians agree with him on this. (It is the general resurrection which they deny.) This reinforces the point we made above: Paul's epistles evince the fact that Jesus' resurrection was the central focus of the earliest Christians. But it is in this passage that we find tremendous importance ascribed not only to Jesus' resurrection itself (the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead) but also to the resurrection

appearances (the fact that after Jesus was raised he appeared to numerous people). That tremendous importance was ascribed to the resurrection appearances is clear from the following:

1) Paul declares in verse 3 that the information which he is reminding the Corinthians of is “of first importance” (i.e. of primary importance) and that this information is the essence of the Gospel – the essence of what the Corinthians believe for salvation (15:1-2). This information is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the fact that these events occurred in fulfilment of the Scriptures, and the list of resurrection appearances. The fact that Paul labels these appearances as of “first importance” and that he includes them as an essential part of the Gospel in verses 1-2 certainly indicates that he considered the appearances highly significant. Further, Paul writes that he had “passed on” this information to the Corinthians when he had first founded the church in Corinth. Thus, the resurrection appearances were part of the foundational material which Paul delivered to the churches which he established. Therefore, all churches which Paul founded would have been instructed that the resurrection appearances were part of the foundation of the faith.²⁶ In addition, since Paul considers the appearances to be a matter of primary importance, we can assume that he not only presented the appearances to the churches which he founded, but that he also presented them to the many other churches which he visited. Thus, because Paul’s missionary travels were quite extensive, a very large number of the first century churches must have known of Paul’s high regard for the resurrection appearances. But in fact, it was not only Paul and his co-workers who ascribed great importance to the appearances:

2) Paul indicates that this list of appearances did not originate with him nor did the practice of passing it along to new converts. He plainly states that he “received” this information.²⁷ It is almost certain that this material was discussed between Paul, Peter and James during the two weeks which Paul spent with Peter in Jerusalem during the 30s AD (Galatians 1:18-19). At this time, Paul had just joined a movement founded on the belief in Jesus’ resurrection and he himself had recently experienced a resurrection appearance. It would thus be incredible if the resurrection appearances were never a subject of discussion during those weeks: C.H. Dodd rightly remarks that “we may presume they did not spend all the time talking about the weather.”²⁸ Thus these appearances were certainly

known to the Jerusalem church.²⁹ Further, Paul clearly implies that the Jerusalem church, like Paul himself, regarded the appearances as a matter of primary importance.

3) We come now to the most significant point. Paul explicitly states (15:11) that the apostles agreed with the summary of the Gospel which he gives in verses 3-8. He declares: “whether it was I or they [the other apostles], so we preached and so you believed” (15:11). The referent of “they” here is the apostles, the group mentioned in verses 7 and 9. When Paul refers to what he and the other apostles preached, he surely means the information summarized in 15:3-8: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the fact that these events fulfilled the Scriptures, and the resurrection appearances. Thus the apostles agree with Paul on the primary importance of this information.

With regard to the identity of the apostles, there is some uncertainty as to precisely what Paul means by this term.³⁰ However, it is clear from 1 Corinthians 12:28 that the apostles functioned as prominent leaders in the Christian movement. In this verse, Paul affirms that the apostles are of first rank, ranking ahead of prophets, teachers and other prominent individuals in the early church. This fact is confirmed by Galatians 1:19 where Peter and James, each prominent Christian leaders and heads of the Jerusalem Church, are identified as apostles.³¹ Thus when Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:11 that all of the apostles agree with his preaching, this is a statement that numerous Christian leaders, including the leaders of the Jerusalem church (the “mother church” of the Christian movement),³² agree with him on the importance of the resurrection appearances.³³

1 Corinthians 15:3-11 is an extremely important passage for the present argument. From this passage we learn that Paul considered the resurrection appearances to be part of the foundation of the faith, and that all other apostles (including Peter and James) agreed with him on this. The conclusion follows that during the period AD 30-70 the leaders of the Christian church were agreed in ascribing tremendous significance to the resurrection appearances. Indeed, even if my other three arguments fail, the fact that the early church considered the resurrection appearances tremendously significant is established from this passage alone.

3. Jewish theological disputes

The proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection would have thrust the Christian movement into the midst

of a controversial Jewish theological dispute: Whether the resurrection of the dead would occur. In contrast to the Pharisees, there were at least two groups in first century Judaism who rejected the notion of bodily resurrection. The Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.153-58) and the Sadducees rejected the afterlife altogether. The Christian claim that not only would the general resurrection occur, but that its occurrence was now vouchsafed because God had raised Jesus from the dead,³⁴ could hardly have gone unchallenged by those Jews who doubted the resurrection for if the claim was true it would require a revision to their belief system.

The contentiousness of the notion of resurrection is plain from Acts 23:6-7, where Paul's mention of Jesus' resurrection causes an argument to break out, and from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22:23 and par.) where some Sadducees approach Jesus and ask him a question intended to demonstrate the absurdity of the resurrection. Likewise, the rabbinic writings testify to disputes on the resurrection between the Sadducees and their opponents.³⁵ The Christian claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead was in effect a claim to have a stunning new sort of evidence for the reality of the resurrection: eyewitness reports of an actually resurrected person. This evidence would certainly be questioned by those sceptical of the general resurrection, and thus debates on the appearances would have taken place in Jewish-Christian circles.

If the appearances did become the subject of Jewish-Christian theological disputes, it is likely that the appearances would come to occupy a prominent place in the tradition. This is because Jewish-Christian theological disputes clearly did occupy a prominent place in the tradition, as the preservation of so many of them in the Gospels indicates. The Gospels have preserved a debate on whether healing on the Sabbath constitutes work (Mark 2:1-12), a debate on whether picking grain was unlawful on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28), a qorban dispute (Mark 7:1-23), the Sadducees' question on marriage in the resurrection (Matthew 22:23) and the question of whether the disciples should pay the Temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). These are all disputes that could not have arisen in Gentile churches, but rather clearly reflect Jewish interests and thus originated in Jewish-Christian circles. They must have arisen prior to AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed and Jewish-Christianity was quickly divorced from the rest of the church, ceasing to have much influence on the church's

preservation of Jesus traditions. However, these issues were preserved in documents written after 70, despite their decreased relevance for that time period. This is only explainable if Jewish-Christian theological disputes occupied an important place in the tradition prior to 70. Since the resurrection appearances, by virtue of their relationship to the general resurrection, would have entered the category of Jewish-Christian theological disputes, we should expect that they occupied an important place during the period 30-70.

4. The crucifixion

Paul speaks of the "foolishness" of the message of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:23. This remark occurs in the context of his discussion of Jewish and Gentile rejection of Christianity: Jesus' crucifixion is a "stumbling-block" to Jews and "foolishness" to Gentiles. Because of the Christian heritage of contemporary society, the proclamation that the saviour of the world was crucified does not strike most modern ears as particularly strange. But this was not so in the ancient world, where crucifixion was regarded as a gruesome, shameful punishment to be inflicted on the worst members of society. The ancient sources on crucifixion have been thoroughly examined by Martin Hengel,³⁶ whose observations include the following:

Hebrews 12:2 speaks of Jesus suffering the shame of the cross and this is echoed by Celsus who writes that Jesus was "bound in the most ignominious fashion" and "executed in a shameful way" (Hengel, 7). In response to Maecenas' comparison of the sufferings of old age with the slow death of crucifixion, Seneca responds that such a life is not worth living and that one should commit suicide before suffering a death that can be compared to being fastened to "the accursed tree" (pp. 30-31). Isidore of Seville calls hanging better than the cross (29). Crucifixion was a punishment given to those who had committed awful crimes such as treason, murder and sorcery (34) and it was especially applied to slaves (51-63). Juvenal thought it an abomination that an actor from the upper class had portrayed a crucified victim in a play, and thereby lowered himself to the level of the lower classes (35). The Gospels provide the most thorough descriptions of crucifixion in ancient literature, as Greco-Roman writers avoided the subject (25). "Crux" was used as a vulgar insult (9). Hengel writes that "the Roman world was largely unanimous that crucifixion was a horrific, disgusting business" (37). In Greek romances, heroes

who were bound up to be crucified were always rescued from the cross before actually dying (81).

Since Jesus' death by crucifixion was considered such a shameful, degrading affair, it is likely that potential converts would have been reluctant to adopt the new faith, and Paul tells us as much in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. The notion that someone who was sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21) and divine (Philippians 2:6-11) had suffered this sort of punishment would draw great suspicion. Because of the initial scepticism which the Christian message would encounter, it is probable that whatever reasons the early Christians provided for accepting Christianity would be subjected to close scrutiny. From 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 it is apparent that the early Christians presented the resurrection appearances as evidence for the truth of Christianity. If this is the case, then the resurrection appearances would have been subjected to close scrutiny by potential converts and thus we have one more reason to believe that there was a significant emphasis on the resurrection appearances during the mid first century.

There are two indications from 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 that when the early church enumerated resurrection appearances, as Paul does here, it did so for an apologetic purpose, presenting the resurrection appearances as evidence for the resurrection and hence, given the centrality of the resurrection for the faith (see above), the truth of Christianity. First, the structure of Paul's argument indicates that this was the case. His argument against the Corinthians' denial of the general resurrection is based on the contention that Jesus' resurrection guarantees the fact of the general resurrection. It seems then that Paul's purpose in citing the list of appearances is to argue that just as Jesus' resurrection guarantees the fact of the general resurrection, so the appearances guarantee the fact of Jesus' resurrection.³⁷ On this interpretation, the list of appearances serves a discernible function: Paul's argument moves from using the fact of the appearances to demonstrate the fact of Jesus' resurrection, to then using the fact of Jesus' resurrection to demonstrate the fact of the general resurrection. If this is not what Paul is trying to do, it is hard to see why he produces the list of appearances.

The second indication is the mention of the 500 persons in the list. Two facts suggest that this appearance has been included in the list because the large number of witnesses strongly supports the factuality of the appearance. First, the nature of the appearance to the 500 differs from that of

the other appearances. The other appearances all occurred to individuals who were well-known in the early church and their inclusion in the list can be explained on that basis.³⁸ Yet the 500 do not fit this category; they are not well-known individuals and their inclusion in the list demands another explanation. The evidential value of such a large appearance furnishes just such an explanation.

Second, that the appearance was used evidentially is strongly suggested by the fact that Paul comments "most [of the 500] are still living, though some have fallen asleep". The purpose of such a passing remark is likely to say, in effect, that most of the witnesses are still there for anyone who wishes to question them. As N.T. Wright comments: "The entire paragraph is about evidence, about witnesses being called, about something that actually happened for which eyewitnesses could and would vouch."³⁹

Hence, Pannenberg is likely right that: "The intention of this enumeration is clearly to give proof by means of witnesses to the facticity of Jesus' resurrection."⁴⁰ Thus the resurrection appearances served an evidentialist function for the early church and were therefore a reason presented by the Christians in favour of the truth of Christianity.

First objection: Mark's ending

One point which can be raised against the argument that the resurrection appearances were ascribed tremendous significance in the early days of the church is that Mark, generally regarded as the first Gospel and usually dated to c.65-70, ends his Gospel without any resurrection appearances. The last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel, which do narrate appearances, are regarded by virtually all scholars as a later addition to the Gospel.⁴¹ This would mean that it originally ended with the discovery of the empty tomb in 16:8. However, this is not the case if, as some scholars maintain, Mark did not actually end his Gospel at 16:8, but rather the original ending of Mark has been lost.⁴² But even on the assumption that Mark did originally end at 16:8, the absence of resurrection appearances in his Gospel should not be taken to imply that he did not consider the appearances significant. Five times in his Gospel Mark anticipates the resurrection of Jesus (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:32-34; 14:28) and he mentions in particular an appearance in Galilee in 14:28 and again at the end of his Gospel in 16:7. Hence, the fact that Mark ends his Gospel with a prediction of a resurrection appear-

ance means that a plausible case can be made that he did regard the appearances as significant, and no strong case can be made to the contrary. Thus, at worst, the absence of a resurrection narrative in Mark leaves ambiguous the question of how significant he regarded the resurrection appearances. This cannot be used to overturn the clear evidence examined above (particularly that of Paul) which indicates that the resurrection appearances were ascribed great significance during the period 30-70.

Second objection: contradictions?

Another retort to this argument might be that the resurrection narratives cannot be reliable because they contradict each other. According to Fuller, "the stories themselves appear incredible on the grounds of their palpable inconsistencies".⁴³ One can certainly compile a long list of seeming discrepancies among the narratives, yet one can propose plausible harmonisations as well.⁴⁴ But if we are arguing only for the general accuracy of the narratives and not for their inerrancy, we need to recognize that some contradictions, even if unharmonisable, are not significant enough to raise doubts about the general accuracy of the narratives.

An illustration from the USA: Basketball player Wilt Chamberlain's is credited with scoring 100 points in one game. However, this game was not caught on videotape and there are thus a number of discrepancies in the details: Chamberlain claims he had ten assists that game,⁴⁵ while the official score reveals he had only two.⁴⁶ Some accounts have Chamberlain scoring his 100th point on a lay up,⁴⁷ while others say it was a dunk.⁴⁸ When Chamberlain scored his 100th point, the crowd rushed onto the court, but some accounts say the game was called at this point,⁴⁹ while others claim that the crowd was cleared and the game resumed.⁵⁰ Minor contradictions such as these do not cast doubt on the essential accuracy of the story.

The large majority of apparent contradictions among the resurrection narratives are of a minor kind: For example, there are apparent contradictions over how many women visited the tomb and whether it was daylight or still dark when they arrived. These are surely not significant enough to impinge upon the general reliability of the story. However, it is possible to have apparent contradictions which are not trivial and which, if incapable of being harmonised, would be grounds for ques-

tioning the basic historicity of the narratives. (It is necessarily a subjective judgment as to when a contradiction should be considered major and when minor.) In the case of Wilt Chamberlain's game, if we had conflicting testimony over where the game was located or what century it occurred in, these would be sufficient to cast doubt on the basic story. With regard to the resurrection narratives, there are only two apparent contradictions of such a magnitude: 1) Luke seems to limit the appearances to Jerusalem, Mark and Matthew seem to limit them to Galilee, and John says that they took place in both Jerusalem and Galilee; 2) John seems to contradict the Synoptics as to whether or not Mary Magdalene found out that Jesus was resurrected when she went to the tomb. The short answers to these problems are as follows: I have dealt with 2) in detail in a forthcoming article,⁵¹ and John is correct that Mary Magdalene did not learn of Jesus' resurrection when she visited the tomb, but the Synoptics do not actually affirm otherwise. Regarding 1), John is correct that the appearances took place in both Galilee and Jerusalem, but Luke does not exclude Galilean appearances as he superficially seems to, nor do Matthew and Mark exclude Jerusalem appearances as they superficially seem to.⁵²

Before proposed harmonisations are dismissed as strained and far-fetched, the following case ought to be considered. In their book on methodology for conducting local historical research, Barbara Allen and William Montell investigated two different accounts of the 1881 lynching of two young men – Frank and Jack McDonald ("the McDonald boys") – in Menominee, Michigan. One account claimed they were hung from a railroad crossing, while the other claimed they were strung up on a pine tree. The accounts seemed hopelessly contradictory until Allen and Montell discovered old photographs that showed the bodies hanging *at different times from both places*. As macabre as it is, the McDonald boys apparently had first been hung from a railroad crossing, then taken down, dragged to a pine tree, and *hoisted up again*.⁵³

Conclusion

We have seen that there are four strong reasons to believe that the resurrection appearances were considered extremely significant during the period between Jesus' ministry and the writing of the Gospels. From this we can conclude that if many Jesus traditions were transmitted accurately, the

stories of the resurrection appearances were likely among them. Thus, on the assumption that the Gospels are at least fairly reliable sources, we have good reason to think that the resurrection narratives are reliable.

Appendix

One point which is not related to the specific argument given above but which does affect the general question of whether the resurrection narratives are reliable ought to be considered. In *Against Heresies* 3.3.4 Irenaeus recalls how, during his youth, he met Polycarp:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.

Further, in Irenaeus's *Letter to Florinus* (quoted in Eusebius's *Church History*, 5.20.5-7) he writes:

For when I was a boy, I saw you in lower Asia with Polycarp, moving in splendour in the royal court, and endeavouring to gain his approbation. I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined with it; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the "Word of life". Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures.

Note that in these passages Irenaeus refers to John and the others who had "seen Christ" and had "seen the Lord". These are the witnesses to the resurrection appearances (John 20:18, 24; 1 Corinthians 9:1). The fact that Irenaeus emphasizes Polycarp's personal familiarity with the wit-

nesses of the appearances implies that Irenaeus had heard Polycarp relate accounts of the resurrection appearances. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand how in the first place, Irenaeus would know that Polycarp had conversed with those who had seen the Lord, and in the second place why Irenaeus would make mention of it. Further, at the end of the second passage, Irenaeus explicitly states that Polycarp heard stories of Jesus' miracles and teaching from those who had seen the Lord, and that Irenaeus heard the same stories from Polycarp. But if these witnesses to the appearances related stories of Jesus' miracles and teachings, surely they also related stories of his appearances. If this is so, then Irenaeus has heard stories of the resurrection appearances as recounted by someone who spoke with the eyewitnesses. It is well-known that elsewhere in his writings Irenaeus affirms that he regards the four Gospels as authoritative. Since Irenaeus also regards Polycarp as a reliable source, it is highly likely that the descriptions of the resurrection appearances which Irenaeus read in the four Gospels are substantially the same as the accounts of those appearances which Irenaeus had heard from Polycarp.⁵⁴

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Notes

- 1 William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (rev. ed; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002 [1989]); Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); see also the transcripts of Craig's debates on the resurrection (with further commentary) versus Gerd Lüdemann and John Dominic Crossan: Paul Copan (ed.), *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Paul Copan (ed.), *Jesus' Resurrection Fact or Figment: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).
- 2 Robert M. Price and Jeffrey J. Lowder (eds.), *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005).
- 3 Dale C. Allison Jr., "Resurrecting Jesus" in *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its*

- Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005) 198-375.
- 4 With regard to attempts to dismiss a historical argument for the resurrection, a priori: There have long been adequate rebuttals to the standard philosophical arguments (such as those of Hume and Troeltsch) against the possibility of affirming the historicity of a miraculous event (see e.g. John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 39-90). William Lane Craig convincingly refutes recent arguments by John P. Meier and Gerald O'Collins that the theological nature of the resurrection makes the event impossible to investigate historically in *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (3rd ed; Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) 53-57. On the illegitimacy of creating a bifurcation between faith and history in general, see Wolfhart Pannenberg (ed.), *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), particularly Pannenberg's essay "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation", 124-158.
 - 5 After surveying over 2200 publications on Jesus' resurrection from 1975-2005, Gary Habermas concludes that "the vast majority of critical scholars who answer the question [of when Paul received the material of 1 Cor 15:3-8] place Paul's reception of this material in the mid-30s CE" ("Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What Are Critical Scholars Saying?" in *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3 [2005] 135-153, 142).
 - 6 To say that these appearances are not legendary, or to say that they are historical, is not to say that they were actual appearances of Jesus raised from the dead. Rather, the virtually unanimous opinion of scholarship is only that the people in this list had experiences which they believed were experiences of Jesus raised from the dead. Many scholars who affirm that these appearances "happened" (that is, some sort of experience occurred, the report is not based on nothing) nonetheless are either unsure whether the experiences were real, bodily appearances or positively endorse a non-supernatural explanation for the appearances. For an overview of the many different kinds of alternative explanations see Gary R. Habermas, "The Late Twentieth Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection" in *Trinity Journal* 22 (2001) 179-196.
 - 7 See Gary R. Habermas and J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1998) 129.
 - 8 The appearances to Peter (Lk 24:34), the Twelve (Lk 24:36-44; Jn 20:19-23), possibly the 500 (see Craig, *Assessing*, 45-48, for the argument that Matthew's Galilean appearance is the same as the 500) and Paul (Acts 9:1-9) are all recounted elsewhere in the New Testament.
 - 9 For further discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 see Craig, *Assessing*, 3-62; Habermas and Moreland, *Beyond Death* 128-133, 141-147.
 - 10 Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983) 99.
 - 11 Habermas, "Resurrection Research", 136.
 - 12 After surveying over 2200 publication on Jesus' resurrection from 1975-2005, Gary R. Habermas writes that "The substantially unanimous verdict of contemporary critical scholars is that Jesus' disciples at least believed that he was alive, resurrected from the dead" ("Experiences of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection," *Dialog* 45 [2006] 288-297, 289).
 - 13 But see note 6 on possible naturalistic explanations for the appearances.
 - 14 Dale C. Allison Jr., "The Resurrection of Jesus and Rational Apologetics" in *Philosophia Christi*, forthcoming. Allison's question does assume that none of the Gospels were written by the traditional authors. For if the Gospels really do come from the traditional authors, then the authors were very close to the events and thus the resurrection narratives as well as the Gospels as a whole can be accepted as reliable. Although in this article I grant this assumption for the sake of argument, I believe a very strong case can be made for the traditional authorship of Luke; see Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 308-364. While I think the case for the eyewitness authorship of John is also strong, I am not so sure on the traditional authorship of Matthew and Mark.
 - 15 It may not be the case that a given scholar who argues in such a manner necessarily agrees with the majority position that the narratives are unreliable, for he may argue in this fashion on purely pragmatic grounds. That is, if the argument can be made only by appeal to those materials which most scholars accept, then the argument will probably win more adherents. This certainly seems to be the approach of Habermas and Licona (*Case*, 44-46) who state that they base their argument for the resurrection only on the "minimal facts" (i.e. those facts which are accepted by the large majority of scholars). Likewise, although Craig argues for the reliability of the narratives in *Assessing*, when engaging in public debates on the resurrection (such as those referred to in note 1 above) he typically states that he is arguing only from facts which are accepted by the large majority of scholars.
 - 16 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 89.
 - 17 Craig Evans, "Life-Of-Jesus Research and the

- Eclipse of Mythology" in *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 3-37, 34.
- 18 Evans, "Life-Of-Jesus Research" 14.
- 19 For an introduction to the criteria for authenticity including the criterion of multiple attestation see e.g. Craig A. Evans, "Authenticity Criteria in Life of Jesus Research" in *Christian Scholar's Review* 19 (1989) 6-31; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 167-195.
- 20 Just as I am conceding for the sake of argument the majority position that the Gospels were not written by the traditional authors, I am also conceding the majority position that the Gospels were written after AD 70. If the Gospels were in fact written before 70, then they must be reckoned generally reliable given that so many eyewitnesses would still have been around while they were written, and given the controlling presence of the Jerusalem church. On the role of eyewitnesses see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: the Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). On the controlled nature of the Jesus tradition see Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); *idem*, *The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001). I am not at all sure on the question of the dates of the Gospels, but J.A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) is probably the best-known attempt to argue for a pre-70 date.
- 21 This is the general tenor of Ulrich Wilckens, "The Understanding of Revelation within the History of Primitive Christianity" in Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 57-121; cf. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 147-166.
- 22 Outside of Paul's epistles, the other New Testament documents which have the most scholarly support for a pre-70 date are probably 1 Peter, Hebrews and James, though I think a number of others also date pre-70. The resurrection is clearly ascribed great significance in 1 Peter (1:3, 3:21) as well as Hebrews, see Gareth L. Cockerill, "The Better Resurrection (Heb 11:35): A Key to the Structure and Rhetorical Purpose of Hebrews 11" in *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 (2000) 215-234. The resurrection is not mentioned in James but this is clearly a pastorally oriented letter which has little theological focus, so the absence of resurrection from it cannot be taken as indicative of a lack of interest in it by the author. The various speeches on the resurrection in Acts which are purportedly from the mouths of Peter and Paul also need to be taken into consideration here, since many scholars argue that these speeches, even if not the exact words of the apostles, embody pre-70 apostolic preaching. If this is so, they certainly testify to great interest in Jesus' resurrection and even the resurrection appearances specifically since the appearances are mentioned in these speeches (e.g. 3:15; 13:31) prior to 70; for a list of scholars who believe that the speeches embody early apostolic preaching see Habermas, "Resurrection Research", 143 n. 52. But this question is a matter of considerable debate, see Craig, *Assessing*, 28-29.
- 23 Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: MacMillan, 1971) 48.
- 24 On this idea in Luke-Acts in particular see I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (3rd edition; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
- 25 On this point, see R. Rendtorff, "The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel" in Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 25-53.
- 26 Some scholars have proposed the quite unlikely suggestion that during Paul's time the appearances listed in 1 Cor 15:3-8 really were only listed, without actually being narrated; see e.g. Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection: An Historical Examination and Explanation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 63. But we can hardly expect that any potential convert to Christianity would have been persuaded simply by hearing, for example, "Jesus appeared to Peter". Rather anyone hearing such a statement for the first time would immediately wonder what it meant at which point Paul, or whoever was relating the appearances, would need to elaborate.
- 27 It is often noted that the terms "received" and "passed on" can be used as technical terms for passing on sacred tradition (e.g. Habermas and Moreland, *Beyond Death*, 129).
- 28 C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (London: Hodder, 1944) 16.
- 29 Not all scholars agree that the list of resurrection appearances always existed in the precise form in which we find it in 1 Cor 15:3-8. A number believe that prior to Paul, the creed ended with the appearances to Peter and the Twelve at 15:5 (see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3-7" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 [1981] 582-589), although such scholars acknowledge that the remaining appearances still represent pre-Pauline material even if they were not put into list form until Paul. Even if only the appearances to Peter and the Twelve are the referent of what is of first importance in 15:3, this still indicates that those before Paul held the appearances to be of first importance (since they proclaimed the appearances to Peter and the Twelve) even if they did not provide as extensive a list of appearances as Paul would come to provide. However, it does not seem likely that the list was not put into its final form until Paul; that the whole list was given to Paul as is (except for the addition of his own appearance in 15:8) seems much more likely (see Kirk R. MacGregor, "1 Corinthians 15:3b-6a,7 and the Bodily Resurrection of

- Jesus" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 [2006] 225-234 [227-229]; Craig, *Assessing*, 22-34).
- 30 On the identity of the apostles see the entries for "apostolos" in *TDNT* and *ABD*; Kevin Giles, "Apostles Before and After Paul" in *Churchman* 99 (1985) 241-256; Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 115-116.
- 31 On the fact that Galatians 1:19 indicates James was reckoned as an apostle see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word, 1990) 38; John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 60; Frank J. Matera and Daniel J. Harrington, *Galatians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007) 66.
- 32 The centrality of the Jerusalem church is evident from the fact that this is where the early Christians gathered together to resolve the Gentile controversy (Acts 15). And see R. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church" in *idem* (ed.), *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 415-480.
- 33 The Acts speeches need to be noted here. If they are to be dated pre-70 (see above note) then, with their emphasis on the resurrection appearances, they provide independent attestation to Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:11.
- 34 As we saw, the connection between Jesus' resurrection and the general resurrection was missed by some of the Gentile converts in Corinth, but the connection would have been obvious to most Jews.
- 35 See the texts cited in Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949) 357-364.
- 36 Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).
- 37 This is well explained in Craig, *Assessing*, 16-22.
- 38 This point is made by Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 237.
- 39 Wright, *Resurrection*, 325.
- 40 Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, 89.
- 41 The primary reason for regarding these verses as inauthentic is that they are missing from the earliest manuscripts of Mark.
- 42 On this possibility see N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003); Robert H. Stein, "The Ending of Mark" in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18 (2008) 79-98.
- 43 Fuller, *Formation*, 2.
- 44 Many of the apparent contradictions are dealt with at various points in Craig, *Assessing*. One can also consult John Wenham, *Easter Enigma* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) but with the caveat that Craig is right to criticise Wenham on the grounds that "he tends to take his often unnecessarily elaborate speculations, not as mere possibilities, but as actual facts" (*Assessing*, 225). See also Jakob van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Jakob van Bruggen, *Jesus the Son of God: The Gospel Narratives as Message* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).
- 45 Wilt Chamberlain, *A View From Above* (New York: Villard, 1991) 190-191.
- 46 See a copy of the box score in Bryan Burwell, *At The Buzzer! Halibek steals, Erving soars, Magic deals, Michael scores: The Greatest Moments in NBA History* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 127.
- 47 Burwell, *Buzzer*, 126.
- 48 Burwell, *Buzzer*, 126.
- 49 Burwell, *Buzzer*, 126.
- 50 Burwell, *Buzzer*, 126.
- 51 "John Versus the Synoptics on Mary Magdalene's Visit to the Tomb" in *Conspectus*, forthcoming.
- 52 See C.F.D. Moule, "The Post-Resurrection Appearances in Light of Festival Pilgrimages" in *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957) 58-61; Craig, *Assessing*, 223-25.
- 53 Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, 424.
- 54 It might be asked how Irenaeus can be so close to the events given that he wrote in c. 180 and the resurrection appearances occurred in c. 30. However, the time gap is not as significant as it first appears. According to *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9.3, Polycarp was 86 when he died in 155, and thus was born in the year 69. If the witnesses to the appearances were about the same age as Jesus or a little younger, they would have been about 80-90 years old in c.85 CE when Polycarp was 16. If Irenaeus was 60 years old when he wrote (Josephus wrote three of his four works while he was between the ages of 57 and 62) he would have been about 20 when Polycarp was 71. Thus there is nothing implausible about Irenaeus being only one link removed from the witnesses to the appearances. Incidentally, it would be profitable to search Irenaeus' writings to see if he relates any information on the resurrection appearances which is not found in the New Testament; any such information may well derive from his conversations with Polycarp.