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## **Hope's Reason: A Journal of Apologetics**

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## Table of Contents

“Hope’s Reason” by Stephen J. Bedard	1
“Did Muhammad Deny the Incarnation or Paganism?” by K. Dayton Hartman	3
“The Myth of Metaphorical Resurrection” by Tawa J. Anderson	17
“An Introduction to Presuppositional Apologetics” by Ian Hugh Clary	49
“Past, Probability, and Teleology” by J.W. Wartick	69
“Shona Concept of Spirit Possession” by Francis Machingura	85
“Pentecostal Perspectives on Charismatic Activity of the Spirit” by Dan Morrison	103
“Are the Gosepls/ Acts in Conflict With Paul?” by Tony Costa	113
“Literary Apologetics in Action” by Holly Ordway	135
“Exposing the Spirit of the Age” by Stephen J. Bedard	145
Reviews	169



## HOPE'S REASON

Stephen J. Bedard<sup>2</sup>

### **Why Another Journal?**

Why would anyone want to start another journal, either print or online? And why another apologetics journal? There are a number of apologetics journals and many apologetics blogs (I have one myself).<sup>3</sup> On the surface, there seems to be little need to add to what already exists. However, it quickly becomes apparent that most apologetics resources fall into one of two categories: popular or academic. The popular resources are easy to understand but often have only surface treatment of the issues and lack scholarly precision. The academic resources do interact with the larger scholarly world and are more in-depth in their treatment but they are often so theoretical as to be of little use to the local church. This journal seeks to fill that gap.

In starting this journal, we have been blessed with a number of peer reviewers from backgrounds such as Ph.D. studies, pastoral experience and apologetics blog. They will be heavily involved in making sure that the apologetics articles that appear in this journal are of only the highest quality and at the same time are relevant to the ministry of the local church.

### **Why Hope's Reason?**

Coming up with a name that is catchy, descriptive and not over-used is a great challenge. Thanks go to Beth Stovell who came up with the name *Hope's Reason: A Journal of Apologetics*. The name is inspired by 1 Peter 3:15, the foundational verse for all apologetics.

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always  
being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.1peter315.wordpress.com>.

you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

Christianity is about hope. It is about beliefs in things that cannot be seen such as an eternal God, grace, peace and an afterlife. However, it is not a faith without reason. There are good reasons to believe in the existence of God, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in historic Christianity as the original faith that was taught by the apostles. This journal will explore the reasons for the faith that many Christians take for granted and that many skeptics reject as myth.

The second part of this passage reminds us of the importance of gentleness and respect. There is no lack of Internet apologetics that insult, ridicule and mock different belief systems. This reminds us that there are two types of apologetics: one to make Christians feel good and one to make connections between Christians and non-Christians. There is a desire for Christians to feel confident in their beliefs and for some this comes through the putting down of others. It is good for Christians to be confident in their faith but there are better ways to achieve this. The goal of this journal is not to make Christians feel good about themselves but to seek to build bridges with those of different (or no) faith systems by scholarly and respectful treatments of the issues. This is the method used by Paul in Acts 17:16-34 and it continues to be vital for today's religious milieu.

### **The Vision**

The vision for this journal is to bridge the gap between scholarship and the local church. Scholars have done much work in the areas of apologetics but their research has often gone unnoticed by the local church. This journal seeks to provide scholarly treatments of important apologetic issues, not just for other scholars, but for pastors, educated laypeople, students and even honest seekers looking for answers. Readers are invited to join us for this journey as we interact with the world around us, demonstrating that indeed there are reasons for the hope within us

## DID MUHAMMAD DENY THE INCARNATION OR PAGANISM?<sup>4</sup>

K. Dayton Hartman<sup>5</sup>

### Arabia Prior to Islam

Prior to the introduction of Islam, the people of the Arabian Peninsula were largely nomadic and principally polytheistic.<sup>6</sup> In the midst of this polytheism, however, there existed a monotheistic minority known as the *Hanifs*. Within some scholarly circles it is believed that the *Hanifs* were a codified group or movement of neo-Abrahamic monotheists entirely independent of Judaism.<sup>7</sup> However, it must be admitted that details from this period of history are scant to say the least and any proposition based upon the known data is ultimately conjecture rather than established fact. It is interesting to note that Khadijah, Muhammad's first wife, had a cousin named Waraqa ibn Naufal who was reported to be a *Hanif*.<sup>8</sup> Further,

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<sup>4</sup> This article is adapted from Mr. Hartman's original paper written for Answering Islam entitled, Did Muhammad Deny the Trinity or Paganism? You can view Mr. Hartman's original paper along with many other articles written by various authors by visiting the Answering Islam website: [www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org).

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<sup>6</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *A Short History of Islam* (Boston, MA: OneWorld Oxford Publishing, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Winfried Corduan believes this monotheism represents Arab vestiges of original monotheism. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 79. Cf. Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* translated by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 99. Interestingly enough the Qur'an refers to Abraham as a true Muslim *Hanifa*. See Surah 3:67.

Al-Bukhari reports that Muhammad personally encountered a few professing *Hanifs*.<sup>9</sup> In addition, according to Al-Bukhari it was Waraqa, a *Hanif*, who convinced Muhammad that he was not demon possessed, but rather was a true prophet of Allah.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is quite possible (and in fact very likely) that this pre-Islam, monotheistic group had a direct effect upon Muhammad's theology; a group that, interestingly enough, eventually had three of its four named adherents find their way to becoming professing Christians.<sup>11</sup>

A great deal of difficulty exists in concretely describing the indigenous religions of the Arab people during Muhammad's time. While it is known that the Arabs indulged in a mixture of polytheism and animism, their exact level of adherence to these systems is uncertain.<sup>12</sup> The central shrine in Mecca, the *Ka'bah*, was ruled by the supreme god, Allah; however, it also contained a number of idols dedicated to various other deities.<sup>13</sup> While some during this period recognized Allah as the supreme god, there was an overall tendency to view other deities as intercessory beings.<sup>14</sup> This fact is implied by the Qur'an in Surah 29:61-65. The text states that, while many acknowledge Allah as supreme in times of need, they would ultimately return to their polytheism during times of peace.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the face of paganism a supreme deity, Allah, was recognized.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Sabih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 7, Book 67, Number 407. This text was retrieved from this Answering Islam: [http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/first\\_muslim.htm](http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/first_muslim.htm).

<sup>10</sup> *Sabih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3. See previous link.

<sup>11</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman Group, 1979), p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Watt, *A Short History of Islam*, p. 9. According to Samuel Zwemer, pre-Islamic poetry portrays Allah as a supreme god. Samuel Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (New York: Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1907), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Tennent, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Surah 10:19; 39:3.

<sup>15</sup> Watt, *A Short History of Islam*, p. 50. Surah 29:61-65 "If indeed thou ask them who has created the heavens and the earth and subjected



During this period, there were various Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Christian (largely outside the bounds of historic orthodoxy) settlements within Arabia.<sup>17</sup> According to some scholars many of the known Christian settlements of the period were mostly comprised of Nestorians and Monophysites.<sup>18</sup> The Nestorians taught that "... two persons as well as two natures in[dwelt within] Christ."<sup>19</sup> This would mean that "... when Christ sacrificed His life on the cross, it was not the person who is also divine, the Son of God, who died for us."<sup>20</sup> The Monophysites, on the other hand, denied that Christ possessed a fully human and a fully divine nature. This belief went against the orthodox teaching that the two natures existed alongside one another, undiminished and unmingled. According to some sources, these settlements held positions of influence, albeit to a small degree, on the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, their theological positions were known

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the sun and the moon (to his Law), they will certainly reply, "Allah". How are they then deluded away (from the truth)? Allah enlarges the sustenance (which He gives) to whichever of His servants He pleases; and He (similarly) grants by (strict) measure, (as He pleases): for Allah has full knowledge of all things. And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, they will certainly reply, "(Allah)!" Say, "Praise be to Allah." But most of them understand not. What is the life of this world but amusement and play? but verily the Home in the Hereafter,- that is life indeed, if they but knew. Now, if they embark on a boat, they call on Allah, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him; but when He has delivered them safely to (dry) land, behold, they give a share (of their worship to others)!" Cf. Surah 23:84-89. All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from Yusuf Ali's translation.

<sup>16</sup> Watt, *A Short History of Islam*, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 79. Such Christologies would be officially condemned as heresy by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

<sup>18</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), p. 274.

<sup>20</sup> Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 274.

by at least some throughout the region.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars believe that the existence of such groups potentially impacted the development of Islamic theology, as well as Muhammad's understanding of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> However, in light of the Muslim understanding of the Qur'an's origination, it would not matter who Muhammad came into contact with from within the outskirts of Christendom, because the Qur'an as Allah's direct word by its very nature necessitates an accurate account of orthodox Christian belief entirely untarnished by Muhammad's faulty understanding of Christian theology.

In addition to these Christian settlements, there were a number of Christian slaves living on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>23</sup> Those who opposed Muhammad, accused him of deriving many of his beliefs regarding Allah from these Christian slaves. Nevertheless, the evidence for such a charge remains scant. Therefore, the charge cannot be either confirmed or denied.<sup>24</sup> Despite this lack of evidence, Muslim tradition does preserve accounts concerning several Meccan Arabs who possessed knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures who had close relations with Muhammad and even affected his spiritual development.<sup>25</sup> Whether directly influenced by "Christian" heretics or by Muslims who received second-hand information pertaining to the biblical text, it is plausible that Muhammad's conception was likely influenced by those acquainted with a variety of Christian theological positions. Yet, it should be noted that even if Muhammad's understanding of Christian doctrine was delivered via second-hand information or through

<sup>21</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford, 1965), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Anderson (ed.), *The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ghada Osman, "Foreign Slaves in Mecca and Medina in the Formative Islamic Period" in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 16 No. 4 (October 2005), p. 345. Cf. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Osman, "Foreign Slaves in Mecca and Medina in the Formative Islamic Period," p. 345.

<sup>25</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 21.

theologically sub-biblical positions, this does not provide an adequate explanation for the Qur'an's misrepresentation of what orthodox Christians actually believe. Even if Muhammad was unaware of what the Christian Scriptures actually teach regarding the nature of God, surely Allah would have known. Therefore, regardless of the potential influences upon Muhammad's understanding of Christian belief, if the Qur'an is truly settled in heaven and originates from Allah, it should have accurately recounted what Trinitarians themselves profess to be true.

Muhammad was a member of the Quraish tribe and was born near Mecca in A.D. 570. After being orphaned as a child, Muhammad's merchant uncle, Abu Talib, became the young boy's guardian. By the time Muhammad began his career as a prophet in A.D. 610, he had spent more than fifteen years in the caravan trade. It is quite probable that during his travels, Muhammad encountered various monotheistic movements, including the aforementioned theological schools of Christianity. In his biography of Muhammad's life, Ibn Ishaq records an encounter between the prophet and a Monophysite monk in Syria.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Ibn Ishaq proposes that Muhammad was briefly under the influence of an Ethiopian Christian while living in Mecca.<sup>27</sup>

The deeply religious Muhammad eventually developed one guiding principle in the midst of his polytheistic context: a single transcendent God must exist. As a result, Muhammad believed that his calling was to restore mankind to the original monotheism of Scripture, a monotheism he understood to be transgressed by many, including Jews and Christians.<sup>28</sup> According to F.E. Peters: "... what distinguished Muhammad from his Meccan contemporaries was (1) his belief in the reality of the Resurrection and the Judgment in both flesh and spirit, and (2) his unswerving conviction that the 'High God' was not only unique but absolute; that the other gods, goddesses, *jinn*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 147.

and demons were subject and subservient to Him...”<sup>29</sup> Through his reflection on the oneness of Allah, and through the reported recitations he claims to have received from the angel Gabriel, Muhammad formulated his theology concerning the divine being. This eventually led to the development of Islam’s central doctrine, *tawhid*.

The central message of Muhammad’s career was the absolute unity of Allah.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it should come as no surprise that the theme of unity and oneness permeates the text of the Qur’an. In Taha Unal’s estimation, “The Divine Unity (*tawhid*) is the highest conception of deity, and is the basic element which gives Islam its essential color.”<sup>31</sup> Unal adds, “*Tawhid* is the source of hope, determination, patience, firmness, and courage, and also of happiness and spiritual satisfaction.”<sup>32</sup>

### Is Jesus the physical Son of God?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> F.E. Peters, “The Quest for the Historical Muhammad” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 23 No. 3. (August 1991), p. 301.

<sup>30</sup> Abdel Mahmud, *The Creed of Islam* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Taha Unal, *The Crossroads* (Izmir, Turkey: Kaynak House of Publication, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Unal, *The Crossroads*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that some object to the observations that follow in this section. The claim is that the Qur’an does not misrepresent the Trinity. Rather, some claim that Christians did and do in fact worship the virgin Mary as part of the Godhead. For instance, Dr. Mohar Ali makes the claim that Christians worship Mary as God. However, Dr. Ali fails to note when and where this occurred and with whom it occurred. Further, he fails to note that if any Christians did in fact worship Mary as a god (a tenuous position at best) they did so in direct opposition of the Christian Scriptures, orthodox Christian belief, and virtually all Christian institutions throughout history. In other words, Dr. Ali fails to add anything to the conversation, rather, he is merely regurgitating previously tackled arguments. For further observation you may access his book here: [http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/does\\_the\\_qur\\_an\\_misrepresent\\_christian\\_beliefs\\_](http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/does_the_qur_an_misrepresent_christian_beliefs_).

In light of the material presented regarding pre-Islam Arabia, it is no surprise that the Qur'an unabashedly attacks the notion that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The idea that Allah sired Jesus Christ in a physical sense is repugnant to Muslims. In pre-Islam Arabia, tribal people attributed physical wives (Surah 72:3), daughters (Surah 6:100; 16:57; 17:40; 37:149-153; 43:19; 53:27), and sons (2:116; 6:100-101; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:91-92; 21:26; 25:2) to a high god. As a result, Muslims currently reject any theological concepts which they believe entail similar relationships with Allah.

The most explicit passage in the Qur'an condemning the Incarnation and the deity of Jesus Christ appears in Surah 5:116, "And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?'" Ibn Taymiyya believes that this passage conclusively shows that Christians attribute a physical wife to Yahweh.<sup>34</sup> The logic behind Ibn Taymiyya's assertion is quite consistent with Muslim assertion that the Qur'an is perfect and originates from the will of Allah. Ibn Taymiyya proposes that in spite of what the Christian Scriptures actually record regarding the nature of God and regardless of what Christians have historically believed about the nature of God, because the Qur'an teaches that Christians believe Yahweh has a female consort, then in the face of all known data, it must be true.

Similarly, Surah 2:116 depicts Christians as holding the belief that Allah physically fathered Jesus Christ. Commenting on this passage, Yusuf Ali writes:

It is derogation from the glory of God—in fact it is blasphemy—to say that God begets sons, like a man or an animal. The Christian doctrine is here emphatically repudiated. If words have any meaning, it would mean

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologians Response to Christianity* (Delmar, NY.: Caravan Books, 1984), p. 260.

an attribution to God of a material nature and of the lower animal function of sex.<sup>35</sup>

The Qur'an, on a number of occasions,<sup>36</sup> condemns the belief that Allah has offspring. However, the greatest condemnation is clearly directed towards Christians who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>37</sup> The reason for such opposition is because Muslims believe that Christians understand the Fatherhood of God in a physical sense.

Once more in Surah 39:4, the concept of divine paternity is attributed to Christians, and is subsequently condemned. However, this passage offers an alternative to "begetting." The text reveals that, if Allah had wanted a "helper," he would not have needed to sire him in a physical sense, but would instead have created him. If Allah has no wife, as the Qur'an undeniably teaches,<sup>38</sup> then he can have no son. The idea that he would lower himself to the level of creatures for the sake of procreation is entirely blasphemous.

Understanding that prior to the advent of Islam, Arabs believed that Allah engaged in sexual activity, it is not shocking to find that Muslims abhor the concept of "begetting." Undoubtedly, Muhammad perceived this language to mean that Christians believe that God literally engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary, the mother of Jesus. In light of the historical and religious context into which Muhammad was born, it is no surprise that he would object to a doctrine he believed mirrored the pagan "trinities" existing in Arabia. In summary, the Qur'an proposes that Christians believe the following. First, Mary is literally the wife of God. Second, Allah physically engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary and Jesus of Nazareth is the physical offspring resulting from this carnal encounter. Third, the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and

<sup>35</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1989), p. 286.

<sup>36</sup> Surah 16:57; 17:40; 37:149.

<sup>37</sup> Maulana Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 1983), p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Surah 6:101.

Incarnation resemble paganism, teaching that a high god (Yahweh) took for Himself a wife (Mary) and sired a half-man-half-God son.<sup>39</sup>

## Christian Response

In the Arabic language, two terms are used to express the concept, “son of.” The first is *walad*,<sup>40</sup> which is used to describe offspring resulting from the sexual union of a male and female. The second word, *ibn*, can be used metaphorically. It is utilized to describe a close relationship between persons, or persons to things, without necessarily implying a physical paternal connection.<sup>41</sup> For example, a traveler “... [i]s spoken of as a son of the road” (*ibnussabil*).<sup>42</sup> Yet, such a statement does not imply that a sexual relationship, resulting in a child, has occurred between a human being and the road.

Nearly every passage in the Qur’an that denies the sonship of Jesus Christ utilizes *walad*. The single reference that employs *ibn* to describe Christ’s sonship is Surah 9:30; however, when taken in the context of the entire Surah, it is clear that the reference actually refers to physical sonship.<sup>43</sup> Orthodox Christianity would only use the term *ibn*, in its metaphorical sense, to explain Christ’s relationship to the Father. Therefore, in Arabic the Scriptures call Christ *ibnu’llah*, not *waladu’llah*.

Some older english translations of the Bible utilized the most unhelpful formulation “only begotten.”<sup>44</sup> The phrase

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<sup>39</sup> Unal, *The Crossroads*, p. 34. Cf. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (London: MacDonald and Evans, 1961), pp. 1097-98.

<sup>41</sup> Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 249. Cf. Surah 2:215.

<sup>43</sup> Surah 9:30 “The Jews call 'Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah.s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!”

<sup>44</sup> For more information see this article: <http://www.answering-islam.org/Dictionary/begotten.html>.

translated in the King James Version as “only begotten Son” is *monogenes huios*. However, one should not take this in a literal, physically paternal sense. For instance, *huios* (son) has been used metaphorically throughout the New Testament. In Mark 3:17, James and John are referred to as “Sons (*huios*) of Thunder.” Furthermore, in Galatians 3:26 Paul writes that all believers are “Sons (*huios*) of God.” These references are clearly intended to be figurative. The translation of *monogenes* as “only begotten” is in part, a result of the King James translators retaining Jerome’s Latin translation of the term, *unigenitus*, meaning “only begotten.” However, the Latin text existing prior to Jerome’s translation did not use the Latin *unigenitus* when describing God the Son; instead, it utilized the term *unicus*, meaning “only.”<sup>45</sup>

In order for the Greek manuscript to warrant the translation “only begotten,” the Greek term being translated would need to be *monogenetos*. To translate *monogenes* as “only begotten” is, without question, less than precise and it could be argued is incorrect. Commenting on this unhelpful translation, James White noted that:

The key element to remember in deriving the meaning of *monogenes* is this: it is a compound term, combining *monos*, meaning only, with a second term. Often it is assumed that the second term is *gennasthai/gennao*, to give birth, to beget. But note that this family of terms has two *nn*’s, , rather than a single *nn*, , found in *monogenes*. This indicates that the second term is not

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<sup>45</sup> “In the Cathedral of Vercelli, Italy, is the most notable of the Old Latin MSS, Codex Vercellensis(a), supposedly written in A.D. 365 by Eusebius, Bishop of Vercelli. In this document, which contains the Gospels, with lacunae, the word *monogenes* in John 1:14, is; in 3:16, it is translated with the Latin word *unicus* (only), not *unigenitus* (only begotten). Dale Moody, “God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version.” *The Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 72:4 (1953), 214.



*gennasthai* but *gignesthai/ginomai*, and the noun form, *genos*.<sup>46</sup>

The term *genos* means “kind,” or “race.”<sup>47</sup> When the two terms *monos* and *genos* are combined, the reference is intended to convey that Christ is “unique, the only one of his kind.”<sup>48</sup> Additionally, William Mounce explains that *monogenes* can only be understood as stressing the unique nature of Christ; it cannot and should not be understood to imply any type of biological siring.<sup>49</sup>

This metaphorical understanding of sonship is demonstrated in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews refers to Isaac as Abraham’s “only begotten son.”<sup>50</sup> Making use of the same term found in John 3:16 to describe the father-to-son relationship (*monogenes*), the author of Hebrews notes the unique nature of Isaac as the promised child from God. The Muslim reader will readily admit that Abraham had multiple children; therefore, the intent of the text is to stress that Isaac is Abraham’s unique son, not his only son.<sup>51</sup> Craig Keener believes the use of the term *monogenes* in John 3:16 is intended to call to mind the traditional Hebrew understanding of Isaac. Just as Abraham gave Isaac, God the Father has not given merely a son but the unique, beloved Son with whom there is no

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<sup>46</sup> James White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), pp. 201-202.

<sup>47</sup> D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Cleon Rogers Jr. and Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> William Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 1214.

<sup>50</sup> Hebrews 11:17, “By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.”

<sup>51</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 31.

comparison.<sup>52</sup> In the same manner, Christ should be understood as the unique, one-of-a-kind, “Son of God.” Christ’s Hebrew contemporaries understood His claim to be the Son of God as an equation with God rather than a statement of biological origin. When Jesus was before Pilate the Jewish authorities charged, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, His sonship declared His full deity, not a biological origination.

The text of Scripture further demonstrates that the Muslim notion of the New Testament portraying Christ as the biological Son of God is in error. The birth narrative in Luke’s Gospel makes no mention of natural conception resulting from a sexual union. After Gabriel informed Mary that she would carry a Son, she asked, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>54</sup> Gabriel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”<sup>55</sup> The narrative is completely devoid of any sexual interaction between God the Father and Mary; rather, the reader is informed that it is through the working of the Holy Spirit that the virgin conceived. Commenting on this fact, Wayne Grudem states, “Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit...”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the text of both John’s and Luke’s Gospels depict Christ as uniquely, rather than biologically, the Son of God. Further, Christ is the Son of God not because of conception, but because of His economic relationship to the Father. Therefore, the Qur’an is not rebutting the text of Christian Scripture but is reacting against a

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<sup>52</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 270-71.

<sup>53</sup> John 19:7.

<sup>54</sup> Luke 1:34

<sup>55</sup> Luke 1:35. Cf. Matthew 1:18-24.

<sup>56</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 529.

misunderstanding of orthodox Christianity at best and more directly Arab paganism.

### Does Allah have a Son?

Without question, the Qur'an denounces the idea of Allah fathering a son in the genetic sense. Interestingly, the Qur'an addresses Muhammad's course of action pending the figurative establishment of Allah having a son. According to Surah 43:81, "Say: If the All-merciful [God] had a son, I would be the very first to worship [him]." Some Islamic commentators believe that in this passage Muhammad was stating that, if it could be proven that Allah had a son, he would be the very first to submit unto and worship him.<sup>57</sup> Commenting on Surah 43:81, Yusuf Ali states that, "The prophet of Allah does not object to true worship in any form. But it must be true: it must not superstitiously attribute derogatory things to Allah, or foster false ideas."<sup>58</sup> If one takes the Surah in its context, it would appear that Muhammad made this statement because of his conviction that Allah has no son; yet, if Allah's "fatherhood" could be established he would be willing to accept the son of Allah as God.<sup>59</sup> Chawkat Moucarry, an Arab Christian, notes that famed Muslim commentator Fakhr-ul-Din Razi believes that the preceding interpretation of this Surah is the most viable.<sup>60</sup> For Moucarry, Fakhr-ul-Din's interpretation raises a few questions. He asks, "Is there really evidence that God has no son? If so, where is this evidence? What if the case for God having a son is made? Are Muslims prepared, like the Prophet, to worship and to serve him?"<sup>61</sup>

In continuation, the most famous Surah to reject the idea of Allah having a son was not historically used as a

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<sup>57</sup> Chawkat Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 187.

<sup>58</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, p. 1279.

<sup>59</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 187.

<sup>60</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, pp. 187-88.

<sup>61</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, pp. 187-88.

refutation of the Christian doctrine of incarnation, but was instead a criticism of Arab polytheism.<sup>62</sup> Surah 112:1-4 reads, "Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him." Moucarry proposes that the use of this Surah as a condemnation of the Christian understanding of the Son of God comes long after it was used against its intended targets, pagan Arabs. It is only after the expansion of Islam that this Surah was understood as a repudiation of Christian Trinitarianism.<sup>63</sup> Moucarry believes that if the Muslim interpreter intends to remain literally and historically grounded in the text of the Qur'an, he must acknowledge this fact.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

Muhammad's knowledge of the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation (which was well established by the sixth century A.D.) is questionable at best. The Qur'an clearly misrepresents what Christians actually believed and still do believe about the trinity of God. However, the Qur'an rightly and accurately condemns the pre-Islam polytheism that permeated the Arabian Peninsula. What Muhammad denied then was the pagan deities of his native peoples, yet he mistook the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation as being nothing more than a Christianized version of pagan belief. Simply put, Muhammad denied the very same doctrines that Christians have denied for over two-thousand years. The difference being that for over fourteen-hundred years Muslims, as prescribed by the Qur'an, have attributed to Christians a belief that no orthodox Christian has ever held to. So, did Muhammad deny the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ? No!

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<sup>62</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189.

<sup>63</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189. It should be noted that even if such a proposition is historically accurate, the Qur'an does explicitly condemn in other passages Christian doctrine as a whole.

<sup>64</sup> Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189.

THE MYTH OF THE METAPHORICAL  
RESURRECTION:  
THE RESURRECTION IN THE FIRST CENTURY,  
THE EARLY CHURCH, AND HER OPPONENTS  
Tawa J. Anderson<sup>65</sup>

*Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved . . .*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

*. . .*

*. . . If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. . . . If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*<sup>66</sup> (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 13-17, 19-20)

Christianity is a uniquely historical religion, inextricably tied to

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<sup>65</sup> Tawa J. Anderson is a Ph.D. student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 13-17, 19-20. This and further biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.

the person and work of Jesus. The Christian faith has always professed (among other doctrines) the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>67</sup> However, as a naturalistic worldview gripped the 'Enlightened' West and the New Testament came under the skeptical scrutiny of critical scholarship, belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus was replaced by alternative understandings.<sup>68</sup> A common understanding of Christ's resurrection today is that of a 'metaphor' or 'myth'—Jesus was not literally raised from the dead; rather, resurrection faith indicates that the mission, teaching, community, or vision of Jesus Christ lives on.

In this paper, I will critique the modern metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection on historical grounds. Proponents of the metaphorical resurrection generally argue that their interpretation of Christ's resurrection is reflected in the early Church itself, particularly in 'Gnostic Christianity'. I will demonstrate that, to the contrary, the metaphorical view of the resurrection is itself a purely modern construction, with no historical precursors or support. I will first outline the

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<sup>67</sup> While I do not propose to outline a full body of historically core Christian doctrines, it seems that a minimalist account would include at least a) the deity; b) the atoning death; and c) the resurrection of Christ.

<sup>68</sup> The 'swoon' theory holds that Jesus never actually died on the cross, but merely fainted, and was revived in the tomb. Various 'fraud' theories figure the disciples stole the body and then invented the resurrection, or someone else stole or moved the body and the disciples then mistakenly believed Jesus had risen from the dead. 'Hallucination' or 'vision' theories claim that the disciples had subjective personal experiences which they believed were encounters with the risen Lord, but that Jesus was not bodily raised from the dead. A critical analysis of these explanations is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in many places. E.g. William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1981), pp. 23-44; Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), pp. 81-165.

metaphorical resurrection as explained by John Dominic Crossan. I will continue by surveying the relevant first-century pagan and Jewish understandings of 'resurrection,' showing that it was universally understood (by believers and non-believers alike) as a bodily resurrection of the dead at the time of God's eschatological judgment. I will argue that the early church professed, and its earliest recorded opponents attacked, Jesus' literal bodily resurrection. I will examine the second-century 'Gnostic Christian' spiritual understanding of resurrection,<sup>69</sup> arguing that 'Gnostic Christians' redefined the resurrection to reconcile orthodox Christian creedal affirmations with their gnostic worldview presuppositions. I will further insist that the Gnosticized resurrection of Jesus has nothing in common with the metaphorical conception of the resurrection, except that both reject the orthodox Christian doctrine of Jesus' bodily resurrection in favor of a redefined resurrection which better fits their contemporary prevalent worldview. Finally, I will conclude that the modern metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has neither precursors in nor support from first century conceptions of resurrection, the early church and her opponents, or the 'Gnostic Christian' spiritualization of Christ's resurrection. Thus, the metaphorical resurrection is itself a myth with no historical support.

### **The Metaphorical Resurrection in Contemporary Christianity**

The modern reconstruction of Christ's resurrection proclaims it as a metaphor or symbol, not a referent to a historical event.

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<sup>69</sup> A spiritual understanding of resurrection is not the same as a metaphorical understanding. 'Gnostic Christians' affirmed the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a literal, though spiritual, event in which his soul was freed from his physical body. Metaphorical proponents remove Christ's resurrection from history altogether. Nothing happened to Jesus after his death; resurrection is simply a symbol for what the disciples experienced. See section V for further development of this distinction.

John Dominic Crossan, a leading proponent of the metaphorical resurrection, defends several theses concerning the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>70</sup>

First, the disciples experienced visionary appearances of Jesus after his death, but these are natural, well-understood phenomena present in other religions and even secular grief settings.<sup>71</sup> Second, the ‘bodily’ appearances of the resurrected Jesus were invented by the Gospel-writers to demonstrate Jesus’ continued presence with the Christian community and to establish the authority of one individual or group over another individual or group.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Some of Crossan’s theses are not shared by all proponents of a metaphorical perspective of Christ’s resurrection, but are worth mentioning to show the radical nature of his scholarly project. (1) Following Jesus’ arrest the disciples fled Jerusalem and returned to Galilee without knowing anything of Jesus’ fate beyond the fact of his crucifixion. [See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p. 392; John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), pp. 145-54.] (2) After his death on the cross Jesus was *not* buried in a private tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. Rather, his body was either dishonorably buried in a common grave by the Romans or tossed into a shallow ditch and subsequently consumed by wild animals, and Joseph is invented by Mark to have Jesus properly buried in accordance with Mosaic law. [See Crossan, *Jesus*, pp. 154-58; *The Historical Jesus*, p. 393.] (3) Thus, there is no tomb to be found empty—the narratives of the empty tomb are invented by Mark.

<sup>71</sup> Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. xiv-xix.

<sup>72</sup> “In my thesis, therefore, it was originally another symbolical, resurrectional validation of apostolic authority. None of the three was an illusion, hallucination, vision, or apparition. Each was a symbolic assertion of Jesus’ continued presence to the *general community*, to *leadership groups*, or to specific and even competing *individual leaders*.” Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 407. See also in N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), p. 19.



Third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ need not be discarded, merely redefined.<sup>73</sup>

Easter means for me that the divine empowerment which was present in Jesus, but once upon a time limited to those people in Galilee and Judea who had contact with him, is now available to anyone, anywhere in the world, who finds God in Jesus. As far as I'm concerned, it has nothing to do, literally, with a body coming out of a tomb, or a tomb being found empty, or visions, or anything else. ... The heart of resurrection for me is that the power of God is now available through Jesus, unconfined by time or space, to anyone who believes and experiences it.<sup>74</sup>

The metaphorical resurrection does not refer to an actual historical event, or anything that happened to the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth; rather, it is a metaphor for the continuing power of Jesus' ministry and community.<sup>75</sup>

### **Resurrection in the First Century: Jewish and Pagan Conceptions**

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<sup>73</sup> "Just to make it accurate, I am not denying the resurrection. You [William Lane Craig] just don't like my definition of resurrection." Crossan in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, p. 58.

<sup>74</sup> John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), pp. 127-28.

<sup>75</sup> While this presentation of the metaphorical resurrection has focused on Crossan, his position has significant academic company, both historical and contemporary. Other scholars who deny the historical bodily resurrection but maintain the significance of the proclamation 'Jesus is risen' include Rudolf Bultmann (*Faith and Understanding, Kerygma and Myth*), Marcus Borg (*The Last Week*), and Ched Myers (*Binding the Strong Man*). Such scholars do not agree with every element of Crossan's reconstruction, but would assent to the broad strokes. Nothing happened to Jesus' corpse, but resurrection remains central to the Christian faith.

The metaphorical conception of Christ's resurrection does not fit the first-century context in which it was first preached. In his magisterial work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N. T. Wright traces the contours of resurrection belief in Jesus' religious-cultural milieu in exhaustive detail. He surveys Greco-Roman pagan thought, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the intertestamental period of Second-Temple Judaism.<sup>76</sup>

One major stream of Greco-Roman afterlife thought was represented in Homeric literature. For Homer and those who read him devoutly, the dead are "shades," "ghosts," or "phantoms"—"they are in no way fully human beings."<sup>77</sup> Some type of conscious existence beyond death is universally presumed, but Hades (the underworld, the realm of the dead) "holds no comforts, no prospects, but only a profound sense of loss."<sup>78</sup>

Conscious existence beyond death is presumed also in Plato's dualistic philosophy. Whereas Homerists lamented the finality and sadness of death, Platonists welcomed it as "the moment when, and the means by which, the immortal soul is set free from the prison-house of the physical body."<sup>79</sup> The soul is the essential self; the body serves only as a shell, or even a prison.<sup>80</sup> "Nobody in their right mind, having got rid of it [their body], would want it or something like it back again."<sup>81</sup> Death brings release from the physical prison, and if one has

<sup>76</sup> See, respectively, Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 32-84 (Greco-Roman paganism); pp. 85-128 (Old Testament); and pp. 129-206 (Second-Temple Judaism).

<sup>77</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 44, 81-83.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>80</sup> Plato's anthropological (body/soul) dualism reflects his cosmological dualism, wherein the eternal realm of the forms is spiritual and perfect, while the created physical world is material and corrupt.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 60.

lived well and rightly, eternal disembodied bliss in the heavenly realm of the forms.

These two major perspectives on the afterlife dominated Greco-Roman thought, and significantly for our purposes, both of them absolutely denied the second-Temple Jewish concept of two-stage bodily resurrection.<sup>82</sup> The Homerist might want a body back, but they knew they would not get one; the Platonist did not want a physical resurrection, knowing that such was impossible anyway. Both alike denied the possibility of bodily resurrection.<sup>83</sup> Jewish belief in bodily resurrection “was strange and repellent, if not incomprehensible or abhorrent, to the contemporary pagan mind.”<sup>84</sup>

The Hebrew Bible makes scant reference to resurrection, generally presenting death as “sad, and tinged with evil.”<sup>85</sup> The Old Testament lacks a consistent doctrine of rewards and punishments after death,<sup>86</sup> instead assuming that

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<sup>82</sup> See part B of the current section of this paper.

<sup>83</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 60, 81-83.

<sup>84</sup> Russ Dudrey, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better: A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus Based on Ancient Criticisms of the Resurrection Reports,” in *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3.1 (2000), 65. Wright notes, with his typical clarity and rhetorical force, that “The ancient world was thus divided into those who said that resurrection couldn’t happen, though they might have wanted it to [Homerists], and those who said they didn’t want it to happen, knowing that it couldn’t anyway [Platonists].” Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 82. Echoes of the Greco-Roman ridicule of the Jewish perspective are evident in Acts 17:32, where Paul’s preaching meets with interest *until* he mentions the resurrection of Christ, and Acts 26:24, where the pagan Festus interrupts Paul to call his resurrection faith ‘insane’.

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 85-91. Wright notes numerous Old Testament passages which speak of the finality of death, and the lack of hope for anything positive beyond *Sheol*—Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:3-12; 115:17; Gen. 3:19; Is. 38:10f; 2 Sam. 14:14; Ecc. 3:19-21; 9:5f; Job 3:13-19; 14:1-14; 19:25-27.

<sup>86</sup> Richard A. Muller, “Resurrection,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume Four* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 145.

“upon death, one’s shade descends to *Sheol*, where one remains forever, cut off from God’s presence.”<sup>87</sup> The ‘translation’ of Enoch, Elijah, and perhaps Moses are unique examples of men who do not traverse physical death, but they represent “unexplained exceptions to the otherwise universal rule.”<sup>88</sup> After death, Hebrews could expect only a lifeless, purposeless, joyless existence in *Sheol*, the grave.<sup>89</sup>

However, key Old Testament doctrines stood in tension with this outlook: (1) God’s covenant relationship with Israel; (2) God’s justice and righteousness; and (3) God’s sovereignty. In the absence of a robust afterlife, God’s sovereign covenantal justice for Israel would have to “take place here and now”—hence Job’s demand (Job 14:1-14) that Yahweh judge Job righteously now, not after Job’s death.<sup>90</sup> Tension between these theological themes eventually spurred the development of post-mortem hopes within Israel. The emerging hope of Old Testament authors is focused upon both individual Israelites *and* the nation of Israel, particularly her Promised Land. Generally speaking, the national hope took precedence over visions of individual vindication—hence the importance of

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<sup>87</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 5* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 685.

<sup>88</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 95.

<sup>89</sup> Muller makes the important point that this does not represent “extinction of the human being at death,” but rather passage to “a shadowy, underworld existence.” Muller, “Resurrection,” p. 145.

<sup>90</sup> Nickelsburg observes: “As creator, God is the Lord of life, who effects and nourishes a covenantal relationship with God’s people. As judge, God rewards the faithful and punishes those who rebel against the covenantal commandments. As the Almighty, God can effect what divine justice requires. *The tension arises when premature death frustrates this justice.*” Nickelsburg, “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” p. 685. Emphasis mine.

family lines and genealogies.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, during and after the Babylonian exile, expectations grew that at least some righteous Israelites would be raised to a new bodily life after death. Intimations of a glorious afterlife for God's faithful children are found in the Psalms<sup>92</sup> and the prophets.<sup>93</sup>

Intertestamental Jews held one of three beliefs about life after death. First, some categorically denied life after death.<sup>94</sup> Second, a few adopted Platonic dualism and held to "a

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<sup>91</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 99-102. In fact, as belief in the resurrection developed, the themes of national restoration and personal resurrection were strong and often difficult to distinguish. Wright notes that Jewish faith in the future 'resurrection' of Israel—a metaphorical resurrection embodied in a literal and glorious return from exile—was more frequently and powerfully expressed. Approaching the first century, however, the two themes (return from exile and eschatological re-embodiment of faithful Jews) were thoroughly intertwined, and difficult to disentangle. Given the primary focus of this paper upon the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I will focus exclusively upon the expressions of resurrection hope in the personal eschatological sense. This does not mean that I reject or do not acknowledge the corporate national resurrection hope of Israel. Rather, I seek to draw attention to the concrete personal resurrection hope within 1<sup>st</sup>-century Israel and the early Church.

<sup>92</sup> E.g., "Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves . . . Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself." (Ps. 49:12-15)

<sup>93</sup> "But your [God's] dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead." (Is. 26:19) See also Hos. 6:1-2; 13:14; and Ez. 37.

<sup>94</sup> The Sadducees are the best-known resurrection-deniers, but Sirach (11:26f; 14:16; 17:27; 38:21-23; 41:4) and parts of the Mishnah and

future blissful life for the righteous, in which souls, disencumbered of their attendant physical bodies, would enjoy a perfect life forever.”<sup>95</sup> Significantly, proponents of future disembodied bliss did *not* use ‘resurrection’ language to describe their views.<sup>96</sup>

Most second-Temple Jews, however, rejected those positions, and hoped for a bodily resurrection on the great Day of the Lord when all peoples would be judged and the righteous of Israel would be vindicated and raised to new bodily life in a renewed heavens and earth.<sup>97</sup> Prophetic passages like Isaiah 2, Isaiah 13-14, Ezekiel 30, Joel 1-2, Amos 5, and Malachi 4 provided the righteous remnant of the nation with the hope that God would intervene at the end of the age, vindicate his righteous remnant, and punish evildoers.<sup>98</sup> Combined with Old

Talmud also deny the resurrection of the dead. See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 135.

<sup>95</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 140. This perspective is represented in, e.g., 4 Macc. 3:18; 6:7; 10:4; 13:13-17; 14:5; 16:13; 17:12; 18:23; *Pseudo-Phocylides* 102-114; and the *Testament of Abraham* 20. See Wright, pp. 140-42.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-45.

<sup>97</sup> Wright notes: “As we have seen, the Bible [OT] mostly denies or at least ignores the possibility of a future life, with only a few texts coming out strongly for a different view; but in the second-Temple period the position is more or less reversed. The evidence suggests that by the time of Jesus, . . . most Jews either believed in some form of resurrection or at least knew that it was standard teaching.”

Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 129. Wright traces the emergence of resurrection belief through the intertestamental apocryphal literature (pp. 150-75), Josephus (pp. 176-81), the Essenes (pp. 182-89), and the Pharisaic tradition of the post-70 A.D. era (pp. 192-200).

<sup>98</sup> “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established . . . The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty . . . The arrogance of man will be brought low.” (Is. 2:2, 12, 17) “Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty . . . a cruel day, with wrath and fierce

Testament passages that hinted at personal resurrection, second-temple Jews found great hope for the execution of God's justice after their physical death. The clearest indication of such resurrection faith in the Old Testament is unquestionably Daniel 12:1-3, which combines the personal hope for bodily resurrection with the great coming Day of the Lord.

At that time Michael, the great prince, who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Second-temple Jews, then, did not create resurrection belief out of whole cloth; rather, they found echoes, intimations, and promises contained within their Scriptures that

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anger . . . The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land.” (Is. 13:6, 9; 14:1) “The day of the Lord is near – a day of clouds, a time of gloom for the nations.” (Ez. 30:3) “Declare a holy fast; . . . Alas for that Day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. . . . Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.” (Joel 1:13, 14; 2:13-14) “Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.” (Amos 5:18) “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire. . . . Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” (Mal. 4:1-2)

presented future resurrection as a compelling belief. Such Jews spoke of bodily resurrection using “what became the standard ‘resurrection’ language,” the verbs *anastemi* (and its derivative noun *anastasis*) and *egeiro* (and its derivative noun *egeresis*).<sup>99</sup> Thus, “anyone who used the normal words for ‘resurrection’ within second-Temple Judaism would have been heard to be speaking within this strictly limited range of meaning.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, this predominant resurrection belief was *always* a two-stage process.

Those who believed in resurrection believed also that the dead, who would be raised in the future but had not been yet, were alive somewhere, somehow, in an interim state. ... Resurrection ... meant life *after* ‘life after death’: a two-stage future hope, as opposed to the single-stage expectation of those who believed in a non-bodily future life.<sup>101</sup>

### **Conclusion: Resurrection Belief in the First Century**

The first century context contained a myriad of beliefs about what happened to human beings after physical death. Most ancients believed in conscious existence after death. Some

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<sup>99</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 147. Critics rightly note that both  $\mu$  and  $\epsilon$  and their cognates have broader usage; the former in particular does not always refer to resurrection. Nonetheless, when they are applied to the dead, these ‘resurrection terms’ *always* refer to bodily resurrection. See also Muller, “Resurrection,” p. 147.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 204. Hence, Wright notes in footnote 311, “The NT references to Jesus’ resurrection cannot be ambiguous as to whether they mean bodily resurrection, because there was no other kind of resurrection.”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 130. Wright repeatedly emphasizes this notion. E.g.: “Resurrection, the ‘making alive of the dead’, was not simply about ‘life after death’; it was about a new, embodied life *after* ‘life after death’. Nobody supposed that . . . anyone else had yet been given this resurrection life.” (p. 199)



Greeks believed that post-mortem existence in Hades would be shadowy, incomplete, and lamentable. Other Greeks and a few Jews longed for the soul's post-mortem liberation from the physical body. In contrast, the majority of Jews embraced belief in a two-stage resurrection—intermediate existence after death followed by eventual bodily resurrection at the judgment of the Lord on the last day. However, whether affirming or denying the future resurrection, the Greek resurrection terms were *always* used “to refer to a hypothetical concrete event that might take place in the future, namely the coming-to-life in a full and bodily sense of those presently dead.”<sup>102</sup> The modern metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection thus finds no contextual precedents within Greco-Roman thought, the Old Testament, or second-Temple Judaism.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. xix.

<sup>103</sup> Contemporary proponents of a metaphorical resurrection often point to Greek myths concerning dying and rising gods as evidence that Jesus' resurrection was modeled after pagan legends. This suggestion has a long and illustrious history, being first raised (in extant literature, at least) by the Roman anti-Christian Celsus, writing around 177 A.D. See Graham Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden* (London: SPCK, 1994), p. 81.

Leon McKenzie draws attention to eight proposed pagan parallels (Tammuz/Ishtar, Adonis, Attis, Marsyas, Hyacinth, Osiris, Dionysus/Bacchus, Demeter/Persephone) and shows that they are not analogous to the Jewish expectation of resurrection (or to the Christian proclamation of Christ's resurrection). First, the pagan stories were acknowledged by their proponents as being mythical, whereas Jews expected a literal historical rising from the dead. Greeks did not expect what had happened to the gods ‘once upon a time’ to occur to them after their own death. Second, the dying and rising gods of Greco-Roman paganism were intimately associated with agricultural cycles and fertility, whereas Jewish expectation of resurrection was associated with God's righteousness and judgment. The lack of analogous parallels between the pagan dying and rising gods and the Judeo-Christian resurrection hope is striking. McKenzie concludes: “The use of the term ‘resurrection’ in reference to pagan

They all understood the Greek word *anastasis* and its cognates ... to mean ... new life after a period of being dead. Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long-term future hope; ... Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future.<sup>104</sup>

## Resurrection in the Early Church and Its Opponents

Resurrection language in the first century, when applied to what will happen to a human being after death,<sup>105</sup> always and only

deities ... exemplifies equivocation at its worst. ... Certainly the notions of resurrection or revival in the myths did not connote the same reality as the gospel meaning of the resurrection.” See Leon McKenzie, *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the Resurrection of Jesus: A Christian Perspective* (Charlottesville, VA: Bookwrights, 1997), pp. 21-40.

On the relevance of pagan parallels, N. T. Wright concludes: “when Paul preached [the resurrection] in Athens, nobody said, ‘Ah, yes, a new version of Osiris and such like’.” Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 81.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 31. “Belief in resurrection is characterized . . . by a two-age cosmic and personal eschatology ending with a new embodiment. . . . The word ‘resurrection’ and its cognates . . . is never used to denote something other than this position. The belief can occur without the word, but never the other way around.” Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>105</sup> The distinction is important. Resurrection language (*anastasis*, *egeiro* and cognates) did have a broader field of meaning, and could be used to refer to what was happening to those who were alive. Hence Romans 6:4 speaks of Christians living a new life just as Christ was *raised (egerthe)* from the dead. We currently experience the benefits of Christ’s resurrection. The argument set forth and defended by N. T. Wright is that when the Greek resurrection terminology was applied to expectations for what happened after death, the terms had a narrow and well-defined field of meaning. Beyond that field of meaning, there was a wide range of metaphorical application which early Christian writers (including authors of the New Testament)

referred to expectation of a two-stage bodily resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament was proclaimed within that second-Temple Jewish framework. The assurance of the Christian's future resurrection was pronounced in continuity with the Jewish resurrection hope. The apostolic Church fathers, apologists, and theologians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries proclaimed the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, when Jewish and pagan opponents critically engaged Christian belief, they attacked belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, not a Platonic conception of the afterlife or a metaphorical or spiritual understanding of resurrection.

A study of the New Testament's presentation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>106</sup> It is sufficient to note that the New Testament presents the resurrection of Jesus as a literal, bodily rising from the dead—in continuity with the first-century understanding of resurrection language.<sup>107</sup> However, the New Testament's proclamation of

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utilized to express the rich experience of spiritual rebirth they experienced. But, like the notion of the kingdom of God in the New Testament, the understanding of the Christian experience of Christ's resurrection was "already, but not yet"—we *have* experienced a very real spiritual rebirth, but our ultimate resurrection, our bodily rising with Christ through the power of God, will only occur *after* we die.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Wright's exegetical consideration of the New Testament data in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 209-476, 585-683; also William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, Volume 16 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989).

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Stanton, "Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus," pp. 88-89; Muller, "Resurrection," pp. 147-48; William Manson, "Eschatology in the New Testament," in *Eschatology: Four Papers Read to The Society for the Study of Theology. Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers*, No. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 13-14; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 209-476, 585-683; Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*; etc. Even J. D. Crossan, who rejects the conclusion that anything actually did happen to Jesus' body, admits that the Gospels and Epistles present (largely) a bodily resurrection.

the resurrection contained a significant innovation. Heretofore, resurrection language was used to refer to what *would happen* to believers at the end of the age, when God judged all peoples and nations.<sup>108</sup> When the earliest Christians proclaimed that Jesus *had been* raised from the dead, they insisted that “something had happened to Jesus which had happened to nobody else.”<sup>109</sup>

Proponents of the metaphorical resurrection suggest that early Christians simply took the prevailing Jewish belief in future resurrection and retrospectively applied it to Jesus, whom they acknowledged as the Messiah. But this does not fit the first-century context. Jewish resurrection hope focused on eschatological judgment—resurrection before the Day of the Lord was inconceivable.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, while Jews longed for a coming Messiah and a future resurrection, there was *no* Jewish

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However, he detects an original core which proclaimed a metaphorical resurrection, and argues that descriptions of bodily resurrection appearances and other narrative traditions (empty tomb, women, etc.) which support a bodily resurrection are later interpolations attempting to buttress emerging orthodoxy. Crossan’s time line is backwards, however: the first-century usage of resurrection language always and only referred to literal bodily resurrection; it is not until the second century (as we shall see shortly) that resurrection language begins to be used to refer anything other than Jesus’ literal rising from the dead.

<sup>108</sup> “Nobody imagined that any individuals had already been raised, or would be raised in advance of the great last day.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 205.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 83. The resuscitations of the Shunammite’s son (2 Kings 4:8-37), Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21-43), Lazarus (John 11:1-44), Tabitha (Acts 9:32-43), and Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12) belong to a different category. The dead were indeed raised back to life, but would still suffer eventual physical death—resuscitation was a reprieve from death, while Jesus’ resurrection was a conquering of death itself. He rose to eternal life. See Wright, pp. 404-05.

<sup>110</sup> John Muddiman, “I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body,” in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden*, p. 133.

hope or expectation for a suffering and rising Messiah.<sup>111</sup>

The early church proclaimed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a concrete event wrought by the covenantal God of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>112</sup> Wright traces the proclamation of Christ's resurrection through the apostolic fathers, the early Christian apocryphal literature, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century apologists, and the 'Great Early Theologians.'<sup>113</sup> The early church fathers countered docetic arguments that Jesus' humanity (and therefore also his passion and resurrection) was only apparent,

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<sup>111</sup> "Nobody would have thought of saying, 'I believe that so-and-so really was the Messiah; therefore he must have been raised from the dead'." Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 25.

<sup>112</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*. Rev. 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2004), pp. 482-83. Again, the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus as a 'concrete historical event' does not downplay or deny that the concrete nature of Christ's resurrection had immediate and primarily metaphorical application to the current lives of his followers. Christians experienced being raised from death to life because of their union with Christ in the waters of baptism. But the future hope of Christians' bodily resurrection (as well as the current experience of spiritual rebirth) was based on the concrete past event of Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead.

<sup>113</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 481-527. On the apostolic church fathers, Wright discusses Clement's first and second epistles, written around A.D. 90; Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 30-107); Polycarp (A.D. 69-155); the *Didache*; the *Epistle of Barbanas* (c. A.D. 80-120); the *Shepherd of Hermas* (c. A.D. 150); and Papias (A.D. 60-130). On the early Christian apocryphal literature, Wright briefly discusses the *Ascension of Isaiah* (c. A.D. 70-170); the *Apocalypse of Peter* (c. A.D. 132-135); 5 Ezra (c. A.D. 135); and *The Epistle of the Apostles* (c. A.D. 150). On the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century apologists, Wright discusses the works of Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165); Athenagoras (A.D. 110-175); Theophilus (A.D. 140-200); and Minucius Felix (c. A.D. 170-230). On the early theologians, Wright discusses Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236) briefly, but covers Tertullian (A.D. 160-225), Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), and Origen (A.D. 185-254) in more depth.

not genuine.<sup>114</sup> Beginning about A.D. 150, they also defended the bodily resurrection against ‘Gnostic Christian’ proponents of a spiritual resurrection,<sup>115</sup> usually with an appeal to the biblical doctrine of creation.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 484. Thus Ignatius stresses “the bodily and ‘fleshly’ resurrection of Jesus without differentiating the risen body from the present corruptible one.” Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>115</sup> E.g. Justin Martyr “expounds his belief in bodily resurrection, over against some who claim to be Christian but disbelieve it, holding instead that their souls simply go to heaven after they die.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 501. Athenagoras’ *Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead* responds in large part to the doubts of Christians who spiritualize the resurrection—almost certainly referring to ‘Gnostic Christians’ (Wright, p. 505). Tertullian’s *De Resurrectione* condemns “dualists within the church . . . [who] treat the idea of ‘the resurrection of the dead’ as referring to a moral change within the present life, or even the possibility of escaping from the body altogether.” Ibid., p. 511. For more on the Gnostic spiritualizing of the resurrection, see section V.

<sup>116</sup> Genesis 1:1 proclaims God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and all within them. Genesis 1:31 concludes: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The goodness of creation includes the physicality of human beings. The Gnostic worldview, on the other hand, saw both physical creation in general, and the embodiment of the soul in particular, as lesser or evil. To the Christian theologians and apologists, God is both the creator and the redeemer of the human body. Thus, if God is to ‘raise’ us after our physical death, he will inevitably raise us in bodily fashion. See G. W. H. Lampe, “Early Patristic Eschatology,” in *Eschatology: Four Papers Read to The Society for the Study of Theology*, pp. 21-24. Wright concludes that the writings of the early church fathers “confirm that, for the vast majority of early Christians known to us, ‘resurrection’ was the ultimate Christian hope, and was meant in a definitely bodily sense; that this entailed some kind of intermediate state, itself glorious and blissful; and that the future resurrection was dependent on, and modeled on, that of Jesus himself. . . . ‘Resurrection’ remained literal in use, concrete in referent, and foundational to early Christian theology and hope.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 494.

Opponents of the early church recognized the centrality of Jesus' bodily resurrection and attacked it accordingly. Matthew 28: 11-15 contains the earliest recorded objection: the accusation that Jesus' disciples came and stole His body from the tomb at night.<sup>117</sup>

Around A.D. 177, Celsus launched several philosophical and historical arguments against the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of all Christians.<sup>118</sup> Celsus denigrates the worth of the testimony of mere women at the empty tomb,<sup>119</sup> evokes parallels from Greek mythology,<sup>120</sup> suggests that the Christian doctrine of resurrection is derived from the Greek notion of a blessed afterlife,<sup>121</sup> notes that *not all Christians* affirm the same doctrine of bodily resurrection,<sup>122</sup> suggests that a risen

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<sup>117</sup> Matthew notes that "this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day." Critics contend that Matthew created this apologetic appeal in its entirety. Nonetheless, the same objection is found in the mouth of Justin's Jewish opponent Trypho. Either way, it is the earliest objection.

<sup>118</sup> Celsus. *On The True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*. R. Joseph Hoffman, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 106-15. Celsus' attack against Christian faith and doctrine is preserved by the theologian Origen, who reproduces about 70-75% of Celsus' words in his rebuttal, *Contra Celsum*.

<sup>119</sup> Stanton, "Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus," p. 81; Dudrey, "What the Writers Should Have Done Better," p. 59.

<sup>120</sup> Celsus, *On The True Doctrine*, 110. See also Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 111-12; Stanton, "Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus," p. 82.

<sup>121</sup> Celsus, *On The True Doctrine*, 109-10. "The latter notion [resurrection] they derive from the ancients, who taught that there is a happy life for the blessed—variously called the Isles of the Blessed, the Elysian fields—where they are free from the evils of the world."

<sup>122</sup> W. C. Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: II," in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*. 15.2 (1964), 157.

Jesus should have appeared to more than just a few friends after his resurrection,<sup>123</sup> and questions why anyone, particularly a ‘god’, would “need or want a corruptible physical body.”<sup>124</sup>

About a century later, the Neoplatonist Porphyry added two objections against the Christian doctrine of resurrection. First, he asks whether the future resurrection of Christians will resemble that of Christ or of Lazarus, finding both answers philosophically lacking.<sup>125</sup> Second, he questions how God could perform the logically impossible task of recombining the requisite elements of deceased bodies.<sup>126</sup>

Two significant conclusions need to be drawn from this brief discussion of early anti-Christian polemics. First, ‘modern’ objections to the resurrection are not new. As Stanton writes, “nearly all” of them are present already in the attacks of Celsus and Porphyry.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” p. 83; Dudrey, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better,” p. 60.

<sup>124</sup> Dudrey, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better,” p. 62. Celsus’ logic here is governed by his Platonic dualism—the body is a prison-house for the eternal soul. Once discarded, the body is bidden good riddance.

<sup>125</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, p. 161.

<sup>126</sup> *Porphyry’s Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*. R. Joseph Hoffman, ed. and trans. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1994), pp. 90-91.

<sup>127</sup> Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” pp. 83-84. The exception Stanton cites (the disciples stealing the body of Jesus) was voiced by early Jewish opponents. This conclusion does *not* undermine my thesis that the metaphorical understanding of Christ’s resurrection is a purely modern, post-Enlightenment construct. Scholars like Crossan utilize the same *objections against* the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, but then arrives at a different *conclusion* based on those objections. Whereas Celsus and Porphyry conclude that the resurrection of Jesus is an infantile hoax, Crossan concludes that the resurrection is a metaphorical expression of early Christian faith in the continued power and presence of Jesus Christ.



Second, Christianity's opponents focused upon the literal bodily resurrection. Alternative understandings of Jesus' resurrection (see next section) were *not* the subject of attack by non-Christians. Despite the protests of modern proponents of a metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection, even the church's enemies acknowledged that Christian resurrection faith was belief in a literal bodily resurrection.

### **‘Gnostic Christianity’: Resurrection Spiritualized**

In the mid-second century, we find profession of something *other* than the bodily resurrection of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of believers. ‘Gnostic Christians’<sup>128</sup> taught that Christ's resurrection was spiritual and could be shared by his followers—not at some eschatological fulfillment, but in the present life. Gnostics were more attuned to the prevalent Greco-Roman worldview than to the Judeo-Christian. Hence, when some Gnostics embraced Christianity (or vice versa), elements of the Christian faith were compromised in a syncretistic Gnostic Christianity. The result was something entirely new—a Gnosticized resurrection.

Gnosticism is a religious expression of a thorough (anthropological, cosmological, and theological) neo-Platonic

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<sup>128</sup> I hesitate to use the term ‘Gnostic Christians’. On the one hand, I acknowledge that there is considerable scholarly debate about the value of the label ‘Gnostic’ to begin with; but I side with those scholars (e.g. Peel, Layton) who identify a core Gnostic worldview worthy of an identifying label. On the other hand, it will become clear that I highly doubt that true Gnostics could be truly Christian. Calling this group ‘Gnostic Christians’ is therefore somewhat dangerous. Nonetheless, I think it's the best shorthand description available. The underlying worldview of this group identifies them as clearly Gnostic; they self-identified as followers of Jesus Christ and members of the universal Christian Church. Thus, I will hold my nose and continue to apply the label.

dualism.<sup>129</sup> According to this belief, the essence of the human being is the immaterial, eternal soul which longs to be freed from the prison-house of the body.<sup>130</sup> The universe is a combination of spiritual beings and physical matter, the latter having been created by a lesser deity (not the supreme God).<sup>131</sup> Gnostic ‘salvation’ thus consists of the soul’s escape from the physical body and return to the *pleroma*, the ‘cosmic fullness’ which is its proper eternal state.<sup>132</sup> The means of salvation is knowledge (*gnosis*), particularly knowledge of one’s true identity.<sup>133</sup>

While Marcion (c. A.D. 85-160) likely had some influence upon early ‘Gnostic Christianity’, Valentinus (c. A.D.

<sup>129</sup> James M. Robinson, “Introduction,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 2-4. Bentley Layton writes: “The gnostic, or gnosticizing, aspects of early Christianity [are] a ‘Platonism run wild’: one should not forget that close under the surface of much supposedly gnostic language lies material familiar from the most-read passages of Plato.” Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection From Nag Hammadi*. *Harvard Dissertations in Religion*, Number 12 (Missoula: Scholars, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 65; Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection*, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g. Malcolm Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 53. In some Gnostic or pseudo-gnostic movements (e.g. Manichaeism), a strict theological dualism was maintained, with the existence of two super-potent deities—one good, one evil.

<sup>132</sup> Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” p. 145; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 539.

<sup>133</sup> “[Salvation] may be summarized as comprising the recognition of one’s self – one’s origin, who one is now, one’s destiny – and, by corollary, the recognition of one’s relationship with heavenly characters like the Father and the Saviour.” Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 99.

100-160) was the central figure.<sup>134</sup> In accommodating itself to Christianity, Gnosticism willingly embraced Jesus as the 'author of salvation'<sup>135</sup> and appeared to accept the authority of the apostolic New Testament scriptures.<sup>136</sup>

However, 'Gnostic Christians' also performed radical surgery to fit Christian doctrine into their underlying Gnostic worldview. First, the conception of a Triune personal God was jettisoned. Second, the doctrine of creation was rejected in favor of the view that "the world of space, time and matter is the evil creation of a lesser god."<sup>137</sup> Third, the Hebrew Scriptures were studiously avoided or consciously rejected.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> At one point, according to Tertullian, Valentinus was sufficiently orthodox to be considered for the post of bishop of Rome. See Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries: The Impact of the Nag Hammadi Library* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), p. 119. Meyer betrays his own bias when he continues: "Had he been appointed bishop of Rome, the subsequent history of the church might have been altogether different. Valentinus, *and perhaps all of us*, lost on that day." The discovery of fifty-two Gnostic Christian documents (the *Nag Hammadi Library*) in 1945 exponentially increased our understanding of 'Gnostic Christianity' and its relationship to the early orthodox Church. See Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 10.

<sup>135</sup> Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, p. 100.

<sup>136</sup> Hence the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* quotes the Gospels and the letters of Paul to support his theological points. E.g. *Treatise* 45:24-28 – "Then, indeed, as the Apostle said, 'We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.'" See Bentley Layton, "Vision and Revision: a Gnostic View of Resurrection," in *Colloque International sur Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981), p. 209; Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: I," p. 151.

<sup>137</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 537.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 550. Wright claims that "the Gnostic and similar writings avoid the Old Testament like the plague. . . . they certainly do not want to give the impression that the spirituality they are talking about,

Fourth, the doctrine of culpable sin was exchanged for the notion of separation from the *pleroma* (cosmic fullness) through no personal fault; as a consequence, the concept of divine judgment became irrelevant.<sup>139</sup> Fifth, salvation was redefined. It is not the whole human being which is saved, but rather the (Platonic) soul alone. Finally, while Jesus was acknowledged as the savior, he was not much different from other human beings—he merely understood and exercised the incipient spiritual powers we all have, and pointed others towards a salvation they could then achieve.<sup>140</sup>

With all the changes Gnostic Christians made to Christian doctrine, it is already clear that ‘Gnostic Christianity’ is more ‘Gnostic’ than ‘Christian.’ The Gnostic treatment of the resurrection, exhibited most clearly in the *Gospel of Philip* and *Treatise on the Resurrection*, continues to de-Christianize ‘Gnostic Christianity’.

*The Gospel of Philip* insists that the resurrection of believers is a present reality, not a future hope.<sup>141</sup> “Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not

or the Jesus in whom they believe, or any events that may have happened to him, or the future hope they themselves embrace, have anything much to do with Israel, the Jews, the patriarchs and the scriptures.”

<sup>139</sup> Paul Foster, “The Gospel of Philip,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), p. 82; Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” p. 151.

<sup>140</sup> “Salvation is the acquisition of self-knowledge, but the Gnostic does not have the power to come to that insight by him/herself. Someone is required to alert the Gnostic to the insight that awaits recognition, to wake him/her up. In this way, the Saviour needs to be primarily a revealer in the sense of one who awakens, rather than someone who gives extra knowledge that is not already possessed.” Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, p. 100. The similarities between ‘Gnostic Christianity’ and New Age spirituality are striking.

<sup>141</sup> Foster, “The Gospel of Philip,” p. 80.

first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing.”<sup>142</sup> Jesus has already risen, so too the believer must rise *before* death.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, the resurrection of both Jesus and other Christians is spiritual, not bodily. The soul rises; the body does not.<sup>144</sup>

*The Treatise on the Resurrection* also insists that the resurrection is a present reality for Christians.<sup>145</sup> Resurrection, like salvation, is self-achieved through knowledge received from Jesus’ teaching.<sup>146</sup> The human being is essentially a spirit trapped within a corrupt physical body; thus, resurrection “involves the ... laying aside of flesh, first by anticipation, then

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<sup>142</sup> *The Gospel of Philip* 73:1-5. This and all further citations of *The Gospel of Philip* are from Wesley Isenberg’s translation in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., pp. 141-60.

<sup>143</sup> *The Gospel of Philip*, 56:15-20 – “Those who say that the lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died.” See Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, p. 158.

<sup>144</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 542. *The Gospel of Philip*, 56:25-35 – “Compare the soul. It is a precious thing and it came to be in a contemptible body. Some are afraid lest they rise naked. Because of this they wish to rise in the flesh, and [they] do not know that it is those who wear the [flesh] who are naked.” Later, the author of *Philip* insists that the material world is corrupt. “The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire. For the world never was imperishable, nor, for that matter, was he who made the world.” *The Gospel of Philip*, 75:1-10. Such passages betray the utter rejection of the Old Testament doctrine of creation by Yahweh.

<sup>145</sup> Douglass, “The Epistle to Rheginos,” p. 121; Malcolm Peel, “Resurrection, Treatise on the,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Volume 5* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 691; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 540.

<sup>146</sup> Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection From Nag Hammadi*, pp.58-59.

literally.”<sup>147</sup>

On the surface the Gnostic documents affirm the resurrection of Jesus and of all true Christians.<sup>148</sup> However, the spiritualization of the resurrection is in effect a rejection through redefinition. Resurrection language (*anastemi, egeiro* and their cognates) had previously been used solely to refer to a two-stage bodily resurrection at a concrete point in history. The Platonic conception of soul liberation, ascent, or transmigration was common and widespread—but until its appearance amongst ‘Gnostic Christians’, was never referred to using the language of resurrection. Texts like *The Treatise on the Resurrection* represent Platonic philosophy dressed up in Pauline language.<sup>149</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ is no longer the

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 96. *Treatise on Resurrection* 45:25-46:1 – “As the Apostle said, ‘We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.’ Now if we are manifest in this world wearing him, we are that one’s beams, and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly.” Translation from Malcolm Peel, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., pp. 54-57.

<sup>148</sup> Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*, p. 136; Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” p. 150. Robinson notes that “Christian Gnosticism [was] a reaffirmation, though in somewhat different terms, of the original stance of transcendence central to the very beginnings of Christianity. Such ‘Gnostic Christians’ surely considered themselves the faithful continuation, under changing circumstances, of that original stance which made Christians Christians.” Robinson, “Introduction,” p. 4. Robinson may be correct in saying that ‘Gnostic Christians’ *considered* themselves to be faithful Christians—but that doesn’t mean they were right!

<sup>149</sup> Layton, “Vision and Revision: a Gnostic View of Resurrection,” p. 213. Earlier, Layton writes: “Not only does our author ignore the problem of sin. He ignores the question of Judaism and the Law, indeed he makes no reference whatsoever to the Old Testament. He does not speak of divine economy or providence, nor of God’s

culmination of Jewish hope and the firstfruits of the bodily resurrection from the dead. Instead, it is the fulfillment of Platonic philosophical endeavor.<sup>150</sup> The resurrection has been altered from an eschatological hope of vindication through the righteous judgment of Almighty God, into the achievement of Platonic soul-liberation through self-knowledge.<sup>151</sup> The resurrection of both Christ and Christians has been redefined out of existence.

But why did Gnostics, with the language of Platonic philosophy readily at hand, choose instead to co-opt Judeo-Christian resurrection language? Van Unnik rightly argues that 'Gnostic Christians' altered their proclamation of the resurrection "to fit the Gnostic conception of the *Pleroma* and the world."<sup>152</sup> They wanted to maintain both their Gnostic

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raising of Jesus. Indeed he does not speak of God. The crucifixion and cross are not mentioned. Jesus is not *ho khristos* ('the anointed') but *ho kbrestos* ('the excellent') . . . Furthermore, there is no future resurrection. Resurrection for our author is preeminently a category of the here and now; thus there is no problem about delay in the general resurrection, and no concept of a coming *parousia* with judgment. And, as I have already emphasized, there is no concept of a resurrection 'body' in which the self will be reclothed when it reenters the *pleroma*. The author has therefore dressed a quite non-Pauline theology in a thin and tattered Pauline garb." Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>150</sup> "Resurrection, in the main sense that we have seen the word and its cognates used in the first two centuries of Christianity, is in these texts either *denied* or *radically reinterpreted*. If 'resurrection' is seen as in any sense a return, at some point after death, to a full bodily life, it is denied. If (as in the *Epistle to Rheginos*) the language of resurrection is retained, it is reinterpreted so that it no longer refers in any sense to the bodily events of either ultimate resurrection or moral obedience in this life, but rather to non-bodily religious experience during the present life and/or non-bodily post-mortem survival and exaltation." Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 547.

<sup>151</sup> Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*, p. 136.

<sup>152</sup> Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: II," p. 165. The alteration could have taken

dualism and their Christian identity, so they simply applied the Christian terminology to the Gnostic concept.<sup>153</sup>

### **Conclusion: Gnostics and the Modern Metaphorical Resurrection**

The early, strong heterodoxy of ‘Gnostic Christians’ is a boon to modernists’ anti-orthodoxy.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, ‘Gnostic Christians’ were the first to apply resurrection language to something other than the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future two-stage bodily resurrection of believers. Proponents of the metaphorical resurrection seek to do what the ancient ‘Gnostic Christians’ did—apply resurrection language to something other than orthodox resurrection belief.

However, invoking ‘Gnostic Christianity’ in historical support of the metaphorical understanding of Christ’s resurrection is strange at best. We have already seen the stark contrast between the Gnostic and Christian worldviews. More striking, however, is the difference between the Gnostic worldview and the modern naturalistic worldview held by proponents of the metaphorical resurrection. To Gnostics, the material world is corrupt and evil, something to be escaped—to

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place in two different ways. First, existing Gnostics attracted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ would transform Christian resurrection language to fit their worldview. But also, existing Christians could have been attracted to Gnosticism, and transformed their conception of Christ’s resurrection to fit the language of their new Gnostic worldview. Perhaps it is the latter transformation that happened with Valentinus.

<sup>153</sup> N. T. Wright emphasizes that “‘Resurrection’ and its cognates never meant, in either pagan or Jewish usage, what these documents make it mean; the only explanation is that they are loath to give up the word, because they want to seem to be some type of Christian, but are using it in a way for which there is no early warrant.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 550.

<sup>154</sup> Smith, “The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism,” pp. 532-33.



modernists, the material world is all there is. To Gnostics, a human being is an eternal divine soul trapped in a degraded physical body—to modernists, one is *only* a physical body. To Gnostics, death results in the liberation of the soul and reunion with the *pleroma*—to modernists, physical death results in utter personal extinction. Most crucially, to Gnostics, the spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ is a concrete historical event—to modernists, the metaphorical resurrection of Jesus Christ has no concrete referent, but rather is a symbol for the enduring power of his teaching and community. Simply put, a *spiritual* understanding of resurrection is incompatible with a *metaphorical* understanding. The Gnostics affirmed the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a concrete historical event wherein his (Platonic) soul was liberated from its physical body. The metaphorical reconstruction dissociates Christ's resurrection from history altogether. Nothing happened to Jesus after his death; resurrection is a symbol for what his disciples experienced. The only similarity between the Gnostics' spiritual resurrection and the modernists' metaphorical resurrection is an anti-orthodox denial of the bodily resurrection that fits the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection within the prevailing worldview. The metaphorical interpretation of Christ's resurrection emphatically finds no support from the Gnosticization of the resurrection.

### Conclusion: Resurrection and Worldview

Proponents of the metaphorical resurrection insist that the resurrection of Jesus was understood symbolically by his earliest followers. It is certainly true that Jesus' earliest followers derived metaphorical applications *from* Jesus' bodily resurrection.<sup>155</sup> However, we have seen that when applied to an individual's post-mortem existence (or lack thereof), resurrection language in the first century always and only referred to a future two-stage bodily resurrection from the dead,

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<sup>155</sup> E.g., Romans 6:1-14 emphasizes that we have been baptized with Jesus into his death and raised to new life through his resurrection.

even among those who rejected the possibility. Furthermore, the New Testament, the early Church fathers, and early opponents of Christianity all understood the resurrection in literal, bodily terms.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, while ‘Gnostic Christians’ applied resurrection language in a radically new spiritualized sense, they did so in a way contrary to modern metaphorical reconstructionists. Indeed, both the underlying worldview and the reconstructed resurrection of ‘Gnostic Christianity’ are diametrically opposed to that of proponents of a metaphorical resurrection. The inescapable conclusion is that the metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a purely modern invention, with neither precursors in nor support from the history of the Church and her ancient opponents.

In conclusion, I would like to explore the interplay between worldview and Christ’s resurrection.

- (1) ‘Gnostic Christians’ redefined the resurrection (of Christ and believers) in order to better fit their underlying worldview presuppositions. The metaphorical reconstruction of Christ’s resurrection represents the same process. Modernists generally adhere to a naturalistic worldview which denies both the possibility of life after death and the active involvement of God in the physical realm. Under such a worldview, a metaphorical resurrection is plausible; a bodily resurrection is not. I propose that the process of redefining or altering resurrection belief in order to fit one’s own worldview is a widespread and natural phenomenon.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Again, this does not downplay or deny that the resurrection was *applied* metaphorically to the present experience of believers. But this metaphorical application was only possible because of their belief in the concrete historical *fact* of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead.

<sup>157</sup> Van Unnik seems to agree; see Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: II,” pp. 163-64. See also Dudley, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better,” p. 55.

- (2) Altering resurrection belief is considerably more likely when the predominant cultural worldview *does not fit orthodox resurrection belief*. The vast majority of the Greco-Roman world rejected the Judeo-Christian worldview that lay behind the Christian proclamation of Jesus' bodily resurrection and the future bodily resurrection of believers. The attacks launched by Celsus and Porphyry demonstrate "why Christians were tempted to abandon the doctrine of the incarnation and the resurrection" and why "Christian Gnosticism simply accepted the pagan antimaterialistic worldview": a spiritual understanding of resurrection "was far more marketable to the pagan worldview."<sup>158</sup> Today, functional naturalism is the dominant worldview in the Western world.<sup>159</sup> The metaphorical resurrection is "far more marketable" to this worldview than is the bodily resurrection proclaimed by biblical Christianity.
- (3) Both Gnostic and modern reinterpretations of the resurrection seek to maintain Christian language and hence credibility, even while radically altering or rejecting the Christian worldview in which that language (and credibility) is grounded. It is quite natural, from a biblical Christian worldview, to wish that Gnostics and modern metaphorical proponents would engage in honest intellectual labeling.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Dudrey, "What the Writers Should Have Done Better," p. 67.

<sup>159</sup> I am not suggesting that Westerners are generally professing atheists (consistent naturalists). Functional naturalism suggests that while Westerners might consciously acknowledge the real or possible existence of a transcendent deity, they operate on a day-to-day basis as if that 'God' is entirely uninvolved in world affairs. Moral therapeutic deism is one popular catchphrase for the dominant Western worldview. All I'm seeking to argue is that the dominant worldview discounts the possibility of God intervening (or interacting) in historical events.

<sup>160</sup> Ronald Nash writes: "It is important to recognize that disagreement on some issues should result in the disputant's being regarded as someone who has left that family of beliefs, however much he or she desires to continue to use the label. . . . A religion

- (4) Wright notes: “Some events seem to have the power to challenge worldviews and generate either new mutations within them or complete transformations.”<sup>161</sup> The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is one such event. When the Jewish disciples encountered the risen Christ their worldviews were radically altered. They began to treat Jesus not only as Messiah but as the proper object of devotion and worship, they gathered for separate corporate worship on the first day of the week, and they altered their resurrection faith to include Jesus as the firstfruits and promise of their own future resurrection.

Whether in the 1<sup>st</sup> century or the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the person who comes face-to-face with the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is faced with a decision: “Will I (like the Gnostics, like the modernists) alter, shape, reinterpret or redefine the resurrection so as to fit my pre-existing worldview; or will I (like the apostles and the early Christians) allow the risen Messiah to alter my worldview?”

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without the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God may be a plausible faith, but it certainly is not the *Christian* religion. Much confusion could undoubtedly be eliminated if some way could be found to get people to use important labels like Christianity in a way that is faithful to their historic meaning.” Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 33.

<sup>161</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 27.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Ian Hugh Clary<sup>162</sup>

The apostle Paul was quite unlike the modern tourist when he wandered the streets of Athens in Acts 17. As he absorbed the bustle of the *polis*, the magnificent sights of Mount Olympus or the Parthenon did not captivate him. Instead of standing awestruck at the surrounding culture, Paul was “greatly upset” because he saw that the city was “full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Athens was a place of tremendous learning. It was home to a number of schools of philosophy such as Epicureanism and Stoicism (Acts 17:18).<sup>163</sup> It was also a city of religion. Pagan spirituality flourished in the melting pot of religious pluralism. In the diversity of philosophical and religious thought, Paul witnessed what could easily be called “pre-modern post-modernism.”

There is great affinity between the west of the twenty-first century and the Athens of Paul’s experience. Gone are the days of Christendom, where most European and North American countries were generally Christian.<sup>164</sup> In the post-modern west, religion is becoming just as diverse as it was in Greco-Roman society. In a city like Toronto Sikh temples stand as tall as Christian churches and Islamic mosques. One could

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<sup>163</sup> A good introduction to Greek philosophy is John M. Frame, “Greeks Bearing Gifts” in W. Andrew Hofferger ed., *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-36. A more detailed examination can be found in Gordon H. Clark, *Ancient Philosophy* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1997).

<sup>164</sup> For an analysis of the changes in western thought see Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976).

just as easily take a university course on Wicca or atheist philosophy as they could on Reformation history.

How does Christianity fair in light of this multiplicity of philosophical and religious thought? In what way can Christianity answer the challenges posed by post-modernism and religious pluralism? As a worldview that makes an exclusive truth claim in the gospel of Jesus Christ, is there a method of commending and defending the faith in the midst of a relativistic culture?

There is a need for an apologetic method that not only dismantles unbelieving thought in all of its forms, but also offers Christianity as the only worldview that gives meaning to the world.<sup>165</sup> The following essay will present the presuppositional method of apologetics as that which soundly defeats non-Christian faith while offering a meaningful alternative. This essay will first answer the question, “What is apologetics?” It will provide a basic exposition of the discipline and trace the various schools of apologetic thought. Secondly, it will examine the role that Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) played in the development of the presuppositional method. Finally, a brief survey of presuppositionalism as an apologetic strategy will be put forward, highlighting key distinctives that mark it as a unique and biblical method.

## **The Task of Apologetics**

John M. Frame explains that there are three aspects to apologetics. First, apologetics is proof; it presents a rational basis for the Christian faith and proves it be true (cf. John 14:11). Second, apologetics is defense; it answers the challenges of unbelief (cf. Phil. 1:7). Third, apologetics is offense; it attacks the foolishness of unbelief (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16).<sup>166</sup> In addition

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<sup>165</sup> This is what is referred to as “negative” and “positive” apologetics Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 14-16.

<sup>166</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 2.

to this tripartite understanding of apologetics William Edgar adds that commending the faith is just as important as defending it.<sup>167</sup> Therefore the command to evangelize is integral to apologetics. "Evangelism and apologetics are seamlessly linked and together function under the rubric of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)."<sup>168</sup>

There has been a need for apologetics since the inception of the church.<sup>169</sup> 1 Peter 3:15 makes the point clear as does a cursory reading of Paul's missionary journeys in the book of Acts (see Acts 17:16-34). Apologetics played a major role in patristic history where examples can be drawn from a myriad of sources.<sup>170</sup> For instance, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-c. 107) argued against docetic understandings of Christ;<sup>171</sup> Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165) penned *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 155) arguing for the veracity of the incarnation against Jewish presuppositions;<sup>172</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-c. 200) wrote *Against Heresies* (c. 175-185) listing and critiquing a wide variety of Gnostic teaching;<sup>173</sup> and Augustine of Hippo (354-

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<sup>167</sup> William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>168</sup> Ian Hugh Clary, "Apologetics: Commending and Defending" in *The Evangelical Baptist* (Fall 2005): 10.

<sup>169</sup> One would argue that apologetics has been necessary since the fall.

<sup>170</sup> For an excellent sample of patristic apologetics see Michael A. G. Haykin, *Defence of the Truth: Contending for the Faith Yesterday and Today* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004).

<sup>171</sup> Ignatius, "The Letters" in *The Apostolic Fathers* The Fathers of the Church Volume One: A New Translation (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1947), pp. 83-130.

<sup>172</sup> Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho" in *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr* The Fathers of the Church Volume Six: A New Translation (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 139-368.

<sup>173</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume One: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 309-602.

430) wrote a definitive work against paganism in the massive *The City of God Against the Pagans* (416-422).<sup>174</sup>

Once Christianity became the dominant worldview in the west, apologetics took a less prominent role. The major apologetic example from the medieval church is Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) who incorporated Aristotelianism in his writings against Islamic philosophy, particularly in parts of *Summa Contra Gentiles* (c. 1258-1264).<sup>175</sup> It was not until the Renaissance that the apologetic task assumed a more prominent role. One thinks, for instance, of the debates of the Protestant Reformation and orthodox interactions with various heretical positions such as Socinianism and Unitarianism. But even so, most apologetic interface took place within a general (Christian) theistic perspective. Only after the Enlightenment did the need to defend theism generally and Christianity in particular arise.<sup>176</sup> With the birth of continental rationalism and British empiricism came direct attacks on Christianity as a system from outside of the faith. Well known examples can be seen in the writings of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and David Hume (1711-1776) whose teaching severely undermined the Christian religion.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought ed., R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>175</sup> Peter J. Leithart, "Medieval Theology and the Roots of Modernity" in W. Andrew Hoffercker ed., *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), pp. 140-77. For relevant section on Aquinas see pp. 156-67.

<sup>176</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (1957; rpr. Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1997), p. 301-394.

<sup>177</sup> Alister McGrath traces atheism from its origins in the French Revolution to the present in Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Galilee, 2006). For the relationship between the Enlightenment and Christianity see W. Andrew Hoffercker, "Enlightenments and Awakenings: The Beginning of Modern Culture Wars" in W. Andrew



In the history of Christian thought, three broad schools of apologetics have arisen to answer Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment challenges.<sup>178</sup> They are, in no particular order, evidentialism, classical apologetics and presuppositionalism.<sup>179</sup>

The first school, evidentialism, is a perspective based upon an empirical epistemology. This scientifically oriented school appropriates *a posteriori* arguments for Christianity in a piecemeal fashion that include proofs for the resurrection, the reliability of the biblical documents and the possibility of miracles. Apologists in the evidentialist perspective include Thomas Reid, Bishop Butler, C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel, Gary Habermas and John W. Montgomery.

The second school is commonly known as classical apologetics and is based upon a rationalist epistemology and natural theology. It is a philosophical apologetic that uses *a priori* arguments from causality and design as well as the ontological argument. Apologists from a classical standpoint include Aquinas, B.B. Warfield, William Lane Craig, Ravi Zacharias, William Dembski, R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner.<sup>180</sup>

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Hoffecker ed., *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), pp. 240-80.

<sup>178</sup> With globalism and religious pluralism other faiths such as Islam and Hinduism require some apologetic interaction as well. A recent example is Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2002).

<sup>179</sup> It is worth noting that the evidential and classical approaches share enough affinity in their understanding of the nature of man and his ability to reason since the fall that they could be categorised under a general evidentialist rubric with a distinction between hard and soft evidentialism.

<sup>180</sup> A basic explanation and defence of classical apologetics is R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984). For a review see Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 219-43.

The third school is known as presuppositionalism and is based upon a revelational epistemology and Reformed argument for the veracity of the Christian worldview. It presents Christian theology as a unit, with the Scripture as its presupposed starting point. Using the bible as their authority, presuppositionalists argue for the existence of God transcendentally. Such apologists in the presuppositionalist camp include Van Til, Greg L. Bahnsen, John M. Frame, Joe Boot and K. Scott Oliphint. Others often categorized as presuppositional are Gordon H. Clark, Edward J. Carnell and Francis Schaeffer.

### **Presuppositionalism: A Beginning**

Many schools of thought have a founder and presuppositionalism is no different. In the history of western philosophy, the commencement of various philosophical schools can be credited to the work of one or two industrious thinkers. For instance, René Descartes (1596-1650) is generally credited with founding Continental rationalism and John Locke (1632-1704) with British empiricism. In the discipline of Christian apologetics the thinker generally recognized as “founding” presuppositionalism is the Dutch-American theologian Cornelius Van Til.<sup>181</sup> Van Til was heavily influenced in his thinking by the writings of Kuyper and Bavinck as well as Warfield, Geerhardus Vos and for a time Herman Dooyeweerd. It has been rightly said that Van Til took the best of Kuyper

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<sup>181</sup> For more information on the life of Cornelius Van Til see John Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2008); Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 7-20; John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 19-37; and William White Jr., *Van Til: Defender of the Faith* (Nashville/New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979).

and Warfield and blended them into a Reformed apologetic.<sup>182</sup> The Van Til *corpus* consists mainly of published course syllabi, though his major scholarly contribution is undoubtedly *The Defense of the Faith* where he outlines the basic principles for apologetics.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pp. 596-612. For Van Til's own view of "Amsterdam and Old Princeton" see Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 260-99.

<sup>183</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* The Cornelius Van Til Collection (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1967). A bibliography of Van Til's writings is available in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pp. 735-40. Van Til's works are available in electronic format from Logos Bible Software (<http://www.logos.com/vantil>).

## Presuppositionalism: Some Basic Tenets

What makes Van Tilian presuppositionalism distinct from the other apologetic schools? If presuppositionalism seeks to make proper sense of the evidence for Christian theism, is it not just a form of evidentialism? If it reasons *a priori* from God's existence, is it not another form of classical apologetics? The following will outline four basic tenets that explain why the presuppositional method is distinct from others. This list is not exhaustive, but will hopefully provide an adequate basis for understanding what one writer has called "kung-fu" apologetics.

<sup>184</sup> The four basic tenets are: 1) antithesis; 2) point of contact; 3) ultimate commitment; and, 4) transcendental argument.<sup>185</sup> The fourth point constitutes Van Til's most unique contribution to discussions of apologetic methodology.

### Antithesis

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 the apostle Paul makes a distinction between the natural person and the spiritual person. In his discussion of the natural person, the descriptive term that he uses is *psuchikos* a Greek word that means "an unspiritual person, one who merely functions bodily, without being touched by the Spirit of God."<sup>186</sup> The spiritual person, on the other hand, is described as *pneumatikos* meaning that he or she "possesses the divine pneu/ma...this enables the person to penetrate the divine mysteries."<sup>187</sup> The relationship between the

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<sup>184</sup> Grover Gunn, *Lectures on Apologetics* (Greenville, South Carolina: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1997), p. 41.

<sup>185</sup> More issues could be addressed such as the rational/irrational tension, aseity, Trinitarianism, the relation of faith and philosophy, creation, etc. Space constraints require that these be left relatively ignored.

<sup>186</sup> BDAG, p. 1100b.

<sup>187</sup> BDAG, p. 837b.

two is like that of black and white; they are in antithesis to one another.

The word antithesis comes from the combination of two Greek words *anti* “against”<sup>188</sup> and *tithemi* “to put or place in a particular location.”<sup>189</sup> The root of *tithemi* is *thes* and is where we get the word “thesis” from. Bob and Maxine Moore explain, “The antithesis of something is its opposite, reverse, negation, or antipode.”<sup>190</sup> Explaining the theological significance of antithesis, Gary DeMar, summarizing Greg Bahnsen, says, “As Christians we must recognize the fundamental disagreement between biblical thought and all forms of unbelief at the foundational level of our theory of knowing and knowledge.”<sup>191</sup> Frame explains that the antithesis between believer and unbeliever is “the most conspicuous feature of Van Til’s position.”<sup>192</sup>

The notion of antithesis is reflected in Scripture, as seen in the 1 Corinthians 2:14 passage noted above. Paul could ask in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 what relation does righteousness have with lawlessness, or light with darkness? Here, Paul likely builds on the teaching of Jesus in Mark 9:40 who said, “For the one who is not against us is for us.” And of course, the antithesis can be traced all the way back to the garden of Eden after the fall where God said to Satan in Genesis 3:15 that he would put

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<sup>188</sup> Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2000), p. 2262. “Originally with a local sense *over against, opposite.*”

<sup>189</sup> BDAG, p. 1003b.

<sup>190</sup> Bob Moore and Maxine Moore, *NTC’s Dictionary of Latin and Greek Origins: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classical Origins of English Words* (Chicago, Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), p. 320.

<sup>191</sup> Gary DeMar ed., *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2007), p. 13.

<sup>192</sup> John M. Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1995), p. 187.

enmity between he and the woman, between his offspring and hers.

In the patristic period, the antithesis between believing and unbelieving thought is apparent. Take for instance Tertullian's (c. 160-c. 225) famous question in chapter seven of *The Prescriptions against the Heretics* (c. 200), "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?"<sup>193</sup> Likewise Augustine pits Christianity against paganism by distinguishing the city of God from the city of man in *City of God*.<sup>194</sup>

Yet, the one theologian who most influenced Van Til's teaching on the antithesis was the Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). James E. McGoldrick explains Kuyper's view of the antithesis, "At a time when modernists were promoting a theology of synthesis, Kuyper emphasized the antithesis that posits an impassable gap between God and Satan, between Christ and Anti-Christ, a conflict of cosmic dimensions, and he called Christians to wage a struggle against all compromises of truth in every area of life and learning. He summoned them to become part of a counter-offensive against all forms of falsehood and in so doing to confront evil with the gospel of divine mercy and grace, which Christ bestows on all who leave the kingdom of Satan and enter the diametrically opposed kingdom of God."<sup>195</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Kuyper, and J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) whose contrast between Christianity and liberalism was also influential,<sup>196</sup> Van Til made the antithesis

<sup>193</sup> Tertullian, "The Prescriptions against the Heretics" in S.L. Greenslade ed., *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome* The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>194</sup> See footnote 15 above.

<sup>195</sup> James E. McGoldrick, *Abraham Kuyper: God's Renaissance Man* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), p. 142.

<sup>196</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923).

one of the hallmarks of his apologetic. For Van Til, the fundamental difference between the believer and the unbeliever is ethical.<sup>197</sup> The unbeliever, having not experienced the saving grace of God in the gospel, is dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1), thus certain epistemological consequences result. For instance, in the words of the apostle Paul unbelievers have become “futile” in their thoughts and their “senseless hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21). This is so because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18b) and exchange the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:25). Sin’s negative impact on the mind is what theologians call the “noetic effects of sin.” Van Til explains, “When we say that sin is ethical we do not mean, however, that sin involved only the will of man and not also his intellect. Sin involved every aspect of man’s personality. All of man’s reactions in every relation in which God had set him were ethical and not merely intellectual; the intellect itself is ethical.”<sup>198</sup> The results of the noetic effects of sin are “that man tried to interpret everything with which he came into contact without reference to God.”<sup>199</sup>

The Christian, on the other hand, has been set free from the bonds of sin and has a new way of viewing the world. He or she has been “clothed with the new man” and is “being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it” (Col. 3:10). Thus, being renewed in their minds (Romans 12:2), the Christian can rightly interpret the world that God made. The indwelling of the Spirit and freedom from sin allows the Christian to “think God’s thoughts after him.” The knowledge that the believer has of God has an ethical impact. Bahnsen explains, “As man’s knowledge of God’s increases, his sense of distance does not diminish, but actually increases. He stands in even greater awe and wonder at God’s mind. He is humbled even more than when he began to learn of Him.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 171.

<sup>198</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 46.

<sup>199</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 47.

<sup>200</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 231.

Therefore, according to Van Til, the presuppositional method recognizes the issues at stake and offers a powerful defense/offense for the Christian faith. “In the all-out war between the Christian and the natural man as he appears in modern garb it is only the atomic energy of a truly Reformed methodology that will explode the last *Festung*.”<sup>201</sup>

### Point of Contact

Many who misunderstand Van Til on antithesis often charge him with teaching that there is no point of contact between the believer and the unbeliever. Because of this supposed lack of common ground, the misconception is that presuppositionalism offers no rational argumentation and advises the apologist only to preach the gospel without remonstrance. However, Van Til does see a point of contact and therefore does believe that an interchange can occur between the believer and unbeliever.

The evidential and classical schools of apologetics place point of contact in natural theology. It is generally held that Van Til was misguided in his appropriation of natural theology saying, “All denials of these assumptions are forced and temporary.”<sup>202</sup> What is often not recognized is that for Van Til, natural theology must always be conditioned by the greater context of theology. According to Jeffrey K. Jue, “This context would identify the function of and relation between natural theology and supernatural theology in the pre- and post-fall environment.”<sup>203</sup> Because the unbeliever’s problem is ethical, which in turn has a negative epistemological result: he or she is at odds with the truth of biblical revelation. Yet, the apologist does have recourse to appeal to the unbeliever on a

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<sup>201</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 105.

<sup>202</sup> Sproul, Gerstner and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, p. 72.

<sup>203</sup> Jeffrey K. Jue, “*Theologia Naturalis*: A Reformed Tradition” in K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Lipton eds., *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), p. 169.



metaphysical level. The common ground between the Christian and non-Christian is ontological.<sup>204</sup> This not only makes sense existentially, but also has biblical support.

Experientially, the non-Christian lives in God's world and is confronted daily with general revelation. God's revelation is clear whether an unbeliever observes creation from the farthest galaxy to the smallest cell. The apostle Paul makes this point in Romans 1:20 when he says that God's invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—are “clearly seen” in the created order.

Alongside revelation in the external world, the unbeliever internally has an experience of God: in conscience. Immediate knowledge of God, since conception, renders the unbeliever without excuse.<sup>205</sup> This knowledge is a result of the unbeliever bearing the image of God and the implanted *sensus deitatis*.<sup>206</sup> Paul says in Romans 1:21 that unbelievers “know God” but do not glorify him. Therefore every apologetic appeal is to something already known by the unbeliever. If by God's grace that knowledge is brought to remembrance, then conversion occurs. However, if the unbeliever continues in hardness of heart, the apologist has still accomplished his or her task of showing the unbeliever that deep down inside, they truly know God. This only furthers unbelievers' responsibility to believe.

### Ultimate Commitment

The question of authority is a controversial aspect of Van Til's thought. Christian and non-Christian alike have been critical of his view that Scripture is the primary authority to be appealed to by the apologist in his or her task of defending the faith. According to both the non-presuppositionalist Christian and

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<sup>204</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, pp. 90-95.

<sup>205</sup> See Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* In *Defense of Biblical Christianity Volume V* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), p. 195.

<sup>206</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 90.

the unbeliever, to assume the authority of the bible at the outset of an apologetic engagement is to involve oneself in the fallacy of circular reasoning. It is argued that Scripture is one of the key issues under scrutiny and that it first needs to be proven that it is the authoritative word of God before it can be appealed to.

What both the evidentialist and the non-Christian do not seem to recognize is that when it comes to issues of ultimate authority, everyone has an unproved starting point that is self-referential and taken to be self-attesting. “Every philosophy must use its own standards in proving its conclusions; otherwise, it is simply inconsistent.”<sup>207</sup> Bahnsen adds, “The Christian apologist simply recognizes that the *ultimate truth*—that which is more pervasive, fundamental, and necessary—is such that it cannot be argued *independently* of the preconditions inherent in it.”<sup>208</sup> The real issue comes down to justifying one’s starting point. Can the non-Christian substantiate their autonomous reason as a legitimate and rational epistemic foundation? To do so, he or she must first assume reason before it can be proven to be a justifiable authority. This is what Van Til called a “vicious circle.” He could also say, “To admit one’s own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is therefore to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*. The starting-point, method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.”<sup>209</sup>

Frame distinguishes between “narrowly circular” and “broadly circular” arguments. When arguing for the truthfulness of the biblical worldview the apologist does not resort to saying, “The Bible is true; therefore the Bible is true.” This is a “narrowly circular” argument and while it is accurate, there is more to the issue. The bible assumes its own authority

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<sup>207</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>208</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Foundation, 2000), p. 75.

<sup>209</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 101. Emphasis his.

(cf. 2 Tim. 3:16), but it also demonstrates that authority transcendentally because of the impossibility of the contrary. This is a “broadly circular” argument. It is the demonstration of the bible’s truth claims by appeal to evidence.<sup>210</sup> For the world to make sense, the bible must be true. If it is not true, then nothing can be known. The bible provides the necessary preconditions for intelligibility in the world. While biblical revelation is the epistemic authority for the believer, it is also authoritative for the unbeliever who regularly borrows from the biblical worldview to make sense of things.

If God’s revelation is the source of all meaning, then it is necessary for it to be presupposed even to make sense of the discussion between the Christian and non-Christian over authority. In Psalm 36:9 the Psalmist declares, “In your light do we see light.” This is true for the believer and the non-believer. Van Til says, “Scripture presents itself as being the only light in terms of which the truth about facts and their relations can be discovered.”<sup>211</sup> According to Bahnsen,

God’s revelation is more than the best foundation for Christian reasoning; it is the only philosophically sound foundation for any reasoning whatsoever. Therefore, although the world in its own wisdom sees the word of Christ as foolishness, ‘The foolishness of God is wiser than men’ (1 Cor. 1:18, 25). Christians need not sit in an isolated philosophical tower, reduced to simply despising the philosophical systems of non-Christians. No, by taking every thought captive to Christ, we are enabled to cast down reasoning that is exalted against the knowledge of God (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5). We must challenge the unbeliever to give a cogent and credible account of how he knows anything whatsoever, given

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<sup>210</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 14. Other external evidences can also be appealed to such as the reliability of the biblical text, the early dates of the manuscripts, etc. Frame says, “‘Circularity...can be as broad as the whole universe; for every fact witnesses to the truth of God.’” See also Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 75.

<sup>211</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 108.

his espoused presuppositions about reality, truth and man (his 'worldview').<sup>212</sup>

### Transcendental Argument

Van Til once wrote, "At the outset it ought to be clearly observed that very system of thought necessarily has a certain method of its own."<sup>213</sup> For Van Til, the only cogent method of apologetics, from the Christian perspective, is the transcendental method.<sup>214</sup> The most significant contribution that Van Til made to apologetics, what has been called a contribution of Copernican dimensions,<sup>215</sup> is the "transcendental argument" for the existence of God. The following will seek to explain the transcendental argument as an apologetic method.

Transcendental arguments are not unknown in the history of philosophy and have been used from the early Greeks to Immanuel Kant.<sup>216</sup> Van Til, however, took the idea and placed it within a Christian worldview by applying it to the existence of God. A transcendental argument asks the question, "What are the preconditions necessary for the intelligibility of reality?" This argument is an "indirect argument" that while not appealing to explicit evidences or arguments from natural theology, does seek to prove that such arguments only make sense within a Christian framework of interpretation.

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<sup>212</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 4-5.

<sup>214</sup> Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 10-13.

<sup>215</sup> John M. Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox" in Gary North ed., *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1979), pp. 295.

<sup>216</sup> For more on transcendental arguments see Charles Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments" in Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 20-33.

Don Collett notes two ways in which the transcendental method safeguards important theological concerns. First, the transcendental method “safeguards the doctrine of God’s transcendence.”<sup>217</sup> It does so by taking seriously God’s absolute character of being when positing an argument for Christianity. Traditional methods of apologetics, that assume principles of deduction or induction, make the existence of God “logically derivative” rather than “logically primitive.”<sup>218</sup> Because the transcendental method starts with God as the necessary precondition for intelligibility, his “logically primitive” and “absolute” character is preserved.<sup>219</sup>

Second, the transcendental method “alone does justice to the clarity of the objective evidence for God’s existence.”<sup>220</sup> Because the existence of God makes argumentation possible, his existence is necessary; it cannot be falsified. By starting with premises in the world, the evidential schools allow for the possibility of God’s non-existence. In the transcendental method, however, the argument from predication rules out such a possibility. The argument from predication is based upon the premise “that predication requires for its possibility the necessary truth of God’s existence...precluding any future possibility of using argument to falsify God’s existence.”<sup>221</sup>

Van Til taught a two-fold method of apologetic strategy that is well expressed in Proverbs 26:4-5, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you yourself also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own estimation.” Verse 4 argues against the idea of neutrality,

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<sup>217</sup> Don Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument” in K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Lipton eds., *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), p. 260.

<sup>218</sup> Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument,” p. 260.

<sup>219</sup> Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument,” p. 261.

<sup>220</sup> Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument,” p. 262.

<sup>221</sup> Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument,” p. 262.

explaining that if one permitted the unbeliever their most basic premises the apologetic task is lost. Verse 5 in turn requires the apologist to assume the unbeliever's worldview, "for the sake of argument" in order to perform an "internal critique" or *reductio ad absurdum*, to demonstrate its irrationality. This, in essence, encapsulates the transcendental method, from the Van Til perspective.<sup>222</sup>

In syllogistic form a transcendental argument looks like this:

Premise 1: For X to be the case, Y would have to be the case, because Y is a precondition of X.

Premise 2: X is the case.

Conclusion: Y is the case.<sup>223</sup>

To work this out in terms of God's existence the argument would look like this:

Premise 1: For there to be intelligibility in the world, God must exist because God is a precondition for intelligibility.

Premise 2: There is intelligibility in the world.

Conclusion: God exists.

What is especially devastating for the non-believer is that for he or she to even deny the existence of God, he must first be presupposed. Take for example:

A presupposes B if and only if:

a) if A is true, then B is true

b) if  $\neg A$  is true, then B is true.<sup>224</sup>

Therefore, God's existence (B) is the necessary precondition for both the affirmation (A) and negation ( $\neg A$ ) of God's existence. The existence of God is thus an inescapable concept. In Van Til's words, "It is the firm conviction of every

<sup>222</sup> Collett, "Van Til and Transcendental Argument," pp. 262-63. See also Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 61.

<sup>223</sup> Adapted from Stephen Wellum's course-notes for Apologetics 323, Toronto Baptist Seminary, Winter 2008.

<sup>224</sup> Adapted from Collett, "Van Til and Transcendental Argument," p. 269.

epistemologically self-conscious Christian that not one human being can utter a single syllable, whether in negation or affirmation, unless it were for God's existence.' Thus the transcendental argument seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is."<sup>225</sup>

## Conclusion

However brief, this essay has sought to explain the nature of presuppositionalism and the basic tenets that make it a unique contribution to the discussion of apologetics. It is hoped that the method developed by Cornelius Van Til and explicated by his followers will come to direct the playing field of apologetic methodology. Such a discussion, however, is important for more than just methodological considerations. The church in the twenty-first-century is again facing a barrage of intellectual challenges from a multiplicity of faith commitments. The recent spate of publications from the so-called "New Atheism" is a case in point.<sup>226</sup> Presuppositional apologetics is a consistently biblical apologetic that offers a comprehensive critique of non-Christian thought without compromising the Christian worldview. Therefore it poses an indomitable challenge of its own. Van Til best summarizes the challenge: "There is a global war on between Christ and Satan. All men are participants in this war. They all wear uniforms; they are all for or against God...But those who fight for truth must fight with spiritual weapons only. Their opposition to Satan is in the interest of winning converts to the love of God in Christ."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 11.

<sup>226</sup> For a good example of how presuppositionalism can be used in a discussion with an atheist see Christopher Hitchens and Douglas Wilson, *Is Christianity Good for the World? A Debate* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008).

<sup>227</sup> Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 209.





## PAST, PROBABILITY, AND TELEOLOGY

J.W. Wartick<sup>228</sup>

Once thought to be buried by the objections of detractors like Kant and Hume, the teleological argument<sup>229</sup> has recently seen a popular resurgence due to cosmological research.<sup>230</sup> Cosmology has revealed the improbability of our universe's life-permitting qualities. Most often, the teleological argument has been molded around this cosmological data, emphasizing the infinitesimally small probability of our universe's existence in light of the scientific data.<sup>231</sup> The popularity of the teleological argument has, unfortunately, also lead to popular—but illogical—methods by which opponents try to deny the implications of teleology by arguing that the universe is not improbable on atheistic naturalism. The failure of these

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<sup>229</sup> Also known as the “design argument.”

<sup>230</sup> See Robin Collins, “The Teleological Argument,” in William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, (Blackwell, 2009), pp. 226-239; Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Neil Mason (ed.), *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Troy Nunley, “Fishnets, Firing Squads, and Fine-Tuning (Again)” in *Philosophia Christi* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010) for some recent works on the argument.

<sup>231</sup> Other versions of the teleological argument are formulated around biological design. These biological arguments are part of the Intelligent Design movement. Cf. William Dembski, *Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999); William Dembski, *The Design Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998); Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Free Press, 2006); and Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell* (New York: HarperOne, 2010) for just a few examples.

objections leads philosophers to a stunning conclusion: the high probability of a cosmic designer.

### The Argument Stated

The teleological argument comes in many forms, some of which are stronger than others. The version defended here is from Robin Collins:

“(1) Given the fine-tuning evidence, [a life-permitting universe] is very, very epistemically<sup>232</sup> unlikely under [atheistic naturalism<sup>233</sup>]...

“(2) Given the fine-tuning evidence, [a life-permitting universe] is not unlikely under theism

“(3) Theism was advocated prior to the fine-tuning evidence (and has independent motivation)

“(4) Therefore... a life-permitting universe strongly supports theism over [atheistic] naturalism”<sup>234</sup>

Premise 1 is the key premise because the other premises are generally unchallenged. There are few—if any—who would

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<sup>232</sup> “Epistemology” is the “study of the nature of knowledge and justification.” Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 273.

<sup>233</sup> The naturalism being expressed here is of the atheistic, materialist, physicalist variety. There are forms of naturalism which could be more compatible with a life-permitting universe, though these forms of naturalism would also be theistic in nature. One example could be process philosophy as expressed in David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>234</sup> Robin Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, p. 207. I’ve simplified Collins’ version due to space constraints. A strength of this version of the argument is that the conclusion isn’t “God exists” but that God’s existence is more probable than not. Because this conclusion is weaker than the definitive “God exists,” the argument is more easily defended, yet yields (largely) the same results apologetically.

argue that a life-permitting universe is unlikely given theism,<sup>235</sup> which leaves premise 2 unchallenged. Premise 3 seems obvious because many advocated theism before any version of the teleological argument even existed. Others were theists before discovering the argument.<sup>236</sup> The conclusion (4) simply follows from the premises. Therefore, the argument hinges upon Premise 1. Rather than focusing on the evidence for fine-tuning,<sup>237</sup> the defense presented here will focus on refuting objections to attributing the fine-tuning to design (theism) rather than chance.<sup>238</sup>

### Modes of Necessity

One way to deny Premise 1 is to argue that the probabilities of past events are certain. The thinking goes that, because an event (the existence of the universe, for example), has happened, the probability that that event *would* happen is certain.<sup>239</sup> Richard

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<sup>235</sup> I know of no one in any literature who does argue in this way. Collins does provide a defense for this premise in *The Teleological Argument*, pp. 254ff.

<sup>236</sup> Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, p. 207.

<sup>237</sup> Interested readers can check out Robin Collins, "Evidence for Fine Tuning" in Neil Mason (ed.), *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 178-199; Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, pp. 47-74; and Robin Collins, *The Teleological Argument* for just a few examples.

<sup>238</sup> It is also possible to deny the conclusion by holding that the universe exists necessarily, but this is a rare objection. For some problems with holding to a necessary universe, see Stephen Parrish, *God and Necessity* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), pp. 217-250.

<sup>239</sup> One example of this can be seen in J.D. Barrow and F.J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, (Oxford: Oxford, 1986), wherein the authors argue that "The basic features of the Universe... must be *observed* to be of a type that allows the evolution of the observers, for if intelligent life did not evolve in an otherwise possible universe, it is obvious that no one would be asking the reason for the observed

Dawkins puts it this way, “The fact of our own existence is perhaps too surprising to bear... How is it that we find ourselves not merely existing, but surrounded by such complexity, such excellence, such endless forms so beautiful? ...The answer is this: it could not have been otherwise, given that we are capable of noticing our existence at all and of asking questions about it.”<sup>240</sup>

How are we to take such a statement? Perhaps Dawkins is implying that if an event  $e$  happened, the probability of  $e$  having happened is  $1/1$ . That is true, but only trivially so.

The line of thinking is problematic when used against some forms of the teleological argument. Statistically, some people assert,<sup>241</sup> the odds that the universe would be life-permitting (like the one we observe) must be  $1/1$ , because, we are here, after all, to observe it! Imagine the following:

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[properties]” (pp. 1-2). For an excellent response to this argument, see William Lane Craig, “Design and the Anthropic Fine-Tuning of the Universe” in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, edited Neil Mason (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 155-177. Alternatively, some accuse theists of not understanding exactly what “chance” means. Cf. Austin Cline, “Rebuttal to the Argument from Design: Design or Chance?” at [http://atheism.about.com/od/argumentsforgod/a/design\\_4.htm](http://atheism.about.com/od/argumentsforgod/a/design_4.htm) (accessed December 1, 2010).

<sup>240</sup> “Richard Dawkins on *The Greatest Show on Earth*” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/video/2009/sep/21/richard-dawkins-greatest-show-earth> (accessed November, 2009).

<sup>241</sup> Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*. See also Mike, “Classic Arguments for God” <http://mwillett.org/atheism/classic.htm> (Accessed December 2, 2010) who writes: “This argument ignores the size of the universe. There are hundreds of billions of galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars, any of which might have planets capable of supporting life. Even an impossibly improbable event is almost a certainty - and we already know of one planet that supports life.”

d: The chances of any one side coming up are (granted a fair die and surface)  $1/6$ . I toss a die and roll a 1.

To argue that the universe had to be life-permitting because we are here to observe it is equivalent to saying that d had to happen, given that it did occur. The fact that something is observed, some insist, means that the probability that it would happen was  $1/1$ .<sup>242</sup>

The analogy exemplifies an elementary philosophical error: the improper distinction between *de re* versus *de dicto* fallacy. *De dicto* necessity is "a matter of a proposition's being necessarily true" while *de re* necessity is "an object's having a property essentially or necessarily".<sup>243</sup> *De dicto* necessity ascribes necessity to a proposition, while *de re* necessity argues only that "...each *res* of a certain kind has a certain property essentially or necessarily."<sup>244</sup>

Consider the statement, "What is seen to be sitting is necessarily sitting." The statement is true in the *de dicto* sense, but false in the *de re* sense. In the *de dicto* sense, it is written as "It is necessarily true that whatever is seen to be sitting is sitting." In the *de re* sense, it states "Whatever is seen to be

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<sup>242</sup> Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, pp. 1-2, 566; other examples come from my personal conversations with atheists. For example, in response to my comment that "One can't just take some state of affairs and then assert that because it's true, the probability that it *would* be true is [I should have said 'was']  $1/1$ ," one atheist friend wrote that "That's precisely what can be done. If it is true, it was always true. We are simply ignorant of the eventual outcome at any given point prior to the event." Furthermore, the friend wrote, "[Statistical probabilities] have no meaning in retrospect." I quote the friend as an example of someone making this assertion in the general population, because this specific error is much more difficult to find in philosophical literature due to its fundamental flaw, discussed in the following pages.

<sup>243</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. v.

<sup>244</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 10.

sitting has the property of sitting necessarily or essentially.”<sup>245</sup> The *de re* reading is mistaken, for that which is sitting *could* instead be standing, dancing, or doing any manner of things other than sitting.

The distinction is important regarding past events, such as the universe coming into existence or rolling a die and having it come up as a 1. Those who, with Dawkins, argue that the fact of the universe’s existence simply “could not have been otherwise, given that we are capable of noticing...”<sup>246</sup> are committing this basic error. The proposition in question is:

- (1) Any event which has obtained has necessarily obtained.

But this is only true in the *de dicto* sense. That is, it is only true that:

- (2) It is necessarily the case that whatever events have obtained have obtained.

But it is not true in the *de re* sense:

- (3) Whatever event has obtained has obtained necessarily or essentially.

Those who use this argument against teleology have assigned to the proposition that the universe exists *de re* necessity, when in reality it is only a *de dicto* necessity. The problem is the same as it was when referring to the sitting man; just because something *is* doesn’t mean it *must be*.

In other words, it is necessarily true that if *p* is the case then *p* is the case. Those who are arguing (3), however, need a much stronger conclusion, namely, necessarily *p*. But this simply doesn’t follow from reality, as was demonstrated with the sitting man. Whether the statement is “A man is sitting” or “A universe is existing,” there needs to be some kind of argument

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<sup>245</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>246</sup> “Richard Dawkins on *The Greatest Show on Earth*”  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/video/2009/sep/21/richard-dawkins-greatest-show-earth> (accessed November, 2009).

to demonstrate necessity of the *de re* sense. The statement itself is only true in the *de dicto* sense, and trivially so.<sup>247</sup>

### Epistemic Probability

Premise 1 is also attacked by arguing that the probability of our universe's existence is inscrutable. Keith Parsons argues that "[I]f the universe is the ultimate brute fact, it is neither likely nor unlikely, probable nor improbable; it simply is."<sup>248</sup> The proponent of the teleological argument can respond by noting the distinction between mathematical and epistemic probability.<sup>249</sup>

Robin Collins demonstrates the distinction between the two types of probability through the following analogy:

[W]hen people say that the Thesis of Common Ancestry is probably true given the fossil and genetic evidence we currently have, they are clearly not talking about statistical probability, since this thesis is about a unique event in Earth's history. The same holds for any claim about the probable truth (or 'empirical adequacy') of a scientific theory.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Thanks to Stephen Parrish for enlightening discourse on this subject

<sup>248</sup> Quoted by Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, p. 226. See also Graham Oppy, *Arguing About Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 233, where Oppy writes (favorably referencing Humean thought) "...at any time, the order in the world is explained as the product of order that existed at an even earlier time," leading not only to a kind of deterministic origin of past events, but also to a kind of infinite regress of explanations (which therefore leads to the inscrutability of ultimate explanation).

<sup>249</sup> Robin Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, pp. 226-239. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) for an illuminating explanation of epistemic probability.

<sup>250</sup> Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, 226.

In other words, the one who asserts that the Thesis of Common Ancestry is probable is not claiming that it has an arbitrarily assigned  $1/100$  chance of being true as opposed to some hypothetical rival thesis, which has an arbitrary  $1/1000$  chance. There may not even be a way to discover such probabilities. Instead, he is claiming that the Thesis of Common Ancestry makes more sense than its rivals. He has analyzed whatever evidence has been laid before him and assigned a greater *epistemic* probability to the Thesis of Common Ancestry than he has to that of its rivals.

Basically, the distinction is between an exact, mathematical probability and an estimation of how probable some hypothesis is given pertinent background information. The proponent of the teleological argument can grant that the universe cannot be analyzed via mathematical probability, but still hold the argument is sound by analyzing the probability of our universe epistemically.<sup>251</sup> Rather than arguing that the probability of our universe's existence is  $1/10^{123}$ <sup>252</sup> and should lead one to infer a designer, one can argue that the existence of our life-permitting universe favors the thesis of theism over the thesis of naturalism. The distinction allows one to weigh the mathematical probability as evidence for a hypothesis (theism, in this case) rather than inferring a conclusion from the probability (as would be done if one inferred a designer from the mathematical probability).<sup>253</sup>

Parsons' statement, therefore, could refer to the statistical probability—and it would be a mistake to use it in

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<sup>251</sup> Which would include mathematical probabilities as part of the background information.

<sup>252</sup> A vast underestimation of the mathematical improbability of our universe. See Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, pp. 47ff; Collins "Evidence for Fine-Tuning."

<sup>253</sup> Note that one doesn't even need mathematical probability in order to analyze things with epistemic probability. This can be seen in Collins' example of the Thesis of Common Ancestry.



that case as well<sup>254</sup>—but it definitely doesn't work when applied to epistemic probability. If Parsons is to argue that his view holds even for epistemic probability, he would have to assert that one cannot analyze the possibility of the universe. That this view is extreme is an understatement. Take two rival hypotheses about the origins of the universe: Naturalism (N) and Theism (T). Parsons would have to argue that there can be no evidence to support either N or T. Suppose one read a version of another argument for the existence of God which she found most convincing. On Parsons' view, she could not then believe that T is more probable than N as an explanation of the universe; she should instead remain ignorant and say "Well, the universe *just is*, after all. Whether or not God exists is irrelevant to the existence of the ultimate brute fact of the universe." Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be any reason to assign the misnomer of "ultimate brute fact" to the universe. It is a version of the "taxicab fallacy" in which one asserts that everything needs an explanation up to a point (here, that point would be the existence of the universe) and then jumps off the cab, arguing that "Here we have found something for which an explanation is unneeded."<sup>255</sup>

Therefore, the epistemic probability of the existence of the universe is what should be analyzed as opposed to the mathematical probability. Mathematical probabilities can serve as epistemic evidence, but they do not ground the teleological argument. The probability of our universe *can* be analyzed in an epistemic sense. It is a matter of what hypothesis one finds more likely as an explanation for our existence.

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<sup>254</sup> If Parson's statement is taken in this way, then it entails the kind of modal certainty discussed in the previous section.

<sup>255</sup> Note that some try to level this argument against theism by arguing that theism holds that God needs no explanation for His existence. That is false. Theists have held throughout most philosophical thought that God is a necessary being, which means the explanation for God's existence is found within the core of His being. God is uncaused, but not unexplainable.

### The “Particularity” Objection

Another objection to Premise 1 involves asserting that the teleological argument is too effective. Opponents assert that any universe is equally improbable. The teleological argument is taken as an argument about *this particular* universe. The particularity objection occurs most often through disingenuous analogies for the teleological argument.

In order to examine this objection, the claims of the teleological argument must be clarified.<sup>256</sup> Returning to the first premise of Robin Collins’ teleological argument, the subject of the argument is the *life-permitting universe*.<sup>257</sup> The emphasized portion is extremely important to note. The teleological argument is not arguing that, given the monumental epistemic improbability of *this particular* universe, we can see that theism is more likely than naturalism. Instead, the argument states that it is the improbability of *a* (read: *any*) life-permitting universe is so phenomenal that we ought to wonder how it is that the universe which is actual managed to come out as life-permitting at all. In other words, the teleological argument is not about the probability or improbability of *our own* universe *alone*, but is instead about the probability or improbability of *a life-permitting universe*, which our universe exemplifies.

The distinction can be drawn out by examining a couple frequent caricatures of the argument:

- (5) The teleological argument is often compared to a lottery with nearly infinite tickets. If one were to win this lottery, they would be astounded that they won!<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Other versions of the teleological argument may fall victim to the “particularity” objection, but the teleological argument I endeavor to defend—outlined above—does not.

<sup>257</sup> Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, p. 207.

<sup>258</sup> This is sometimes called the “lottery fallacy.” Cf. Victory Gijssbers, “Theistic Anthropic Principle Refuted: A Survey of Arguments Against the Theistic Anthropic Principle” at Positive Atheism

(6) Another analogy which misrepresents the teleological argument expresses the argument like a poker hand. One looks at his or her own hand after it is dealt (and it happens to be the five of diamonds, the three of spades, the queen of clubs, and the seven and jack of hearts) and exclaims, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe I got this hand! The probability of getting this exact hand is so improbable! You stacked the deck!"<sup>259</sup>

The objection leveled against the teleological argument by such analogies is that in both cases the probability of *every* single entry is the same. In the case of (5), each lotto ticket is equally improbable. In the case of (6), each poker hand is equally improbable. Thus, the objection goes, we should not really care too much about the vast improbability of our own universe, because, after all, *any* universe would be equally improbable. *Any particular* universe is equally improbable.<sup>260</sup>

Such analogies, however, have stacked the deck against the teleological argument. The teleological argument, as stated above, has to do with the vast improbability of their being a life-permitting universe, not with the vast improbability of our

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<http://www.positiveatheism.org/faq/anthropic.htm> (accessed December 2, 2010) for an example of atheistic use of this analogy; see also Scott Oser, and Niall Shanks, "Review of *The Hidden Face of God* (2007)," at Infidels.org [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/scott\\_oser/hidden.html#fine-tuning](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/scott_oser/hidden.html#fine-tuning) (accessed December 2, 2010); there is another example of this in Stephen Law, *The Philosophy Gym: 25 Short Adventures in Thinking* (London: Review, 2003); see Glenn Peoples, "The Lottery Fallacy Fallacy" at <http://www.beretta-online.com/wordpress/index.php/the-lottery-fallacy-> for a succinct discussion of all three of the previous examples.

<sup>259</sup> Luke Muehlhauser, "Was Our Universe Fine-Tuned for iPads?" Common Sense Atheism, <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=11784> (accessed December 2, 2010).

<sup>260</sup> See Law, *The Philosophy Gym: 25 Short Adventures in Thinking*, p. 72; Oser and Shanks, "Review of *The Hidden Face of God*."

particular universe. The key difference is in the specification of the parameters for the universe. Instead of arguing that our own particular universe is improbable, we are arguing that the probability of a life-permitting universe is infinitesimally small. The criterion for selection is specified. Thus, the analogies can be rewritten to properly exemplify the teleological argument:

(5') In the lottery analogy, suppose all the lottery tickets are colored white except for one, which is colored black. Furthermore, before the lottery drawing, it is revealed only if the black ticket is drawn will there be a "winner." The drawing takes place, and it is this black ticket that is drawn from among the billions and trillions of white tickets. Note that the key difference here is the specification. In this drawing, we specified *in advance* which ticket is the "winner": the black one. The fact that this ticket was selected despite the nearly insurmountable improbability of it cries out for explanation.

(6') In the poker analogy, suppose the dealer said before the hands were dealt, "I feel as though I will deal you a royal flush five times in a row." When the cards are dealt, the player receives a royal flush. Then, the player is dealt a royal flush again, and again, until he has received five straight. Again, the phenomenal improbability of this specified event (being dealt five royal flushes after having that very event specified) is of note, as opposed to the equal improbability of being dealt any random selection of cards.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Note that in either analogy, it is still *possible* in the broadly logical sense that the specified event could happen due to random chance. However, it is the specification itself that makes the event stand out. For more on the types of criterion for discovering design, see Dembski, *The Design Inference*; Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, John Leslie, "The Meaning of Design" in Neil Mason (ed.) *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 55-65; Craig, "Design and the Anthropic Fine-Tuning of the Universe," pp. 161ff.

Note that in each analogy, the particular selection made is incredibly improbable, though that would still be true of *any* particular selection. It is the specification: the black ticket or the royal flushes, which explains the key thrust of the teleological argument. In either scenario, the specified range of positive selections (black ticket; royal flushes) is exceedingly improbable in relation to the negative choices (white ticket; any other combination of cards).<sup>262</sup>

The teleological argument relies heavily on the fact that it is arguing for a *specified* universe, not a *particular* universe. It picks a feature from a range of possibilities (in this case, life-permitting universes) and argues that the improbability of our universe exhibiting this feature is such that it favors theism over alternative hypotheses. The fact that the teleological argument specifies a type of universe, as opposed to arguing from our particular universe, means that those who argue from particularity are simply mistaken.

### Returning to Modes

The different analogies and misrepresentations of the teleological argument illustrate a different way to view the modal logic behind the ideas involved. Perhaps the opponent of teleology is not making such a basic error as a *de dicto* versus *de re* fallacy. Perhaps she is instead arguing the rather extreme view that:

(7) Anything that obtains is not improbable, given that *something* had to obtain (we are here, after all).

There are a number of things to say about (7). First, this adjustment does not rescue those who argue, like Dawkins, that that which has obtained, necessarily obtained. Those wishing to maintain that kind of reasoning still fall victim to the fallacy of

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<sup>262</sup> These examples are drawn from those found in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), pp. 164-66. They are also drawn from William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), pp. 113-115.

distinguishing modes of necessity. Simply stating that *something* had to happen doesn't allow someone to argue that *this exact thing* had to happen.

One immediate problem with (7) is that it is question-begging. Here the opponent of the teleological argument grants that the argument is capable of revealing some kind of truth, but then they refuse the argument its weight. The fact that we exist, they argue, is enough to discount the vast improbability of even such a specified event as the life-permitting universe. In other words, "It happened, so the probability doesn't matter."<sup>263</sup> The teleological argument expresses the premise that a life-permitting universe is extraordinarily improbable, granting naturalism. Arguing against this premise (arguing that the life-permitting universe is not improbable on naturalism) by simply saying that the probabilities don't matter is to unjustifiably assume the premise is false.

There is a similar, secondary problem: (7) doesn't do justice to the evidence. The fact of the matter is that our universe is extraordinarily improbable! One example of the statistical improbability of our universe was expressed by the stating that "...the Creator would have to aim for an absurdly tiny volume of the phase space of possible universes—about  $1/10^{10^{123}}$  of the entire volume..."<sup>264</sup> Simply dismissing the kind of improbabilities the teleological argument rests upon by saying "Oh well, it happened!" is disingenuous.

The argument in (7) also misses the point of specification. It is exceedingly more probable that our universe would be life-prohibiting than life-permitting, yet here we are. The teleological argument specifies life-permitting universes as the subject. The argument is that such a universe is extremely

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<sup>263</sup> Again, one can see this kind of argument in what I call the "observer fallacy": the argument is that the only reason we think there is design present in our universe is because we are capable of observing it. See again "Richard Dawkins on *The Greatest Show on Earth*"; Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>264</sup> Roger Penrose quoted in Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, p. 58.

improbable, so much so that it favors theism over naturalism if such a universe exists. Again, dismissing the argument simply because we are here is to miss the entire point of the argument.

(7) also seems to fall victim to the same modal fallacy as (3) above. It can be demonstrated by analyzing the statement with *de dicto* and *de re* senses. Take the following:

(8) Necessarily, something has obtained.

This is a true statement, but only on the *de dicto* (and tautological) reading of:

(9) It is necessarily the case that something has obtained, because something has obtained.

But (7) requires us to read (8) as:

(7') Something obtained necessarily.

(7') is the *de re* reading of (8). And again, this simply doesn't follow from (8). It is not the case that *something had to obtain*. Rather, it is the case that something has obtained. Thus, (7) and (7') are question begging and modally fallacious.

## Conclusion

A survey of the common objections to the teleological argument has revealed that they can be defeated. Most are either modally fallacious or question begging. Each of these counter-arguments to the teleological argument addresses Premise 1, "Given the fine-tuning evidence, [a life-permitting universe] is very, very epistemically unlikely under [atheistic naturalism]." <sup>265</sup> That these objections fail means that the only premise which suffers any kind of dispute stands firm. The premises lead to the conclusion that the existence of our life-

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<sup>265</sup> Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, p. 207.

supporting universe strongly favors theism over atheistic naturalism. *Ergo Deus est.*<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> My most sincere gratitude must go to my peer editors, whose helpful comments vastly improved this essay. Any remaining errors are wholly my own fault. *SDG.*



THE SHONA CONCEPT OF SPIRIT POSSESSION  
(KUSVIKIRWA) AND THE PENTECOSTAL  
PHENOMENON OF GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT  
(KUPINDA MUMWEYA)

Francis Machingura<sup>267</sup>

The concept of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, although a neglected dimension in written African Theology and many Western mission churches, permeates the activities and functions of African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches.<sup>268</sup> This paper suggests that the importance attached to the Holy Spirit in some Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe shares some tenets with the Shona concept of spiritual possession, especially the role played by the spirit world in the lives of the Shona people. This has led some critics to argue that, Pentecostal churches are spearheading the rejuvenation of the long lost African spirituality. Ivan M. Satyavrata observed that, “the genius of Pentecostalism is clearly the remarkable capacity of Pentecostal movements to incarnate themselves in various indigenous cultures, producing rich cultural and theological diversity particularly on the aspect of spirituality.”<sup>269</sup> Critics would like to note that, the Zimbabwean Pentecostal operational concept of the Holy Spirit has produced a hybrid concept which to some extent is influenced by the traditional beliefs of the operation of the spirits in the lives of African traditionalist believers. The argument is further raised that the concept of the Holy Spirit, especially the value attached to glossolalia, besides having a Biblical background is more of an adopting the Shona

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<sup>268</sup> Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994), p.vii.

<sup>269</sup> Ivan M. Satyavrata, “Globalization of Pentecostalism” in Stanley M. Burgess (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 222.

worldview of spirits adapted to the Biblical texts. However, Christian Pentecostals have dismissed any similarities that are raised by critics on the understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit and the importance given to speaking in tongues as merely a misunderstanding of Christian pneumatology. Spirit possession as understood in ATR is taken as wholly the other or evil spirits.<sup>270</sup> A sharp distinction is made between the devil, the evil one, the spirit that troubles and makes man sick, and the Holy Spirit who inspires, reveals and fills one with power and spiritual gifts.<sup>271</sup> The possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit or the in-filling by the Holy Spirit is quite different from possession by spirits and it is also clear that the Holy Spirit definitely excludes the others. Speaking in tongues in the Pentecostal fold features not as a continuation or replacement of traditional religious practices, but it is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance (Acts 2:3, 8:17, 19:6-7; 1 Cor.12:13; 1 John 2:20). In the Pentecostal fold, the spirit possession in the African Traditional Religion is classified under other evil spirits which are not from God but from a satanic source which does not acknowledge lordship and saviourship of Jesus. Satanic spirits are broadly taken as including other manifestations that fight against the broader church as acknowledged by Peter to Ananias in Acts 5:3.

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<sup>270</sup>Biblical Texts are cited like 1 Corinthians 12: 10 "to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues and to still another interpretation of tongues". 1 John 4:1-2 "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of anti-christ, which you have heard is coming and even is now in the world". (NIV)

<sup>271</sup>N. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution* (London: SPSK, 1981), p. 90; M. L. Stebbing, *Concepts of Salvation Amongst the African Independent Churches in Chipinge* (Zimbabwe, MTh dissertation, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1985), p. 106.

### **The Concept of the 'Spirit World', Salvation and the Community**

The aspect of being in touch with the spiritual world is something linear and centrally important in the Shona worldview before one's birth, during one's life, at death and after death. The Shona interpretation of life is guided by their understanding of the spirit world and one cannot imagine a situation where one can claim to be irreligious or atheistic as proudly done by some people in the Western world. In the Shona worldview, one cannot ever think of a situation when s/he is not in contact with the spirits. Spirits are everywhere, such that they communally co-exist with the people. Life is communally lived and the guiding philosophy is 'I AM BECAUSE WE ARE or A PERSON IS A PERSON WITH OTHER PEOPLE-Unhuism,' which guides how one conducts himself/herself. It is the Shona belief that what one does can affect or benefit the community, such that they try by all means to make sure that one's conduct does not offend the spirits and bring curses on the entire community. The Shona concept of salvation is communal and not individual. In order to have peace, the 'living-living' must be in contact with the 'living-dead.' That is the same with rituals which are done on behalf of everybody living in the community, it does not matter if one is faraway. In the Shona belief, names are mentioned pleading with the spirits for the protection of all the community members. Critics point out that, the universal calling by Pentecostals for all Christians to speak in tongues finds no problems amongst the Shona, as they believe in working for the total well-being and protection of the community. Although, people can make individual decisions on some cases, the community or the extended family plays a greater role in the individual's life in relation to the communication with the spiritual world.

Possession is one aspect that makes communication with the spiritual world possible among the Shona.<sup>272</sup> It is not surprising that possession plays a central role in ATR and the Shona people regard it as not enough for the spirit to merely exist without publicly manifesting to its audience. G. Parrinder observed that the African Traditional Religion is essentially a spiritual religion.<sup>273</sup> The Shona people are always in touch with the spiritual world and it becomes very sensible to continue with this link even in church, in case of an attack by evil spirits. The spirits in the Shona belief system always manifest amongst the living, communing with the living. The spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living dead. The understanding is that the spirits dwell in the woods, bush, forest, rivers, and mountains or just around the villages. So failure to communicate with the living dead or *Vadzimu* is regarded as extremely dangerous and disturbing to the social and individual conscience.<sup>274</sup> The spirit pervades all the aspect of life in the Shona person's world view.

The Shona spiritual world views have a tripartite cosmology in which the physical, spiritual and the dead (underworld) are in communion. Critics regard that as resonating well with the Pentecostal emphasis on demonology,<sup>275</sup> an aspect which connects with the Shona traditional belief in spirits, but negatively regarded amongst

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<sup>272</sup>M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1976), p. 241.

<sup>273</sup>G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Hutschison, 1954), p. 24

<sup>274</sup>J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), p. 83.

<sup>275</sup>The doctrine of demons plays a greater role in most of the African Pentecostal Churches particularly Zimbabwean ones. However, the emphasis is on the believers to be freed from such demons or evil spirits. Usually evil spirits for Pentecostals imply any "spirits" that manifest itself amongst the Shona people. The only spiritual power they recognise is that of God and Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Christians particularly Pentecostals. Demons are interpreted as occupying every place and space.<sup>276</sup> The Pentecostal concept of pneumatology takes into consideration the spiritual concerns of the Shona people by negatively reversing the role of 'spirits' in the lives of Shona Christian believers, hence forming the grassroots theology that is relevant and beneficial to Pentecostal missiology. The spiritual world view of Africans is very rich and of importance in formulating the missiology of every Church which seeks to win the hearts of Africans, particularly the Shona people.

Tabona Shoko argues that, there are different types of spirits: ancestors (*vadzimu*, sing. *midzimu*), avenging spirits<sup>277</sup> (*ngozi*, sing. *ngozi*) and alien spirits (*mashavi*, sing. *shavi*). These types of spirits get attention from the Shona people through illness. The illness by ancestral spirits and alien spirits is not meant to kill the victim but to alert the people on what is supposed to be done.<sup>278</sup> The Shona people believe that there are some *shavi* spirits that are bad or evil like the *shavi reuroyi*-the spirit of witchcraft, which is associated with evil propensities. However for Pentecostals all the spirits in the Shona numinous

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<sup>276</sup>*Pentecostal Experience at Pentecostal Church Camp*,

<http://www.trueghosttales.com/paranormal/demon-experience-at-pentecostal-church-camp/>, Accessed Online 23 December 2010;

<sup>277</sup>Ancestral spirits are the spirits of the descendants and are known to protect their members of the family after the bringing home ritual. Ngozi is the spirit of the person who was either murdered or indebted or of a mother who was not given the motherhood cow as dowry when her daughter got married. The shavi spirits comprise of good and bad ones, Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-Being* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2001), p.62

<sup>278</sup>Tabona Shoko, "Healing in Hear the Word Ministries Pentecostal Church Zimbabwe" in David Westerlund (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2009),p. 46.

realm are evil.<sup>279</sup> It does not matter that some are regarded as good by the Shona traditional believers. In the African society sickness, illness, misfortunes, accidents and failures in life are believed to be caused by human beings using spiritual or mystical power against their relatives, neighbours, colleagues or the community in general.<sup>280</sup> It is in this context that the Pentecostal message of deliverance from the various spirits is found most welcome amongst the Shona people, as it offers solutions to real life problems. It is an open response to their fears from evil spirits that bring mishaps in the community. For J. S. Ukpong, the Pentecostal churches try to attain the African way of life by making Christianity relevant and expressive of the way Africans live, think and relate with the spirits.<sup>281</sup> By virtue of the Pentecostal missiology, theology, ecclesiology, pneumatology and demonology touching more on spirituality, Africans find such emphasis particularly helpful, giving them the needed security of life.

M. Gelfand adds that, it is an affected fact by all Shona people that a person owes his safety and protection entirely to his *Vadzimu* and if that protection is removed for any reason, one may suffer any kind of illness, tragedies and misfortunes.<sup>282</sup> Such fears are removed by the protection that is offered in the new community of believers. Besides the presence of *Vadzimu*,

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<sup>279</sup>The position is that whenever such spirits manifest themselves in Church or anywhere on their believers, they must be cast out (Mt 8:32, 9:33, 15:28, 17:18, Mk 1:26, Acts 19:12). The casting out of such spirits is then taken as a show of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, who is there to burn out evil spirits. It is then paraded as a symbol of the type of protection that all people should expect when they become believers.

<sup>280</sup>J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 74.

<sup>281</sup>J. S. Ukpong, *Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies*, Journal of Theological Studies, 1984, Vol. 45, pp. 501-36.

<sup>282</sup>M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona: Survival Values of the African Culture*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), p. 121.

the Shona also believe that every Shona person has a *Shavi* (alien spirit) which bestows individuals with various skills (e.g. hunting, healing, fighting, witchcraft). M. L. Daneel points out:

The conveyance of knowledge or certain skills to spirit mediums through spirit-possession was replaced by all-important possession of the elect by the Holy Spirit.... Thus the Christian message and all that goes with it is introduced into African society in a truly African guise.<sup>283</sup>

Alien spirits are also known for protecting their hosts against any danger in life. Protection from danger is an important feature that is also emphasized by the Pentecostals, although the Pentecostal emphasis is based on the Trinitarian Godhead: Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Yet the spirits emphasized in ATR are departed human spirits, hence one of the clearly noted differences. All the categories of spirits (ancestors-the *midzimu*, alien spirits-*Mashavi*, *ngozi*-avenging spirits) among the Shona people are spirits of the dead, even though some *Shavi* spirits could be types of nature spirits.<sup>284</sup>

Tabona Shoko argues that, both the traditional Shona believers and the Pentecostals are strikingly united when it comes to the concept of power that manifests itself in ecstatic prophetic behaviour, especially in their diagnosis and healing concepts.<sup>285</sup> The difference as already highlighted is that, the role of ancestral and alien spirits in the Pentecostal fold is largely shunned and ridiculed as evil spirits and the Holy Spirit takes the lead in their hierarchy of spiritual and prophetic order (Mt 3: 11, 8: 28; 9: 32; 12:22; 15:22; 17:15; John 14: 26; 20: 22; Lk 11: 13; Acts 5:16; 1 Tim. 4:1, 1 Cor. 2:4, Eph 3:16). It is common amongst the Shona that, the host of either the

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<sup>283</sup>M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Morton, 1971), p. 463.

<sup>284</sup>M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Morton, 1971), pp. 91-140; H. O. Mönnig, *The Pedi*, (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1967), p. 52.

<sup>285</sup>Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*, p. 138.

ancestral spirit or *Shavi* spirit is viewed with respect and fear as they are regarded as possessing power incomparable in the face of danger. The Shona associate spiritual possession with protection, a feature that critics argue possibly influences some Shona Christian people to desire having the leading role of the Holy Spirit. In particular, having the gift of tongues as they believe that glossolalists are assured of protection from the evil spirits, sickness, diseases and pain in whatever form. A. N. Chinyemba (a senior pastor and overseer in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe) in his unpublished research claims that glossolalia has ritual value for the sick. When they pray in tongues They become a divine therapist (Eph. 6:12; 1 Cor. 14:4).<sup>286</sup> J. N. Chacha adds that “if one speaks in tongues; one becomes powerful and effective witness of Jesus and gets protection from sickness (Mic 3:8, Acts 1:8, 4:31, 33, 19:11).<sup>287</sup> It is important to note that Pentecostals are aware that the possession of the Holy Spirit breaks all other spirits not of God as already highlighted. Critics argue that the challenge for some Christians is when speaking in tongues is equalled with the Holy Spirit.

### **The Concept of Possession in the Shona Traditional Religion**

The Shona people are always in touch with the spirits in different forms including: performing rituals, consulting diviners, use of music and symbols. One can tell that possession has occurred by the behaviour of the medium<sup>288</sup> who begins to

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<sup>286</sup>A. N. Chinyemba, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Unpublished Thesis), Harare: Living Waters Bible College, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>287</sup>J. N. Chacha, *Three Dimensions of Spiritual Warfare: A New Perspective on Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>288</sup>A medium is simply the receptacle, the vessel of the spirit. S/he may be referred to in Shona as ‘*homwe*’ which means pocket or little. S/he is grabbed by the ancestor and has no unspecialised powers, knowledge and qualities of his own, D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas*



twitch violently. Sometimes, he/she utters sharp cries and mourns, although he or she requires support from the attendants before entering into the state of full possession by the spirit. It is one of the fascinating aspects of the Shona spiritual worldview, where spirits reveal their presence or existence to the outside world by actively possessing particular individuals of their choice. Michael Gelfand observed that the Shona constantly try to prove the existence of the spiritual world by pointing to the medium's state of possession, with the spirit talking to him/her. The spirit constitutes irrefutable evidence of spirit possession. For example, a *n'anga* (Shona traditional practitioner), host possessed by a *shavi*<sup>289</sup> (several alien spirits with various functions) or *midzimu* (ancestral spirits).<sup>290</sup> Manifestation of the spirit presence is witnessed through singing and dancing. In both cases, when the climax of singing and dancing has been reached, people automatically keep quiet and that is when possession takes place. Spiritual

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*and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 49.

<sup>289</sup>The Shona people especially the Karanga people believe in many spirits which influence their day to day lives. Some of the spirits are either good or bad, for example, the *Shavi* spirits. The *Shavi* spirits are the spirits of people who died away from home and were not properly buried, for example, the bringing back rituals not being carried out. They wander around restlessly until they find the host to possess. Such spirits find hosts to possess in any family. The *Shavi* spirits can be spirits of relatives, young unmarried persons, neighbours, white people, animals (baboons) and objects (aeroplanes). The *Shavi* possess people and provide them with some skills in: hunting, healing, dancing and divination. The type of the *Shavi* spirit and its function is only known when one is possessed. Some *Shavi* spirits rarely come out but operate at a subtle level, Tabona Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-Being* (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), p. 40; M. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, With Special Reference to Their Religion* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998), pp. 242-46.

<sup>290</sup>M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p.132.

possession forms an integral part of the Shona's religious spirituality. However, the ease of induction of spiritual possession in the Shona Traditional Religion varies often with each type of medium.<sup>291</sup> The possession features are common among the Shona in cases where people have ceremonies that are linked to the bringing home ceremony (*Kurova Gwa Ceremony*), thanking their Ancestral Spirits (*Kupira Midzimu*) and identifying or celebration of the benefits that a certain *Shavi* (Alien) spirits plays in the family or community.

Speaking in tongues is undoubtedly the most distinctive doctrine of Pentecostalism and has become the cornerstone of the beliefs of Pentecostal movements.<sup>292</sup> However Pentecostals do not talk of being 'possessed' by the Holy Spirit, but they talk of 'being filled'. For critics, the vocabulary difference of being 'possessed' in the Shona spiritual world view or being 'filled or getting into the Spirit' is ambiguous and confusing even to those proclaiming the conceptual difference. Critics see no difference between the two concepts, but take them as one and the same phenomena connoting possession.<sup>293</sup> For some

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<sup>291</sup>M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p. 134.

<sup>292</sup>David and Johanne Wynn, *A Reader on the Holy Spirit: Anointing, Equipping and Empowering for Service* (Los Angeles: International Church of the Four Square Gospel, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>293</sup>Possession as the norm in the Shona spiritual understanding implies an invading force that puts off the mind of the medium who lacks control, whereas for Pentecostals, Glossolalists have control over their minds as argued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:27-28. Possession by the 'spirit or spirits' in the Shona concept literally means 'to be seized by the spirit', M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent churches*, Vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 463. There can be cases of glossolalists who quote Acts 2 for their lack of control when speaking in tongues and some Pastors who would erroneously like to force all Christians to speak in tongues. However, for Paul (1 Cor 14:1ff), the gift of tongues is not imposed on an unsuspecting believer but they willfully pray for the gift and God gives accordingly. Yet that is not the case in most cases to do with Shona mediums, where the medium who does not wish to be possessed but made to do so as a result of illness. If one turns down

Pentecostals, speaking in tongues is the evidence and experience a Christian needs in order to have the fullness of Christian life, an irrefutable evidence for baptism or filling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2, 4, 4:8, 31, 7:55, 10:44-47, 11:24, 13:9, 13:52, 19:4-6).<sup>294</sup> Pentecostals mostly cite Acts 10:44- 48:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcision believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

However, for the Shona traditionalists speaking in tongues is a sign of being possessed. The understanding is that, had Cornelius not spoken in tongues, Peter would not have known that they had received the Holy Spirit. The concept of possession as understood by the Shona people is contemptuously dismissed by Pentecostals. Pentecostals find the book of Acts very useful for pneumatology, so much so that S. M. Horton has labelled it the 'the Acts of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>295</sup> There are cases that have been raised by critics in relation to possession as in the following testimony by one of the Pentecostals reporting on how she received the gift of speaking in tongues:

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interest of the spirit, it can result in death. According to D. Lan, it is the all-powerful ancestors who make their choice, 'grab' their mediums and take control of their lives, D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 49.

<sup>294</sup>J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 201.

<sup>295</sup>S. M. Horton, *What the Bible says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), p. 136.

When the pastor laid his hands on my head, I suddenly felt my body shaking violently as a result a sort of electric shock which I experienced on my whole body. I started jumping, falling on the ground, beating the ground with my fists, running around and shouting with a loud voice. I could not stop it and I knew that God was at work with me. I felt every part of my body responding to the force that I was facing and an extraordinary power started streaming through me. I was no longer my usual self.<sup>296</sup>

It is possible to find same kind of behaviour that was also observable with the Hebrew prophets that made the onlookers easily able to identify them as possessed by the spirit of YHWH (Isaiah 11:2; Ezek 1: 12, 2:2, 3:12, 8:3, 20-21, 11:5, 37:1 and 43:5). For example, the case of King Saul in 1 Samuel 19:23-24. People judged his behaviour as that of somebody possessed and said:

So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

In this sense, possession is generally associated with a change in behaviour (Ezek 3:1ff; Jer.13:1ff) that causes the onlookers to easily recognize that one is under the possession of a spiritual force. It might be true as raised by critics that there is confusion on what actually is possession and getting into the spirit in relation to peoples' behaviour. Whether there is a difference or not is something up for further debate for theologians, religious researchers and African biblical scholars.

### **The Concept Music and Dance in Preparation for Possession**

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<sup>296</sup>Mrs Shamiso Ndlovu, interviewed on 26 January 2010.

Music and dance play an important role among the Shona people in their communication with the spiritual world. It is rare among the Shona people to get possessed without music being played. The Shona People dance the whole night and when the tempo of the music is at its peak, it becomes easy for one to get possessed. Music is always an inducer to spirit possession in the Zimbabwean traditional worship. Critics have pointed to the role that music plays, thereby becoming one of the pillars in the Zimbabwean Pentecostal worship and its role in 'getting into the spirit' (*Kupinda Mummweya*). M. Gelfand<sup>297</sup>, M. F. C. Bourdillon<sup>298</sup>, J. S. Mbiti<sup>299</sup> take music as playing a central role to allow full possession to take place. As the music increases in tempo, the individuals enter into full possession; become very hyperkinetic, excited and start to grunt, yawn, and emit strange staccato-like noises. Intense preparation through music and dance are highly expected in the Shona traditional worship, if possession is to take place. The Shona dances like: *Mhande*, *Mbakumba*, *Muchongowoyo* and *Chidzimba* propel the 'svikiro-host' to possession. People sing and dance until somebody gets possessed. Most dances and songs are linked to spiritual possession.<sup>300</sup> Even though the same features can be observable in the Pentecostal concept of 'getting into the spirit' where music and dancing play a central role; these are coincidental parallels which do not imply more than that, since God gives the gift of glossolalia as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11). Glossolalists can still get into spirit even without the help of music and dance (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 13:52).

G. C. Oosthuizen argues that, spirit possession, the general feature in African Traditional Religion, has found a new

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<sup>297</sup>M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p. 133.

<sup>298</sup>M. F. C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society*, p. 237.

<sup>299</sup>J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 82.

<sup>300</sup>Jesca Mushoperi Machingura, *The Influence of Modernity on Zimbabwean Traditional Dances, with Specific Reference to Mhande Dance* (Harare: University Of Zimbabwe (Unpublished Thesis), 2002), pp. 9-11.

emphasis which finds congenial soil in the Pentecostal approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.<sup>301</sup> The missionary churches that operated in Zimbabwe were out of touch with the spiritual world view of Africans as their pneumatology concept was dressed in Western philosophical garb. The African worship since time immemorial had this direct link and experience with the spirit world. In the Pentecostal churches, using Daneel's words, "there is the conveyance of knowledge or certain skills to spirit mediums though spirit possession was replaced by all-important possession of the elect by the Holy Spirit....Thus the Christian message and all that goes with it is introduced into African society in a truly African guise."<sup>302</sup> The mission is accomplished by making the Bible and its teachings relevant to African Christians. This has made the Pentecostal message attractive to Africans, as the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them, making a relationship between the spiritual world and humanity thus possible. Allan Anderson argues that:

Since the Pentecostal movement was generated in a black church in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, where the emphasis on the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' with the 'initial evidence' of speaking in tongues was propagated by a preacher named William Seymour, an African American preacher. Many of the Early Manifestations of Pentecostalism were found in the religious expressions of the slaves who were themselves products of the slavery and were themselves a reflection of the African religious culture from which they had been abducted.<sup>303</sup>

I. MacRobert notes that the Pentecostals holistic view of the Holy Spirit possession or 'getting into the spirit' is inspired by such manifestations such as motor behaviour that are not European but African. The rhythmic hand clapping, the

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<sup>301</sup>G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa*, London: C Hurst, 1968, p. 134.

<sup>302</sup>M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent churches*, Vol.1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 463.

<sup>303</sup>Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context*, p. 26.

antiphonal participation of the congregation in the sermon, the immediacy of God in the services and baptism by immersion, all are survivals of Africanisms.<sup>304</sup> Critics think that it is during the singing, clapping hands and dancing that there is this spiritual preparation for possession. For example, the increase in the tone of singing usually leads to possession in the sense of speaking in tongues as understood by Pentecostals. The more people increase the pitch of their voices, the more the possibility of getting possessed. This fits well with the claim by some Pentecostals that, they started speaking in tongues when they began by making noises with their mouths, clapping of hands loudly as well as the loud use of musical instruments like drums, tambourines, guitars and keyboards.<sup>305</sup> In view of this, critics still insist that the Zimbabwean Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit, glossolalia and spiritual power is more of an influence from the African Traditional Religious understanding of spiritual possession than the Biblical portrayal of the Holy Spirit. The Shona concept of spirit possession is taken as resembling the Pentecostal concept of 'getting into the Spirit' but they differ in substance particularly the concept of pneumatology, which holistically does not end with speaking in tongues, but points to the operation of the Holy Spirit as understood by Christians. The difference is that the Holy Spirit is one of the Godhead, who cannot be associated with any other spirits. M. L. Daneel explains that the Spirit is believed to be given by the divine God and not as a human initiative, but as an act of faith which stands in direct relation to the recipient's spiritual life.<sup>306</sup> The Holy Spirit and the giving of gifts are completely independent of human control and inducement as in the case of the Shona. The Holy Spirit, as well as the gifts, is

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<sup>304</sup>I. MacRobert, *The Black roots and White racism of early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 29, 77.

<sup>305</sup>M. West, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), p. 93.

<sup>306</sup>M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.1, (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 349.

not an impersonal manipulable force. The gift of the Holy Spirit's predilection is to make believers develop the character of Christ, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23, Rom 5:5, 2 Pet 1:5-7). There are cases of certain Pentecostal pastors who falsely claim to give gifts of the Holy Spirit, an issue that cannot be covered in this paper.

Critics believe that Zimbabwean Pentecostals relate to the Bible using their social, political, religious and economical circles. The Bible has passed the test of historical development and adaptation in respect to various cultures and the Shona people are not an exception from that. J. S. Ukpong argues that, "the main goal of African theology is to make Christianity attain African expression...to become a way of life for Africans; Christianity must be relevant to and expressive of the way they live and think."<sup>307</sup> This makes the Holy Spirit reveal himself to Africans, especially Shona Christians in a specific way understandable to them. Desmond M. Tutu adds that, "for Christianity to be truly African, it must be incarnated in Africa.....Christianity must be seen as fulfilling the highest and best in the spiritual and religious aspirations of the black, and yet stand in judgement on all that diminishes him and makes him less than what God intended him to be."<sup>308</sup> One can basically argue that, the Zimbabwe Pentecostal aspect of 'getting into the Spirit,' besides having managed to win many followers, is a missiological adaptive approach and contextual pneumatology suiting their own context.

## Conclusion

This article has shown the dynamics and ambiguities that one witnesses when discussing the concept of 'spiritual possession'

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<sup>307</sup>J. S. Ukpong, "Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies" in *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol.45, 1984, pp.501-36.

<sup>308</sup>D. M. Tutu, "Black Theology and African Theology-Soul Mates or Antagonists?" in Parratt (ed.), *Reader in African Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 46-55.



as understood by the Shona people and the Pentecostals' understanding of 'getting into the spirit'. However this paper sought to show that, the manifestations of Spirit-power should not be interpreted as one-sidedly in terms of mere extension of African spiritual world-view, as done by some critics, but as the good news of God's operational power of the Holy Spirit to the African quest for spiritual power in their worldview. There can be possible similarities here and there in terms of how people view spirituality, but the underlying factor is that Pentecostal pneumatology is confrontational and revolutionary in relation to other spirits branded as evil deserving no honour save God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:12).



## PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHARISMATIC ACTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT

Dan Morrison<sup>309</sup>

The Pentecost event of Acts 2 serves as the foundation for understanding Pentecostal<sup>310</sup> theology and praxis. Besides Pentecostals deriving their name from this event, the Christocentric foundation of understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit leads Pentecostals to maintain additional features to their pneumatology, which make them slightly distinctive, even from their Charismatic counterparts. Pentecostals around the world adhere to a doctrine commonly known as the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit.' Though this doctrine has been the source of much controversy, particularly during the modern Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century, it led to the broadening of theology and experience among Catholics and Evangelicals, evidenced in the 1960s by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Charismatic Movement.<sup>311</sup>

Though members of the broader Christian community have accepted various aspects of Pentecostal theology, there remain a number of misconceptions concerning the charismatic dimension of Pentecostal pneumatology. Admittedly, some of these misunderstandings result from extremes that have presented themselves within the Pentecostal movement. Various Pentecostal groups and scholars have responded to such extremes. These include the New Order of the Latter Rain, the Jesus Only Controversy, the Prosperity Gospel, and others. Given these extremes, much like those found in other Christian traditions, one could understand the misgivings some have toward differing theological positions of other traditions.

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<sup>309</sup> Dan Morrison is a graduate of Assemblies of God Theological Seminary and is continuing further graduate education.

<sup>310</sup> Given their rejection of the concept of the Trinity, the use of the term 'Pentecostal' excludes reference to Oneness Pentecostals.

<sup>311</sup> Gary B. McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004), pp. 365-66.

Understanding the meaning behind the specific use of certain words/phrases serves as one of the most difficult aspects of theological discussion. Terms such as predestination, justification, sanctification, etc. possess a theologically loaded connotation for a majority of individuals in the Church, no matter their theological background or tradition. The goal of this article is to explain the concept of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, along with the closely related idea of Spirit manifestations, from a Pentecostal perspective and clarify various misconceptions associated with the Pentecostal presentation of the doctrine.

When discussing the topic of Spirit baptism, it is important to discover where and how the phrase (or various related phrases) is used. The Greek New Testament contains seven occurrences at which some form of the word rendered “baptize” is used in conjunction with the phrase rendered “in/by/with the Spirit.” Luke uses these words to express the idea three times. Paul uses them once. The other gospel writers each use these words to express the concept of Spirit baptism once in their gospels. Because the popular Pentecostal expression of the phrase finds its basis within the Lukan corpus, attention will first be given to the Pauline text.

### **Spirit Baptism as Conversion**

The Apostle Paul uses his letter to the Corinthians to inform them, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Within the context of the Corinthian church, known for its divisions based upon individuals (1 Cor 1:10-17), social status (1 Cor 11:17-34), and the diversity of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, 14), Paul points out the commonality they share as believers—the Holy Spirit.<sup>312</sup> Despite how other New Testament writers present Spirit baptism, for Paul, “it is

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<sup>312</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), pp. 66-67.

the way to become a member of the body of Christ.”<sup>313</sup> Given the idea that salvation is a Trinitarian work, “all Pentecostals recognize that the Spirit is the agent by which we are incorporated into Christ and born anew.”<sup>314</sup>

The foundation for this understanding of Spirit baptism appears in the Old Testament. The book of Ezekiel contains God’s promise to place his Spirit within his people (Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14). The purpose of this indwelling of the Spirit provides the people with the capacity to walk in the Lord’s statutes and obey him (Ezek. 36:27). This work of the Spirit occurs when one has the ‘born again’ experience (John 3:6).<sup>315</sup> Based upon a biblical theological framework, Pentecostal theology understands this concept in Ezekiel to be the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>316</sup> Given Paul’s use of the idea of Spirit baptism in relation with his presentation of regeneration, Pentecostals acknowledge Spirit baptism in terms of conversion.

Despite this understanding of Spirit baptism, Pentecostals do not see conversion as the only biblical presentation of the concept. The construction of Luke’s narrative presents the understanding of Spirit baptism in a different fashion than Paul’s epistle. As a result, Pentecostals find it necessary to acknowledge Luke’s theological independence and avoid reading the Lukan corpus through Pauline lenses. Reading Luke’s writing in this way allows the audience to understand the message he is communicating, without the imposition of Pauline ideas.

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<sup>313</sup> Veli-Mati Kärkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>314</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 113.

<sup>315</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>316</sup> Anthony D. Palma, *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), p. 96.

## Spirit Baptism as Empowerment

Pentecostals understand the pneumatology of Luke-Acts to emphasize the activity of the Spirit in relation to prophetic speech.<sup>317</sup> The concept of Spirit baptism explicitly appears in Luke-Acts three times. Interestingly, each occurrence is in relation to John the Baptist's teaching concerning the Messiah's work of baptizing with the Spirit. The first episode presents John the Baptist proclaiming the one who would come after him and baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:15-16). Next, Jesus speaks to his disciples concerning John's teaching (Acts 1:4-5). Lastly, Peter recounts Jesus' words as he explains the events which took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:16). Stopping here, one understands that Jesus is the Messiah who functions as the agent of Spirit baptism, but it leaves Lukan readers with the question of what he means by his use of baptized "in/by/with the Holy Spirit."

Luke presents the concept of Spirit baptism through various words/phrases. These include "baptize" (Luke 3:16), "clothed with power" (Luke 24:29), "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), "receive power" (Acts 1:8), "filled with" (Acts 2:4), "fell on" (Acts 10:44), "came on" (Acts 19:6), etc. The end of Luke's gospel and the recapitulation of these events at the beginning of his second volume provide an example of this within the context of a few verses. The end of Luke's gospel shows Jesus telling his disciples, "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The beginning of Acts picks up this idea and shows Jesus instructing his followers to remain in Jerusalem and "wait for the Promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). He goes on to connect the promise with John's teaching and declares, "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). Jesus also informs the disciples about the power they will receive when the Spirit

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<sup>317</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p. 190.

comes upon them (Acts 1:8). Ten days after Christ's ascension, the disciples in Jerusalem experience that which Jesus foretold. Luke notes, "...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). This shows just a few words/phrases Luke uses synonymously when discussing the idea of Spirit baptism.

<u>Luke</u> <u>24:29a</u>	<u>Luke</u> <u>24:29b</u>	<u>Acts 1:4</u>	<u>Acts 1:5</u>	<u>Acts 1:8</u>	<u>Acts 2:4</u>
promise of my Father	clothed with power	promise of the Father	baptized with the Holy Spirit	you shall receive power	filled with the Holy Spirit

The disciples being "filled with the Spirit" in Acts 2:4 functions as the fulfillment of the promise of Spirit baptism in Acts 1:5. When this occurs, the crowd raises questions as to what the events mean. The Apostle Peter addresses the crowd, using the Old Testament in order to explain what they observe.

Even as the Pauline perspective on Spirit baptism appears in the Old Testament, the Lukan presentation of Spirit baptism also finds its basis there. In his explanation to the crowd, Peter utilizes the text of Joel 2 in order to explain that the miraculous events taking place are the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Even as Ezekiel prophesied concerning the regenerative work of the Spirit in the new age, Joel spoke of an outpouring of the Spirit that would transcend lines of age, gender, and social status. Peter proclaims, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..." (Acts 2:17). Ultimately, Peter explains Pentecost as the inauguration of the universal, eschatological, prophetic dimension of the Spirit's work.

Pentecostal doctrine explains, "being filled with the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience,"<sup>318</sup> as the Scriptures

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<sup>318</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), p. 54.

record multiple infillings with the Holy Spirit. Because of this, Pentecostals must express clarity for those outside their community when discussing the topic of Spirit baptism. Peter, who is filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), is filled again before the council (Acts 4:8), and again when the disciples pray for boldness (Acts 4:31). Pentecostals understand Peter's initial filling with the Spirit in Acts 2 to function as his Spirit baptism experience. The latter occurrences function as other charismatic experiences of the Spirit. This provides the idea among Pentecostals that there is one baptism (in the Lukan sense), but multiple fillings.<sup>319</sup> This also leads to the conclusion that baptism/filling with the Spirit does not serve exclusively as a regenerative experience. If it did, this would mean the Apostle Peter had three salvation experiences over the course of three chapters.

The multiple accounts of this type of interaction with the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts display Luke's presentation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit as an experience of charismatic empowerment occurring subsequently to and separately from conversion.<sup>320</sup> Though the idea of subsequence can be a temporal one, the Pentecostal concepts of subsequence of Spirit baptism (as empowerment) relates to a separate aspect of the Spirit's work in regeneration; and the empowering experience only being available to those who have had the regenerative experience. Maintaining continuity with the Old Testament sign of being filled with the Spirit, Luke presents the manifestation of prophetic speech—in the form of tongues—accompanies this experience.<sup>321</sup> As a result, those within the Pentecostal

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<sup>319</sup> General Council of the Assemblies of God, *Where We Stand: the Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003), pp. 226-27.

<sup>320</sup> From the multiple accounts of Spirit baptism presented in Acts, Luke notes a distinction between conversion and empowerment in Acts chapters 8, 9, and 19.

<sup>321</sup> Biblical theology reveals continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. The continuity presented within the Pentecostal understanding of "Initial Evidence" is the manifestation



tradition believe the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism is a particular form of prophetic speech known as tongues.<sup>322</sup>

### Present-day Manifestations of Gifts

Directly tied to the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the practice/theology of spiritual gifts. Multiple lists of gifts bestowed by God appear in the New Testament. Seeing that the Spirit is no longer relegated to a few individuals—prophets, judges, kings—the gifts are no longer limited to a few but are made available to all (1 Cor 12:6). Though the popularity of the cessationist position has diminished over the years, it seems necessary to explain why Pentecostals believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts.

As previously noted, Pentecostals maintain a high Christology, in which they ground their pneumatology. When reading Peter's explanation of the events at Pentecost, he does not end his explanation with Joel's text. He appeals to the Psalms to give his listeners further clarification. He moves beyond identifying the event to providing information concerning its source and purpose—Jesus Christ.

Using David's words, Peter notes the death of David and the presence of his body in the grave. These facts reveal David must have been referring to someone besides himself when he proclaimed God's Holy One would not see corruption (Psalm 16:8). Noting David's role as a prophet, Peter reminds the crowd of the Davidic promise that his seed would eternally sit on the throne. Luke proceeds to note Peter's use of David's comment concerning the exaltation of another to God's right hand of authority (Acts 2:34-35, cf. Psalm 110:1). By way of the Old Testament scriptures, Peter poignantly proclaims the

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of prophetic speech. The discontinuity exists within the manifestation of a particular form of prophetic speech—glossolalia.

<sup>322</sup> William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (ed. Stanley M. Horton; Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1993), pp. 135-38.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit results from Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God. As long as Jesus remains at the right hand of the Father, he will continue to pour out the Spirit on all people.

### Addressing the Idea of Cessation

Pentecostals understand the Scriptures teach the gifts will cease. The question to be answered is not if they will cease, but when they will cease. Various theories have been presented noting the cessation of gifts after the death of the last apostle, after the canon was complete, etc. Given the Pentecostal understanding of Christ's departure and exaltation inaugurating the age of the Spirit, one must also place the conclusion of this age within the eschatological framework of Christ's return. As a result, when reading Paul's statements to the Corinthians concerning that which is partial, Pentecostals understand this to refer to gifts given by God to the church. The question becomes who/what is the perfect to which Paul refers. The entirety of the epistle confirms the perfect as Christ, as the "gifts have to do with the edification of the church as it 'eagerly awaits our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed' (1:7)."<sup>323</sup> At that time, "[we] shall know fully, even as [we] have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

As a result, Pentecostals read Scripture in a way that calls for the continued propagation of the idea that the charismatic function of the church should continue until Christ's return. Some go on to say, "biblical theology not only supports such a reading, it prescribes it."<sup>324</sup> The disclaimer given to this practice is that the gifts must be exercised in conjunction with love (1 Cor. 13).

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<sup>323</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 208.

<sup>324</sup> Oss, Douglas. "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View." in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (ed. by Stanley Gundry. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), p. 265.

### **Similar Manifestations within Non-Christian Religions**

Pentecostals understand analogous manifestations occur within their religious practices and those of other religions. Because they adhere to Paul's statement that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), Pentecostals attribute these occurrences within other religions to a source other than the Spirit of God. The Scriptures reveal Pharaoh's magicians performed some of the same signs as Moses (Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7) and a slave girl operating under demonic influence possessed what appeared to be the gift of prophecy (Acts 16:16-18).<sup>325</sup> Given these biblical accounts, Pentecostals believe "counterfeit" manifestations of the Holy Spirit can occur within non-Christian religions. Few Christians, if any, would utilize the parallel works of Pharaoh's magicians to invalidate the miracles performed through Moses in Egypt. Nor would many deny the gift of prophecy because of a slave girl with a "spirit of divination." Given this same line of thinking, Pentecostals find no reason to question the legitimacy of manifestations occurring among Christian believers in the present-day.

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<sup>325</sup> F. F. Bruce. *The Book of Acts*. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 312.



# THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS: ARE THE GOSPELS / ACTS IN CONFLICT WITH PAUL?

Tony Costa<sup>326</sup>

The earliest textual evidence in the NT indicates that the early Christians believed that an extraordinary thing happened to Jesus of Nazareth following his death and they described or declared it as God raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:32; 4:10; Rom.10:9). Bart Ehrman admits that “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.”<sup>327</sup> This was the confession of the early Christian community and it is central to their theological outlook. They saw the resurrection of Jesus as a divine intervention of God, something God did for Jesus and by extension, what he will do to those who believe in him. It has been the contention of a number of scholars to argue that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus underwent a development or evolution in regards to questions about its nature, i.e. was it a bodily or spiritual resurrection? The former would be understood in terms of a physical removal or disappearance of *the body* from the tomb whereas the latter would infer that the body was still present in the tomb and that it was *the spirit* of Jesus that was resurrected or ascended up to God. Thus these two views would correspond respectively to the empty tomb (Jesus’ body is gone) and an occupied tomb (Jesus’ body still lies in the tomb). An example of the latter view is clearly enunciated by Marcus Borg when he states:

Thus, as a Christian, I am very comfortable not knowing whether or not the tomb was empty. Indeed, the discovery of Jesus’ skeletal remains would not be a

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<sup>327</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

problem. It doesn't matter, because Easter is about resurrection, not resuscitation.<sup>328</sup>

Borg believes one can be a "Christian" regardless of whether the tomb of Jesus was occupied or empty. It should be noted here that Borg does not view the raising of the body as "resurrection" but as "resuscitation", thus he indicates that resurrection does not necessarily have a bodily referent to it.<sup>329</sup> That Borg views "resurrection" in strictly non-bodily terms is further indicated when he comments that the post Easter Jesus is an "experiential reality... The truth of Easter is grounded in these experiences, not in what happened (or didn't happen) on a particular Sunday almost two thousand years ago."<sup>330</sup> Thus the resurrection of Jesus is "experiential" and thus subjective, not an objective reality. The status of the body of Jesus in Borg's assessment is therefore inconsequential and unimportant to resurrection belief.

New Testament scholars like Borg would argue that the view of a bodily resurrection was not the original view nor was it the earliest Christian conviction. It is argued that the earliest Christian writer Paul did not believe in a physical bodily resurrection of Jesus but rather he held to a spiritual resurrection which did not necessitate the actual removal of the body of Jesus from the tomb.<sup>331</sup> The Gospels and Acts however

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<sup>328</sup> Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1999), p. 131.

<sup>329</sup> Joachim Jeremias argues however that terms "resuscitation" and "resurrection should be kept as distinctive terms. Joachim Jeremias, "Die älteste Schicht der Osterüberlieferungen," in Edouard Dhais, ed., *Resurrexit* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), p. 194. See also John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection of Jesus in its Jewish Context," in *Neotestamentica* 37.1 (2003): 46-48; Raymond E. Brown, *The Virgin Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), p. 73.

<sup>330</sup> Borg and Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus*, p. 135.

<sup>331</sup> See Marcus Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb," in Paul Copan (ed.), *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 123; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper

paint a different picture. They present a very concrete and material presentation of the resurrection of Jesus as a bodily one in which his body was taken out from the tomb by an act of God and that he appeared to his followers and presented tangible evidence of his resurrection body. The charge that is advanced by some scholars is that the Gospels / Acts illustrate a reworking of the early tradition which was held by Paul and other Christians that Jesus was spiritually raised and that his appearances which are catalogued by Paul (1 Cor 15:3-8) were *visionary* in nature and were not concrete bodily appearances.<sup>332</sup> Paul however is not dealing with the general mode of the appearances of the risen Jesus but legitimizing his own experience of the christophany with those of his apostolic predecessors.<sup>333</sup> Thus it is argued we encounter a tension here between the Gospels / Acts and Paul in respect to the resurrection of Jesus. But is this really the case? Was Paul opposed to the concrete materialistic notion of the resurrection of Jesus as presented in the Gospels/Acts?

I intend to argue in this paper that the alleged distinction between the Gospels / Acts and Paul in regards to the resurrection of Jesus is a false one and that it is presumed rather than proven and furthermore that the weakness of such a position lies in a misuse of terminology that Paul utilizes in

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San Francisco, 1991), pp. 404-05; Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 52-53, 68; Irving M. Zeitlin, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), p. 165.

<sup>332</sup> Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection, Fact or Figment?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 61.

<sup>333</sup> John Dominic Crossan correctly points out: "Paul needs in 1 Cor.15 to equate his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. To equate, that is, its *validity* and *legitimacy*, but not necessarily its mode or manner...Paul's own entranced revelation should not be...the model for all the others." John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), p. 169. See also Karl Martin Fischer, *Das Ostergeschehen* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), p. 74.

reference to the resurrection especially in his use of the word for “body” which is *soma*. I will begin this paper by first observing the use and meaning of resurrection, followed by a discussion on the use of *soma* in a resurrection context. I will then treat the view albeit briefly of the resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels and Acts and compare them with Paul and examine whether we have unity or conflict between them. I will then end by examining Paul’s use of the phrase *soma pneumatikon*/“spiritual body” which he employs in 1 Cor 15:44 and examine the meaning of this phrase and whether it conflicts with the concrete materialistic view of Jesus’ resurrection presented in the Gospels and Acts.

### The Use of Resurrection Language

Why was the language of “resurrection” applied to Jesus to describe his posthumous status in early Christianity? Raymond Brown comments that,

Thus the choice of resurrection language was not an inevitability for the early Jews who believed in Jesus. To the contrary, its choice must be explained; for while there was an expectation among many Jews of the resurrection of the dead in the last times, there was no expectation of the resurrection of a single man from the dead, separate from and preliminary to the general resurrection.<sup>334</sup>

The choice to use resurrection language to express what early Christians believed about Jesus brings us back to the point of origin of the Christian movement which is the empty tomb discovery and the absence of the body of Jesus. It was the absent body of Jesus from the tomb and later the postmortem appearances which contributed to the application of resurrection language. This seems to be the most reasonable

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<sup>334</sup> Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 76.



point of origin and the appropriation of the motif of the death and rising of the Messiah is very early.<sup>335</sup>

The very fact that the Christian movement began and has continued to the present day is highly significant from a socio-historical point of view. While the landscape of the first and second centuries were no stranger to messianic movements, it is remarkable that the messianic movement that came to be known as Christianity survived while others dissipated into the vapors of history. When messianic leaders were crushed, their followers either disbanded or joined a new messianic movement.<sup>336</sup> In the case of the Christian movement, the death of Jesus by crucifixion most certainly would have dealt a fatal death blow to his followers and dashed any messianic aspirations they had concerning Jesus. The crucifixion itself from a biblical standpoint would render Jesus “cursed by God”, because anyone who hung on a tree was perceived as accursed in (Deut 21:23 cf.; Gal 3:13). According Joseph Klausner crucifixion was believed to be the equivalent of one “hanging on a tree”.<sup>337</sup> Nevertheless, the movement appeared to be revived after it came to the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. While the belief in the resurrection of Jesus was incorporated from the Jewish thinking of the first century, there were nevertheless distinct and significant differences which Christians held to in regards to resurrection which were dissimilar to Second Temple Judaism.

First, contrary to popular Jewish belief which held that the resurrection would take place at the *eschaton* (e.g. John 11:24), the early followers of Jesus came to believe that Jesus had already experienced the eschatological resurrection prior to

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<sup>335</sup> Ted Peters, “The Future of the Resurrection,” in Robert B. Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 156-57.

<sup>336</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 560.

<sup>337</sup> Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 28.

the end itself. Joachim Jeremias comments, "Ancient Judaism did not know of an anticipated resurrection as an event of history. Nowhere does one find in the [Jewish] literature anything comparable to the resurrection of Jesus."<sup>338</sup> This new understanding from a Christian perspective seems to be implied in Paul's reference to the risen Jesus being the "the first fruits" from the dead (1 Cor 15:20, 23). Secondly, resurrection belief entailed the rising again of a collective or general whole of the people of God including unbelievers to judgment (Dan12:2). In the case of Jesus however the resurrection was individualistic. In this respect, the resurrection of Jesus is unique. The uniqueness of the resurrection of Jesus is further heightened by a third point made by Geza Vermes that first century Judaism did not know of a dying and rising Messiah.<sup>339</sup> If the early Christian confession of Jesus dying and rising again was dissimilar to Second Temple Judaism its origin can only be explained as emerging from the early Christian movement itself. Arguments to the effect that the early Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus arose out of Greco-Roman pagan myths of alleged dying and rising gods has been soundly dismissed by most of scholarship.<sup>340</sup> The understanding

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<sup>338</sup> Jeremias, "Die älteste Schicht der Osterüberlieferungen," p. 194.

<sup>339</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: a historian's reading of the Gospels* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1983), p. 20.

<sup>340</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), p. 164. Brown notes that while Jesus' resurrection was in the spring (March-April), so was his death. This Brown maintains does not correspond to the winter concept of dormancy common in pagan religions where the gods were said to descend to the netherworld. See also David E. Aune, "The Genre of the Gospels," in R. T. France and David Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives II* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 48; Gerhard Kittel, "Die Auferstehung Jesu," in *Deutsche Theologie* 4 (1937): 159; William Lane Craig, "Reply to Evan Fales: On the Empty Tomb of Jesus," in *Philosophia Christi* 3 (2001): 67-76. On the relation of paganism to the Old Testament see Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Smith also denies any influence of Greco-Roman myths

however was that this resurrection was bodily in nature because if it was not it could not be unique in any sense of the word. If all resurrection meant was the ascension of the soul or spirit to God, the same could be said of all holy and pious servants of God. According to this view what happened to Jesus has happened and continues to happen to all the faithful. If resurrection means spiritual ascent of the soul to God then why did the early Christians not speak of the resurrection of Moses, or Abraham? The absence of such language strongly indicates that resurrection does not mean ascent of the soul to God.<sup>341</sup> In rejecting bodily resurrection in favour of spiritual resurrection some scholars have in effect resorted to Plato's *Phaedo* with its emphasis on the immortality of the soul. While there were Jews who believed in the immortality of the soul (as evidenced in Second Temple Jewish texts such as *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Jubilees*, *Testament of Moses*, *Testament of Abraham*, *4 Maccabees*), they never called this belief 'resurrection.'

A fourth dissimilarity appears in the emphasis and centrality the early Christians gave to the resurrection. While some Jews subscribed to belief in the resurrection,<sup>342</sup> it was never a foundational but a marginal belief. The Christian movement shifted this marginal belief into the centre of their belief system making it their fundamental doctrine. The truthfulness of the Christian faith rests or falls on the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor15:12-20).

### The Meaning of Resurrection

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on the early Christian belief of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, p. 70.

<sup>341</sup> Oscar Cullmann recognized the distinction between resurrection and immortality of the soul. See Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: Epworth Press, 1958). I do not concur with all of Cullmann's points in this book but I am in agreement with his distinction between immortality of the soul and resurrection.

<sup>342</sup> The exception would be Jewish groups like the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8).

Resurrection in its first century grammatical context referred to the raising of the body. The question of ambiguity as to the definition of resurrection as proposed by some scholars is wholly unnecessary. On this point Brown comments:

It is not really accurate to claim that the NT references to the *resurrection* of Jesus are ambiguous as to whether they mean bodily resurrection-*there was no other kind of resurrection*. Ambiguity arises only about the kind of body involved (earthly, celestial, etc.).<sup>343</sup>

Brown notes that belief in resurrection involved the body as a point of reference. The question was not whether the body was raised or not, that was not under dispute, but rather the question was about the *nature* of the body involved. Brown's point above that "there was no other kind of resurrection" is lamentably ignored by many scholars like Borg as we have seen, who neglect the language and grammar of the New Testament. Brown also asserts that "...the resurrection of the body was the only form of immortality known to the disciples...The various NT authors clearly speak about a *bodily* resurrection of Jesus."<sup>344</sup> This point is clearly evident in Paul's treatment of the resurrection where he poses the rhetorical question: "How are the dead raised? With what *kind* of body do they come?" (1 Cor15:35; emphasis mine) Paul's polemic and apologetic in 1 Corinthians 15 on the resurrection is a reaction to his audience's implied rejection and unbelief in the resurrection of the body. The repugnant and contemptuous view of the body in Hellenistic thinking derived from Plato is evident in the Corinthian audience that Paul is addressing. If Paul had believed that the resurrection of Jesus and those of believers was immaterial or non-physical as some scholars contend he would not have had to defend and argue his position in 1

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<sup>343</sup> Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 70 n121. Italics mine in the second clause. Italics in first clause in the original text.

<sup>344</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, pp. 164-65.

Corinthians<sup>15</sup> that the body would indeed be raised to immortal and incorruptible life at the *parousia* of Jesus.

### The Use of *Soma* and Resurrection

One of the stumbling blocks in the scholarly treatment of the resurrection of Jesus has been the misleading view which has identified the New Testament usage of *soma* ("body") with the person, instead of the body proper. In other words, we have the equivalent *soma* = person. This has resulted in a great disadvantage and disservice to the understanding of New Testament grammar as it relates to the use of *soma* in its contextual sphere but especially so in respect to the subject of the resurrection of Jesus. This misapplication of *soma* as person has served as a grave impediment to a proper understanding of the New Testament view of the resurrection, especially as it relates to Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15 which is the eye of the storm in scholarly treatments of the resurrection of Jesus. If one accepts the proposition that *soma* = person then the resurrection of the *soma*, becomes the resurrection of the *person* and not the physical body. It is this presupposition that precisely lies behind Borg's statement above and a number of other scholars.

The idea of *soma* as the whole person still lingers amongst scholarly circles. This view entered New Testament studies primarily due to the influence of existentialism which was adopted by Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann argued, "Man does not have a soma; he is a soma."<sup>345</sup> In effect, the resurrection of the *soma* was conceived to be the resurrection of

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<sup>345</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament Vol.1* (trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 194-95. See also William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), p. 119. This view was not original to Bultmann as he adopted it from his former teacher J. Weiss. See Robert Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 4.

the *person* instead of the physical body. Robert Gundry in his linguistic study analysis of *soma* in the New Testament has demonstrated that the popular view among some scholars that *soma* = person is erroneous and unjustified.<sup>346</sup> Robert Jewett has equally charged that, “Bultmann has turned [*soma*] into its virtual opposite: a symbol for that structure of individual existence which is essentially non-physical.”<sup>347</sup> Gundry persuasively demonstrates through linguistic analysis of the contextual use of *soma* that this term is *never* used in the New Testament to denote the whole person isolated from his physical body. Rather, it is used of the physical body or the person with special emphasis accorded to the physical body itself.<sup>348</sup> The *soma* is always physical and never an abstract notion. Gundry notes that,

The *soma* denotes the physical body, roughly synonymous with ‘flesh’ in the neutral sense. It forms that part of man in and through which he lives and acts in the world...But it [the *soma*] will also be resurrected.<sup>349</sup>

It is important to stress that even though *soma* refers primarily to the physical body it can be used in various other ways. The context must always be determinant of the meaning of words. *Soma* can also be used as a synecdoche in representing the whole person but Gundry points out that:

The *soma* may represent the whole person simply because the *soma* lives in union with the soul/spirit. But *soma* does not mean ‘whole person’, because its use is designed to call attention to the physical object which is

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<sup>346</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>347</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (AGAJY 10; Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 211. Scholars who advocate the view of *soma* = person also speak of ‘person’ synonymously as the “I” or “ego”.

<sup>348</sup> Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 120.

<sup>349</sup> Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, p. 50.

the body of the person rather than the whole personality.<sup>350</sup>

Gundry further notes that when Paul uses the term *soma*, he uses it for the physical body<sup>351</sup> and that Paul employs *soma* because "...the physicality of the resurrection is central to his soteriology."<sup>352</sup> *Soma* may also be employed metaphorically as in "the body of Christ", i.e., the Church.<sup>353</sup> However, the metaphor is still *physical* since the Church is not the "person", "I" or "ego" of Christ. Words which are used as metaphors presuppose a literal meaning to the given word, and as such metaphors are secondary in functional meaning, not primary. Thus, while the "body of Christ" is used as a metaphor for the Church, the word "body" (*soma*) presupposes the literal physical body of Jesus. While this holds true for *soma*, the same can be said about *anastasis*, for while resurrection can be spoken of metaphorically of Christian believers for instance (Eph 2:1-7), it nevertheless presupposes the literal or bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

### **The Gospels, Acts, Paul and the Resurrection of Jesus: Unity not Conflict**

The early material that is offered by Paul in 1 Cor 15:1-8 in regards to the Christian creed<sup>354</sup> of the sequential order of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the risen Jesus

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<sup>350</sup> Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, p. 80.

<sup>351</sup> Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, p. 168.

<sup>352</sup> Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, p. 169.

<sup>353</sup> John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*. (London: SCM, 1952) Robinson is correct to note that *soma* can mean "community" as in the Church, but again the context indicates that the usage here is metaphorical. However when *soma* is applied to the individual it is always physical.

<sup>354</sup> This creed is generally accepted by scholarship to be pre-Pauline and Semitic in origin and thus tied to the original Aramaic speaking disciples of Jesus. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 93.

bears a striking resemblance in capsuled narrative form to that of the Gospels and the book of Acts. Paul intricately links these events together by the use of the conjunction *hoti* (1 Cor 15:3-5) and the implication is that these events follow each other in sequential order.

### A. The Gospels and Acts

The grammatical and linguistic understanding of *soma* as a reference to the physical body as Gundry has argued is buttressed by the Gospels and Acts, but also by Paul. The Gospels specifically in Luke and John emphasize the concreteness of Jesus' body who has been raised even bearing the wound marks (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:26-29), and his tacit statement, "it is I myself" (Luke 24:39), thereby implying a numerical continuity between the pre and post Easter Jesus. The emphasis on the concreteness of Jesus' resurrected body in both Luke (and Acts) and John are not accidental. They appear to be very deliberate on the part of the writers and seem to imply an intentional apologetic response to those who would deny the bodily resurrection and who would also argue that the postmortem appearances were merely hallucinatory experiences by the disciples and not real. Luke emphasizes about the post Easter Jesus: "After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3). The "convincing proofs" must have involved some empirical means of factual verification from Luke's perspective. The emphasis on the sense of seeing is complimented with the sense of touching or tangibility.<sup>355</sup>

Another implicit polemical feature is discernible in Luke 24:37 where in one of the postmortem appearances of Jesus the disciples reacted with surprise, "They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost." The force of the passage seems to be intended to contrast "ghost" with "flesh

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<sup>355</sup> While Matthew does speak of the risen Jesus being seen (Matt 28:17), the tangibility of the body of Jesus is clearly implied in Matt.28:9, "Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, *took hold of his feet*, and worshiped him" (emphasis mine).



and bones". The response given by Jesus is clearly intended to counter the idea that the risen Jesus was a ghost or incorporeal entity, "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). It is presumed in this passage that encounters with ghosts or spirits of the deceased were not uncommon.<sup>356</sup> The reference to "a ghost" or "a spirit" in Luke 24:37, 39 also infers that at least Luke's audience and those of the other gospel writers also held the belief that a person's ghost or spirit survived death.<sup>357</sup> The concreteness and corporeality of the risen Jesus is further reinforced with the description of Jesus eating before the disciples (Luke 24:41-43; cf. John 21:9-14), but also eating *with* the disciples (Acts 10:41). The fact that the gospels depict the risen Jesus appearing and disappearing at will, demonstrates that the post Easter Jesus while being numerically the same, was in another respect different. There is thus a perceived continuity between the *identity* of Jesus but a discontinuity in respect to the *bodily nature* of Jesus. No hint is offered to the effect that the risen Jesus was incorporeal in the Gospels or Acts other than the misperception of the disciples (Luke 24:39) which is quickly corrected.

## B. Paul

The evidence provided in the Pauline material (1 Cor 15:1-8) in regards to the resurrection of Jesus is very early. Paul is the

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<sup>356</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 189.

<sup>357</sup> It is interesting that the other Synoptic Gospels display the disciples' mistaken identity of Jesus as a ghost or spirit. In Matt 14:26 when the disciples see Jesus walking on the water they assume he is a *phantasma*, "a phantom", "a ghost" or a "spectre". In the parallel passage in Mark 6:49 the same wording is used. The idea of a person's spirit or ghost surviving death appears in Luke's description of the Pharisees' beliefs in Acts 23:8-9. It is also seen in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. That the Pharisees believed in the continued existence of the soul following death see Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.8.14 ; *Antiquities* 18.1.3.

earliest New Testament writer who claims to have been a first hand eyewitness who saw the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:15-16; cf. Acts 1:22). Paul asks rhetorically with an implied positive response to his questions:<sup>358</sup> “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1).<sup>359</sup> As we noted above many scholars see a tension between Paul and the Gospels including Acts when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus. The problem as we noted is that while the Gospels / Acts see the resurrection of Jesus as a *bodily* resurrection, Paul on the other hand held a different view, namely that the resurrection was spiritual. It is argued that for Paul resurrection was about a *soma pneumatikon*, a *spiritual body* (1 Cor 15:44) as opposed to a physical body. This alleged tension has been and continues to be it seems to me, over stated and exaggerated in current scholarship. The major impediment and obstacle in finding a common ground of agreement between Paul and the Gospels / Acts is the misapplication of the meaning of *soma* in Paul

As I argued above since Weiss and Bultmann, the dominant view in New Testament scholarship was that the *soma* meant the whole person and not necessarily the physical body.<sup>360</sup> This view of the *soma* as the whole person was then attributed primarily to Paul and his usage of the term.<sup>361</sup> As

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<sup>358</sup> This is seen in the use of the negative Greek particle *ouk* which when used rhetorically always implies a positive response.

<sup>359</sup> It is interesting that Paul’s words here in 1 Cor 9:1: “Have I not seen [*heoraka*] Jesus our Lord?” is reminiscent of the wording in the Gospels regarding the appearances of Jesus to the women: “I have seen [*heoraka*] the Lord” (John 20:18); “We [*heorakamen*] have seen the Lord” (John 20:25).

<sup>360</sup> Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, p. 5.

<sup>361</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 192. Following closely with Bultmann is J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM, 1952; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). These two works have contributed prominently to the scholarly community on the existentialist view of *soma* as the whole person. Robinson operated under the same false assumption in ignoring the meaning of *soma* as primarily referring to the physical body.

Gundry has demonstrated this view can no longer be sustained and should be abandoned. This has contributed to a long and unnecessary bifurcation and tension between Paul and the Gospels / Acts on the question of the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul is usually presented as advocating a non-physical view or interpretation of the resurrection opting instead for a spiritual resurrection instead hence the emphasis on the Pauline term *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Cor 15:44. This alleged contrast as we noted has led a number of scholars to postulate the idea that the Gospels / Acts were later compositions set out to refute Paul's views of a spiritual resurrection of Jesus by presenting a physical bodily resurrection in its place.<sup>362</sup> Much of the studies in support of an opposing dichotomy between Paul and the Gospels / Acts have been based for the most part on a faulty assumption on the meaning of *soma* for both Paul and the Gospels / Acts. We end up having here a false dichotomy between the two.<sup>363</sup>

### The *Soma Pneumatikon* in Paul

The Pauline phrase *soma pneumatikon* (1 Cor 15:44) is a *hapax legomenon*<sup>364</sup> and has generally been taken by some scholars to support the idea that Paul conceived of the resurrection body as a spirit or as "pneumatic".<sup>365</sup> Daniel Smith claims that "exactly

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<sup>362</sup> See for instance the discussion in Daniel A. Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb: The Early History of Easter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 109-11. See also my review of this book in the Review of Biblical Literature (forthcoming).

<sup>363</sup> John Dominic Crossan points out, "Paul needs in 1 Cor. 15 to equate his own experience with that of the preceding apostles. To equate, that is, its *validity* and *legitimacy*, but not necessarily its mode or manner...Paul's own entranced revelation should not be...the model for all the others." John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), p. 169. See also Karl Martin Fischer, *Das Ostergeschehen*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), p. 74.

<sup>364</sup> A *hapax legomenon* is a word or phrase that appears only once.

<sup>365</sup> Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb*, p. 109.

what Paul meant by a ‘spiritual’ (*pneumatikos*) body in his explanation of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is a debated point.”<sup>366</sup> But why is a debated point? The problem seems to be a misunderstanding of what Paul intended by *soma pneumatikon*. The adjective *pneumatikon*, “spiritual” does not necessarily mean ‘non-physical’ or ‘immaterial’. This adjective is also used elsewhere by Paul in 1 Corinthians to refer to things that are clearly physical or material but which have a divine origin or source to them. The following texts also taken from 1 Corinthians will demonstrate this point:

1 Cor 2:15, *pneumatikos anakrinei* / “the spiritual [man / person] discerns”

1 Cor 10:3, *pneumatikon broma* / “spiritual food”, i.e. manna

1 Cor 10:4a, *pneumatikon... poma* / “spiritual drink”, i.e. water

1 Cor 10:4b, *pneumatikes...petra* / “spiritual rock”, the rock representing Christ

In 1 Cor 2:15 Paul can speak of *pneumatikos anakrinei* / “the spiritual (man)” who discerns without insinuating that such a spiritual person is a spirit or immaterial. This is comparable to calling someone “spiritual” without meaning such a person is an invisible immaterial entity but rather than he /she has a religious or mystical orientation. The background to the references in 1 Corinthians 10 is the Old Testament narratives of the Israelite wandering in the wilderness (Exod16-17; Num 20) in which food is supernaturally provided for by God. The manna and water in these narratives are clearly intended to be literal, but their origin or source are seen as supernatural as they find their source in God and this is implied in Paul’s use of the adjective *pneumatikon*.<sup>367</sup> Thus the meaning of *pneumatikon* / “spiritual” refers to a *supernatural source*. This understanding is

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<sup>366</sup> Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb*, p. 109.

<sup>367</sup> See the discussion in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp.347-61.

evident in the RSV and NEB translation of 1 Cor 10:3-4 in which *pneumatikon* is translated as “supernatural”. If this grammatical understanding of the adjective *pneumatikon* is consistently applied to Paul’s reference to a *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Cor 15:44, then the case can be made that what Paul is addressing regarding the resurrection body is not that it is immaterial or an invisible spirit *contra* Smith,<sup>368</sup> but rather, that it is a body which has a divine origin and source, in that it has been raised by God to an immortal and imperishable state. Thus a spiritual body = a resurrection body. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 15 that what Paul is arguing is a change of the body from one state to another, from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable.<sup>369</sup> That the body (*soma*) is in view here is also clear from Paul’s treatment elsewhere when he deals with the resurrection. In Rom 8:11: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life *to your mortal bodies* also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (emphasis mine). Moreover, Paul describes the resurrection in this passage as “the redemption of

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<sup>368</sup> It is interesting yet unfortunate that Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb* provides no treatment at all of 1 Cor 2:15; 10:3-4 which uses the same adjective *pneumatikon* when he deals with Paul’s use of *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Cor 15:44.

<sup>369</sup> The RSV and NRSV translation of 1 Cor 15:44: “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” is most unfortunate. The term “physical” functions as an antonym to “spiritual” and implies that spiritual means the opposite of physical, namely that spiritual = non-physical. The term Paul uses is *psuchikos* which is usually translated “natural” and means, “concerned with this life only, animal, natural” and further that it is “opp.[osed] to spiritual.” *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 798. In 1 Cor 2:14-15, Paul uses both terms *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos* to describe one who does not have the Spirit of God (natural person), from one who does (spiritual person). The word *psuchikos* is variously translated as “physical” (NRSV; RSV; CEV), “natural” (NASB; ASV; KJV; NKJV; NIV; NLT; ESV; NJB; Darby; Young), “beastly” (Wycliffe), “animal” (NEB, Weymouth). Wright prefers to translate this term as “soulsh”. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 282, 346.

our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Paul believes that the body (*soma*) of the risen Jesus is the model of the bodies that believers will receive at the *parousia*,

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body [*soma*] of our humiliation [or “our humble bodies”] that it may be conformed to the body [*soma*] of his glory [or “his glorious body”], by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Phil.3:20-21)

The Pauline evidence is consistent that the subject of the resurrection is the physical body, and that it will undergo a change from its present state to a superior one. Paul in his understands it as a transformation or transition of the body from a lesser state to a higher one (mortal to immortal, corruptible to incorruptible, perishable to imperishable, natural to spiritual) and that it is an act of God himself (1 Cor 15:38).<sup>370</sup>

In another attempt to divorce Paul from the Easter materials found in the Gospels / Acts scholars have made the oft-repeated charge of Paul’s ignorance of the empty tomb tradition.<sup>371</sup> This argument is usually geared towards rejecting the physical nature of the resurrection of Jesus by way of the empty tomb tradition thus suggesting that Paul believed in a spiritual resurrection of Jesus where his spirit ascended to God.

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<sup>370</sup> The same seems to be reflected elsewhere in the NT for instance in 1 John 3:2-3 where the *parousia* is also in view in which the writer muses: “what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” The reserve here is not so much an exhaustive understanding of what exactly believers will be like at the *parousia*, but it seems rather, that it is sufficient for them to know that they will be like (*homoioi*) Jesus. Thus the early Christians did not seem to be bogged down by an exhaustive knowledge of what exactly a resurrection body was. They believed that God acted in raising Jesus from the dead, and that Jesus served as the model for what would happen to them in their own resurrection.

<sup>371</sup> Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb*, p. 3; Fischer, *Das Ostergeschehen*, 58; Zeitlin, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time*, p. 165.

In regards to Paul's knowledge of the empty tomb whether he knew one or not does not constitute an argument against the veracity of the empty tomb since an argument from silence proves nothing.<sup>372</sup> Paul however does make reference, although implicit, that he was aware of the empty tomb tradition. In the primitive creedal formula of 1 Cor 15:3-4, Paul mentions the *burial* of Jesus and his consequent rising and appearance to the disciples.<sup>373</sup> An additional note which would reinforce that Paul had at least some knowledge of the empty tomb tradition was his meeting and consultation with the original disciples of Jesus who would have been familiar with this original tradition (Gal 1:18-2:10).<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> The dangerous tendency to argue from silence in comparing Paul and the Gospels / Acts is seen in a number of areas. Paul never mentions John the Baptizer in his letters, but John's historicity is not disputed by any New Testament scholar or historian. John the Baptizer is attested in the Gospels / Acts and even Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.5.2. Paul never refers to Jesus as the "son of man" yet no scholar denies Jesus utilized this term. The baptism of Jesus is never mentioned by Paul either, but all New Testament scholars acknowledge the historical baptism of Jesus by John the Baptizer. Were it not for the abuses of the Eucharist in Corinth Paul may never have mentioned it in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. In a similar vein if the resurrection was never in dispute in Corinth it is possible Paul may not have written 1 Corinthians 15. The Gospels / Acts and the Pauline literature should be judged on their own merits and not to be used at the expense of the other.

<sup>373</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ : Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 476 n152.

<sup>374</sup> The place of Peter as one of the original disciples Paul visited, consulted and even argued with is important in respect to the empty tomb tradition. Paul mentions Jesus' appearance to Cephas or Peter in 1 Cor 15:5, but this same appearance is also attested in Luke 24:34, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" The context of the Lukan material here is the empty tomb discovery. Thus it is possible that Paul cites this creedal material which has its roots in the empty tomb tradition.

Another supporting factor in demonstrating that Paul believed in a bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead stems from his own autobiographical admission. He states that he was “a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5), and in addition, mentions both his belief in the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of the dead (Phil 3:10-11).<sup>375</sup> The sect of the Pharisees are presented in the New Testament as believers in the resurrection. This description is further corroborated externally by Josephus who also attributes belief in resurrection to the Pharisees as well as the belief in the immortality of the soul.<sup>376</sup>

### Conclusion

We have examined and seen that the meaning and usage of resurrection language in the New Testament has a somatic reference to it namely the body. The Gospel narratives including Acts in their concrete presentation of the risen Jesus appear to be in complete agreement with the meaning of *soma* as a reference to the physical body of Jesus. When we examined the use of *soma* in Paul in reference to the resurrection we noted that Paul used it with the adjective *pneumatikon*. Many scholars have seen Paul’s description of the resurrection body as a *soma pneumatikon* as being at variance with the Easter narratives of the Gospels and Acts principally because they take the Pauline term *soma pneumatikon* to be synonymous with a spirit, i.e. something which is immaterial or incorporeal. I argued that this is a hasty and rash conclusion with no sound basis which has caused unnecessary debate in academic studies of the resurrection of Jesus. A cursory study of Paul’s consistent use of *pneumatikon* elsewhere in his letter of 1 Corinthians as we

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<sup>375</sup> Luke also points out that Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5). It is significant that in both these passages the context is about belief in the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>376</sup> *Antiquities* 18.1.3-5; *War* 2.8.14; 3.8.5. Josephus points out that the Pharisees and also the Essenes affirmed these beliefs in resurrection and immortality while the Sadducees denied them. Even Josephus, himself a Pharisee sheds an unfavourable light on the Sadducees.



have seen demonstrates that Paul uses this adjective to denote a supernatural source. In light of this understanding we submit that Paul understood the *soma pneumatikon* to be a resurrection body which is supernatural because it is raised by God and has been changed from one state to another without dispensing the physicality of the body. Thus the alleged tension advocated by some scholars between the Gospels / Acts and Paul in respect to the subject of the resurrection of Jesus appears to be conjecturally imagined.



LITERARY APOLOGETICS IN ACTION:  
ENCOUNTERING THE TRINITY IN JOHN DONNE'S  
HOLY SONNETS

Holly Ordway<sup>377</sup>

As Christian apologists, our goal is not just to communicate *facts* about God, but rather to lead others into a saving relationship with God through Christ in power of the Holy Spirit. We know that God is not the vague “spiritual force” of pantheism, nor the amoral monad of Islam, nor the disinterested Watchmaker of deism, because He has revealed Himself to be one God in trinity of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is an important component in an apologetic argument for a specifically Christian understanding of God. Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is rarely incorporated into apologetics – perhaps because the idea of explaining the Trinity is, to say the least, daunting. Here, though, we see the role of literary apologetics.

The most holy Trinity is not a puzzle to be solved, but a reality to be experienced. Though we cannot fully comprehend the Trinity through the use of human reason, God has revealed Himself as Trinity and invites us to participate in His divine life: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10 ESV). Poetry is ideal for exploring this tremendous mystery of faith, as a poem can hold ideas in tension without resolving them. Nothing can *explain* the most holy Trinity, but poetry can help us *experience* God more fully and more deeply.

In this essay, we will explore the doctrine of the Trinity through the poetry of Anglican poet-priest John Donne. In the process, we will see how poetry can be an entrance point for reflection on deep issues of faith, a way to confront doubts and difficulties that may be hindering the reader from turning to Christ. Poetry is not a direct apologetic argument, but its indirectness is precisely the source of its value in apologetics: to

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borrow C.S. Lewis' phrase, it can be a way of getting past the "watchful dragons" of intellectual doubt and skepticism.

John Donne, the 17th century Anglican poet and priest, is an excellent guide for approaching the Trinity. The first and most influential of the "metaphysical" poets, Donne is notable for "the wit, the imaginative picturing, the compression, the often cryptic expression, the play of paradoxes, and the juxtapositions of metaphor"<sup>378</sup> in his poetry. In contrast to the later Romantics, Donne and the other metaphysical poets are more interested in exploring ideas than in evoking emotion for its own sake. That is not to say that the metaphysical poets are entirely abstract: they "constantly connect the abstract with the concrete, the remote with the near, and the sublime with the commonplace,"<sup>379</sup> often through the use of brilliantly unexpected images, or "conceits." Such a style is well suited for meditation on the mysteries of the Christian faith.

Donne himself is a complex figure. After a somewhat dissolute youth, he married for love and as a result lost all chances for advancement in the court. Donne eventually moved from the Roman Catholic to the Anglican church and was ordained as a priest.<sup>380</sup> Was his choice, so swiftly rewarded by King James, a worldly one? Certainly Donne was concerned with getting preferment in the church, but he was aware of the conflict of motives, and struggled through a long period of indecision before concluding that he had a true calling to the priesthood.<sup>381</sup> He swiftly showed that the calling was genuine, becoming a dedicated and faithful preacher of the Gospel, persevering even when doing so risked censure from his patrons, for the "privileging of preaching ...[which] had been

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<sup>378</sup> Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 202.

<sup>379</sup> Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 3.

<sup>380</sup> Richard Schmidt, *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 48.

<sup>381</sup> David L. Edwards, *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit* (New York: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 98.

central to church piety under Elizabeth and James... came under attack when Charles ascended the throne.”<sup>382</sup>

Donne is aware of his own weakness, and uses the sonnets to dramatize and thus bring into focus his spiritual struggles. As an intellectual, Donne would have been well aware of the difficulties involved in trying to grasp the Trinity by reason, as well as the profound importance of responding to God as Trinity, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In “A Litany,” written even before his ordination as a priest, he addresses the Trinity as “O Blessed glorious Trinity, / Bones to philosophy, but milk to faith” and calls on the Trinity to help him “to love, to know, you unnumbered three.”<sup>383</sup>

The Trinity is a particularly important theme in Donne’s poetry because it is central to his relationship with God. If God is solely One, a transcendent monad, then He would be distant and unapproachable. However, God has revealed Himself to be Trinity: one being, three persons. God is “a ‘community of being,’ in which all is shared, united, and mutually exchanged” (McGrath 2001, 326). God does not just want to give us “things” to make us happy; He wants to give us Himself, to draw us into His eternal life. God is love, and in His being there is an eternal loving communion among the three Persons.<sup>384</sup>

John Donne’s most famous devotional poems are the “Holy Sonnets.” Although there are different possible orderings for the sonnets, and debate over the number of sonnets to be included in the sequence, it is at least clear that Donne intended the sonnets to be a sequence of some kind (Stringer 2005, LX-CI), and that the Holy Sonnets as a sequence explore various aspects of Christian faith, especially judgment and death.

We will look at four of Donne’s Holy Sonnets: 1, 10, 11, and 12 from the Revised Sequence of twelve sonnets.

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<sup>382</sup> Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 158.

<sup>383</sup> A.J. Smith (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 318.

<sup>384</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 5.

Although the poems appeared in a different order in the earliest sequence, the manuscript transmission evidence shows that the placement of poems as discussed here came about early and was preserved in later sequences.<sup>385</sup>

Holy Sonnet 1 introduces the themes of sin, death, and repentance:

As due by many titles I resign  
 Myself to thee, O God, first I was made  
 By thee, and for thee, and when I was decayed  
 Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine,  
 I am thy son, made with thy self to shine,  
 Thy servant, whose pains thou hast still repaid,  
 Thy sheep, thine image, and, till I betrayed  
 My self, a temple of thy Spirit divine;  
 Why doth the devil then usurp on me?  
 Why doth he steal, nay ravish that's thy right?  
 Except thou rise and for thine own work fight,  
 Oh I shall soon despair, when I do see  
 That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,  
 And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose me.<sup>386</sup>

The poet is striving to relate to God as a monad, and finding it impossible. Feeling isolated from a God he perceives as distant, he cries out almost in anger, “thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me.” Indeed, God does not seem to be handling things the way the poet thinks is best, and the poet even accuses God of passivity: “Except thou rise and for thine own work fight, / Oh I shall soon despair.”

The Trinity is referenced only obliquely: a hint of the Father (“I was made by thee”), the Son (“Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine”), and the Holy Spirit (“My self, a temple of thy Spirit divine”). These three Persons, only

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<sup>385</sup> Gary A. Stringer (ed.), *Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 7, Part I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. lx.

<sup>386</sup> For readability purposes for a broader audience, the text I have used to present the poems here is the modernized version in A.J. Smith's 1996 edition. The definitive edition, which I used for the analysis of the poems for this essay, is the Variorum Edition, edited by Gary Stringer.

vaguely referred to, do not seem to recall to the poet anything of Trinity's divine communion of love, with implications for the poet's relationship with God. The poet starts to recognize himself as a temple of the Holy Spirit, but only in the past tense: he is a temple "till I betrayed / My self." There is no appreciation of what the indwelling of the Holy Spirit means for his relationship with God the Father.

Holy Sonnet 1 thus opens the sonnet sequence with an unsettled tone, beginning with a view of God as a solitary being who might or might not choose Donne, and ending on a depressed note with the poet wondering if God loves him. In sonnets 2-9, Donne grapples with various aspects of faith, sin, death, and repentance, without recognizing God as Trinity.

As we move to the final third of the sequence, Donne begins to work in a richer sense of the most holy Trinity. Holy Sonnet 10 introduces a change:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'er throw me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurped town to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end,  
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly 'I love you, and would be loved fain,  
But am betrothed unto your enemy,  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I  
Except you enthal me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

The key to understanding Holy Sonnet 10 is that here, Donne is moving toward the understanding that God's service is perfect freedom. The shock we feel at a sexual image – and a violent one – wakes us up out of our slumber. Do we want God as badly as Donne does, here?

In Holy Sonnet 1, Donne suggests that God has been passive; in contrast, here the poet admits that God has indeed acted, to "knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend" the poet's

soul. God, who seemed distant in the previous sonnets, is recognized as a presence who has been active all along - and not just an active presence, but a loving one. In Holy Sonnet 10, Donne explicitly calls on the "three-personed God," the Holy Trinity. The poet sees that while Satan's hold on him is out of hate, God's "enthraling" will be out of love; while Satan's hold on him is slavery, God's "imprisonment" will make him free.

A number of critics suggest that Donne is drawing on the mystical tradition in these sonnets, especially given his Roman Catholic background.<sup>387</sup> If that is the case, then Donne may be using his own fruitless searching for an experience of God to express the profound "otherness" of God. However, the concerns raised by the poet in Holy Sonnet 10 suggest not a dark night of the soul, but a state of confusion about God's love. He says that he loves God and wants God to love him, not realizing that human love is a response to divine love, not the other way around. Likewise, in the image of the "usurped town," Donne fails to recognize that Christ has already overcome Satan; Donne is already free, if he would turn to God—which is indeed what he is doing in this poem, even if he is not quite sure of himself.

A more nuanced view is that Donne "used an interplay of the two mystical traditions – the *via affirmativa*, which emphasized the similarity and continuity of the human and divine spheres; and the *via negativa*, which stressed the ultimate discrepancy between the two levels."<sup>388</sup> With the *via negativa*, Donne affirms the value of seeking God in all circumstances, even when he feels lost in darkness. However, in the Holy Sonnets, the poet does not remain in that dark night throughout the whole sequence, but moves – with a deepening

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<sup>387</sup> Lawrence Beaston, "Talking to a Silent God: Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Via Negativa" in David Galens (ed.) *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 43 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 1999), p. 161.

<sup>388</sup> David J. Leigh, "Donne's 'A Hymn to God the Father: New Dimensions'" in Harold Bloom (ed.), *John Donne: Bloom's Major Poets* (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 1999), p. 91.



awareness of the Trinity – toward the experience of communion with God, as we see in Holy Sonnet 11:

Wilt thou love God, as he thee? then digest,  
My soul, this wholesome meditation,  
How God the Spirit, by angels waited on,  
In heaven, doth make his temple in thy breast.  
The Father having begot a Son most blessed,  
And still begetting, (for he ne'er begun)  
Hath deigned to choose thee by adoption,  
Coheir to' his glory, 'and Sabbath's endless rest;  
And as a robbed man, which by search doth find  
His stol'n stuff, must lose or buy it again:  
The Son of glory came down, and was slain,  
Us whom he had made, and Satan stol'n, to unbind.  
'Twas much, that man was made like God before,  
But, that God should be made like man, much more.

We now see the poet grasping the truth: God loved him first. The poet includes the reader in his address, offering a challenge, or perhaps an invitation: Do you want to love God, the way that He loves you? If so, consider this...

Holy Sonnet 11 moves toward an appreciation of the communion of the blessed Trinity, referencing the eternal relationship of the Son to the Father: "The Father having begot a Son most blessed, / And still begetting, (for he ne'er begun)." Here is no static, distant God, but a God who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What's more, the activity of the Trinity expands outward to draw the poet into the life and love of God. The Holy Spirit, "doth make his temple in thy breast," the Father "Hath deigned to choose thee by adoption," and the Son "came down, and was slain, / Us whom he had made, and Satan stol'n, to unbind."

Holy Sonnet 11 closes with a profound reflection on the Incarnation, "'Twas much, that man was made like God before, / But, that God should be made like man, much more." The harshness of language in the previous sonnets has eased. Rather than straining for an explanation of why God hasn't acted in his life, the poet recognizes that indeed He has acted

decisively in human history through the Incarnation, not just for the poet himself but for all humankind.

The sonnet sequence closes with another deeply Trinitarian poem, Holy Sonnet 12. Indeed this is the only poem in the sequence in which the Trinity is specifically named.

Father, part of his double interest  
 Unto thy kingdom, thy Son gives to me,  
 His jointure in the knotty Trinity  
 He keeps, and gives me his death's conquest.  
 This Lamb, whose death, with life the world hath blessed,  
 Was from the world's beginning slain, and he  
 Hath made two wills, which with the legacy  
 Of his and thy kingdom, do thy sons invest.  
 Yet such are thy laws, that men argue yet  
 Whether a man those statutes can fulfil;  
 None doth, but thy all-healing grace and Spirit  
 Revive again what law and letter kill.  
 Thy law's abridgement, and thy last command  
 Is all but love; oh let that last will stand!

Here the Trinity is likened to knotwork, in which there is no clear beginning or ending; Donne might have been influenced by Celtic representations of the Trinity as an interlocking, beginningless knot that nonetheless has three distinct parts. Interestingly, “knotty” is often used to describe difficult or insoluble problems, and indeed the Trinity cannot be figured out by reason. However, as we said at the beginning of the essay, the Trinity is only “knotty” in a negative sense if we see the Trinity as a problem to be solved. Seen rightly, as a reality to be experienced, then the “knotty” nature of the Trinity is strangely reassuring. The image of the knot connects the idea of infinity with that of security: things knotted are made secure, bound tightly.

We can thus see the poet coming to the realization that God, fully experienced as the most holy Trinity, is a dynamic communion of love. Donne begins to see that God is continually pouring out His “all-healing” grace and love, to which the poet can respond through the power of the Spirit.

One of the applications we can draw from reflecting on the Holy Sonnets is that we do not need to have perfect understanding in order to love God and to be drawn into His love for us. Donne's poetry, like that of the other metaphysical poets, can often be very abstract and intellectual, even when dealing with emotion. Especially in these early poems, written before his ordination as a priest, Donne seems to be striving to understand the mysteries of faith, and falling short. While faith should always go seeking understanding, and we are directed in Holy Scripture to understand the reasons for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15), we must not fall into the error of thinking that just because we ought to use our minds to the fullest, that this full use of our minds will enable us to "understand" God completely. Donne seems to have realized this, later in life as a priest: he writes, in a sermon on John 1:8, that "We may search so far and reason so long of grace and faith, as that we may lose not only them but even our reason too, and sooner become mad than good."<sup>389</sup>

Donne's Holy Sonnets never quite reach assurance, and in many of Donne's other poems we find the same hesitant quality, the wavering between faith and doubt, between the desire to know God and the feeling of being trapped by desire for the world. As we read and reflect on the Holy Sonnets, we can use them as a scaffold to grow in our own faith; Donne helps us see that doubt and struggle need not be feared, if we offer them up to God for Him to use them to bring us closer to Him. Donne's uncertainties about his faith, his sense of his own sinful and rebellious heart, his experiences of loss, his own frequent ill health, were things that he offered up to God – and God used him to do a mighty work of preaching and teaching. Not only that, but Donne came at last to a sweet certainty of God's love and grace, so that he did not fear death, even though he had grappled with it, "stalked it"<sup>390</sup> in his poetry and sermons throughout his whole life.

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<sup>389</sup> Schmidt, *Glorious Companions*, p. 52.

<sup>390</sup> Schmidt, *Glorious Companions*, p. 48.

In Holy Sonnet 1, he had exclaimed in anguish, “Except thou rise and for thine own work fight, / Oh I shall soon despair, when I do see / That thou lov’st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,” giving a sense of frustration at God’s apparent distance from his need. In contrast, Holy Sonnet 12, closes with an affirmation of God’s love: “thy all-healing grace and Spirit / Revive again what law and letter kill.” When the poet cries out “oh let that last will stand!” it is in desire rather than despair, for he knows now that “Thy law’s abridgement, and thy last command / Is all but love.”

Donne does not present us with a neat, tidy explanation of the Trinity; instead, he sidles up to the Trinity, looks sideways at it, writes around it and gradually draws closer to it – and becomes drawn, by grace, into that eternal loving communion. What Donne discovers, he encourages us to discover also: that “God is not some remote, unknowable Deity, a prisoner in his aloofness or shut up in his solitariness, but on the contrary the God who is free to go outside of himself, to share in the life of his creatures and enable them to share in his own eternal Life.”<sup>391</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is far from being an doctrine of interest only to professional philosophers and theologians. Rather, it is a doorway into the heart of the Christian faith, a reality to be experienced with joy, love, and awe. Poetry can help us to open that door, so that a glimpse of what lies beyond may draw the doubter and the seeker into a saving relationship with God who has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>391</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 4.

## EXPOSING THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE: RESPONDING TO THE ZEITGEIST MOVIE

Stephen J. Bedard <sup>392</sup>

The documentary *Zeitgeist* was released on the Internet in 2007. It was originally a multimedia performance piece that included live and recorded music accompanying the video. The documentary by Peter Joseph<sup>393</sup> has been very popular. Not only did it win an award at the Activist's Film Festival, it has also spawned two sequels: *Zeitgeist: Appendix* and *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward*. The original movie is divided into three parts: 1) The Greatest Story Ever Told, which deals with the historical Jesus, 2) All the World's a Stage, dealing with alternative theories regarding 9/11 and 3) Don't Mind the Men Behind the Curtain, which deals with the banking industry. While some people have accepted these radical claims, there have been strong criticism against the movie. Such concerns are not just from evangelical Christians. Tim Callahan, from the Skeptics Society, while acknowledging that he accepted some of the claims added: "Unfortunately, this material is liberally — and sloppily — mixed with material that is only partially true and much that is plainly and simply bogus."<sup>394</sup> D.M. Murdock (aka Acharya S) was the academic consultant for the first part of the film. Murdock has written extensively on the Jesus Myth.<sup>395</sup> She has responded to people's concerns regarding the accuracy of the claims about Jesus in *Zeitgeist* by writing an e-book titled

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<sup>393</sup> Joseph produced, directed, wrote, edited and provided music for the film.

<sup>394</sup> <http://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/09-02-25/>

<sup>395</sup> Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*. (Kempton, Illinois: Adventures Unlimited, 1999); D.M. Murdock, D.M., *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection* (Stellar House Publishing, 2009).

*The Zeitgeist: Sourcebook*.<sup>396</sup> This essay will respond to the first part of the Zeitgeist movie by interacting with Murdock's e-book.

### Sun Worship

Murdock begins by noting the prevalence of sun worship in ancient religions. Murdock is correct when she states that the sun was often personified and given its own mythology. However, there are some unfortunate errors in how this is described. Murdock makes much of the idea of the Sun of God as the Son of God.<sup>397</sup> While this may sound good in English being homonyms, it is meaningless in any of the languages that could have influenced the New Testament.<sup>398</sup> Murdock quotes a fifteenth century Neoplatonic-Christian philosopher named Marsilio Ficino as finding this connection in Plato's *Republic*. This would be a significant discovery. However, it is important to note that Murdock quotes Ficino and not Plato himself. Here is the section from the discussed passage in the *Republic*:

"That is so," he said. "This, then, you must understand that I meant by the offspring of the good which the good begot to stand in a proportion with itself: as the good is in the intelligible region to reason and the objects of reason, so is this in the visible world to vision and the objects of vision." "How is that?" he said; "explain further." "You are aware," I said, "that when the eyes are no longer turned upon objects upon whose colors the light of day falls but that of the dim luminaries of night, their edge is blunted and they

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<sup>396</sup> This e-book can be found at

<http://www.stellarhousepublishing.com/zeitgeistsourcebook.pdf>.

<sup>397</sup> Peter Joseph and D.M. Murdock, *The Zeitgeist Sourcebook* (Stellar House Publishing, n.d.), p. 8. (Hereafter "*Sourcebook*").

<sup>398</sup> Murdock acknowledges this when she says: Concerning the —son-sun— play on words—which is not a cognate but a mere happy coincidence in English that reflects the mythological reality.

*Sourcebook*, p. 8.

appear almost blind, as if pure vision did not dwell in them." (*Republic* 6.508c)

Looking at the original text, it is obvious that Plato is discussing nothing related to the origins of Christianity. This is another common problem plaguing the Jesus Myth Hypothesis: an avoidance of quoting the actual primary texts.

Murdock looks at the attribution of 'Savior' to the personified Sun. Presumably, the point of this is to indicate that the reason Jesus is known as the Savior is that he is another example of a personified Sun. However, as Murdock herself points out: "To describe the sun as •savior, Pausanias uses the word *Soter*, a title commonly applied to many gods and goddesses at different places."<sup>399</sup> The fact that many gods are known by this description makes it very difficult to draw a line of dependence. The other problem is that Murdock assumes that 'Savior' was a common title for Jesus based on later ways of addressing Christ. However, the Gospels refer to Jesus as Savior only twice (Luke 2:11, John 4:42) and although Jesus is sometimes called the Savior in the rest of the New Testament, God the Father is given that title about as often.

### Isis and Horus

Murdock cites Porphyry as a pagan source of the concept of the virgin mother: "In all these ways, then, the power of the earth finds an interpretation and is worshipped: as a virgin and Hestia, she holds the centre; as a mother she nourishes..." Murdock concludes from this: "Here is clearly one source in antiquity of the virgin-mother concept, which was so obviously adopted into Christianity from Paganism."<sup>400</sup> There are a number of problems with this conclusion. Murdock is in fact quoting Eusebius, who is citing Porphyry. It would be difficult for Porphyry to be a source for the Christian doctrine of the virgin birth as he lived 234-305 AD and was writing specifically against Christians in his *Adversus Christianos*. This is an example

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<sup>399</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 9.

<sup>400</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 7.

of one of the common errors of Jesus Myth theorists who ignore relative dates.

A common assertion by proponents of the Jesus Myth is that Jesus shares December 25 with other savior figures. Murdock cites Plutarch as evidence that Horus was born on December 25, more specifically the winter solstice.<sup>401</sup> There are a couple of problems with this. First of all, Plutarch wrote his book dealing with Osiris and Isis in the second century, too late to be an influence on the Gospels.<sup>402</sup> Secondly, nowhere does the Bible suggest that Jesus was born on December 25. It may very well be that this date was chosen because of pagan interest, but it has nothing to do with pagan influence on the Gospels.

Much has been made about possible connections between Isis and Mary.<sup>403</sup> This is not surprising, as it is true that early Christian artists modeled sculptures of Mary and baby Jesus after statues of Isis and baby Horus. However, Murdock makes too much of this connection. Murdock too quickly dismisses Egyptian accounts of Isis being impregnated by Osiris through postmortem intercourse.<sup>404</sup> There is a philosophical

<sup>401</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 15.

<sup>402</sup> Of course the Osiris and Isis myth predates Christianity, and yet it is the later highly philosophized version in Plutarch that Jesus mythicists often rely on.

<sup>403</sup> For information about the connection to Isis and Horus, see Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ: An Evangelical Response to the Cosmic Christ Idea* (Toronto: Clements, 2006), pp. 59-80. For information on the actual myth, see David Leeming, "Osiris and Isis" in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 303, E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Religion* (London: Arkana, 1987), pp. 27-83, Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 137-77, Françoise Dunand and Christine Zivie-Coche, (Ithica: Cornell, 2004), pp. 39-40, Marvin W. Meyer (ed.), *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 155-96.

<sup>404</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 16. For examples of a sexual conception, see E.A. Wallis Budge, *Legends of the Egyptian Gods* (repr. New York: Dover, 1994), p. li. & p. 105.



reinterpretation of this by Plutarch, but as already noted this post-dates the New Testament. It is difficult to identify the sexual conception of Horus with the virginal conception of Jesus. Murdock quotes Reginald Witt in saying: "The Egyptian goddess who was equally 'the Great Virgin' (*hwt*) and 'Mother of the God' was the object of the very same praise bestowed upon her successor [Mary, Virgin Mother of Jesus]."<sup>405</sup> This would make Isis to be the inspiration for Mary, since Mary is described as the 'Virgin Mary' and the 'Mother of God.' Unfortunately for Jesus Mythicists, the Bible never refers to Mary in such a way. The virginal conception is mentioned briefly in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, never to be mentioned again in the New Testament. Nor is Mary ever praised as the 'Mother of God' in the Bible.

Murdock cites E.A. Wallis Budge regarding the Egyptian adoption of Christianity and blending with their earlier Egyptian religions.<sup>406</sup> This may have happened, but it says nothing about the origins of Christianity. Christianity already existed when it entered Egypt. It is natural that the Egyptians, as with any culture, would try to understand the new faith by looking for common points of contact. But what about the fact that Isis is sometimes referred to as 'Meri', a word related to the Jewish name Mary? Murdock correctly points out: "Moreover, the title or epithet of 'Meri' or 'Mery,' meaning 'beloved,' was applied to many kings and later to various deities."<sup>407</sup> The problem with this is that Meri is not a name but an attribution such as 'powerful' or 'graceful.' This could be significant if Mary was a rare Jewish name, being fairly unique to the mother of Jesus. The truth is that, not only are there numerous Marys in the New Testament, it was one of the most common names among the Jews of the time.<sup>408</sup> Any Egyptian

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<sup>405</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 16, quoting Reginald E. Witt. *Isis in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), p. 273.

<sup>406</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 17.

<sup>407</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 17.

<sup>408</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 71.

connection would be from the introduction of Mary in its Hebrew form of Miriam coming from the sister of Moses who was born in Egypt.

In comparing Jesus and Horus, Murdock titles a section: "His birth was accompanied by a star in the east, and upon his birth he was adored by three kings."<sup>409</sup> There are numerous problems with this comparison, both in terms of Egyptology and Christian origins. Does the star really appear at the birth of Jesus? Indications are that Jesus was perhaps as old as two years old when the star led the magi to Bethlehem. What about the three wise men? Murdock relies on an account of the birth of Osiris and then attempt to blend them together. Even so, Murdock cites a secondary source rather than giving us the primary source for us to compare for ourselves. Given the possibility that there may have been three wise men/stars at the birth of Osiris, does that suggest a connection with Christ? Matthew does not actually tell us how many wise men visited Jesus. Later tradition, based on the number of gifts, decided it was three and even gave them names. If the star and the wise men are the key to the solar connection, why are such details missing in the Lukan infancy narrative?

Murdock sees more parallels between Jesus and Horus. Regarding Horus, Murdock states: "At the age of 12, he was a prodigal child teacher, and at the age of 30 he was baptized by a figure known as Anup and thus began his ministry."<sup>410</sup> One of the difficulties is that Murdock does not cite primary texts that we can compare with the New Testament but summarizes Egyptian legends with biblical language. Without knowing the actual text used by Murdock, one will have to make comparisons with her summaries. Murdock explains that Horus was on earth until age of twelve and then was raised to become the sun. The age of twelve is thus a symbol of noon

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<sup>409</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 18.

<sup>410</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 20. I am not sure if Murdock realizes that 'prodigal' does not mean 'lost' but means 'wasteful.' It is unlikely that either Horus or Jesus could be described as prodigal.

when the sun is its highest.<sup>411</sup> Therefore, the myths never say Horus was twelve years old, later interpreters simply identify noon with this age. This has very little in common with the story of Jesus discussing with the teachers in the Temple. Presumably Jesus went back with his parents and it was life as usual until his ministry began.

Murdock seems to have a clearer parallel, even quoting the actual text from Papyrus DCIV. This passage says: "When Si-Osiris was twelve years old he was wiser than the wisest of the scribes."<sup>412</sup> Murdock translates 'Si' as 'son' and therefore here is a clear example of Horus, the son of Osiris doing something at the age of twelve very similar to what Jesus was doing at the same age. There are a number of problems with this. Papyrus DCIV is dated to 46-47 AD and therefore after the time being described in the Gospels.<sup>413</sup> Not only that, this story is not about Horus the son of Osiris but Senosiris, son of Satni-Khamoïs. This is an example of theophoric name, a name of a mortal that includes the name of a god within it. Regarding the supposed preparatory baptism, Murdock must really stretch the facts. Every lake or marsh becomes a symbol of baptism. Murdock even cites the questionable scholarship of Gerald Massey who identifies with baptism and embalming.<sup>414</sup>

One of the reasons for attempting to identify Jesus as the Sun is to include the signs of the Zodiac for the inspiration for the twelve apostles. Beyond the Zodiac, there is some evidence that twelve beings were sometimes placed along side

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<sup>411</sup> It looks from the Sourcebook that the primary texts do not speak of twelve years of age but rather that later writers identified the twelfth hour with twelve years old.

<sup>412</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 21.

<sup>413</sup> Gaston Maspero, *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 118. Although the text predates our Christian texts, it does post-date the events being described and should be used with caution.

<sup>414</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 21. For more on Gerald Massey, see Porter and Bedard, *Unmasking*, pp. 25-31. See also <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/massjc.html>.

Osiris and Horus.<sup>415</sup> There are numerous problems with this. It is not clear in the hieroglyphs what the exact role of the twelve were. In the narratives, we do not have descriptions of adventures with the twelve in any way parallel with Jesus and the twelve apostles. Most likely, Jesus called twelve followers as a reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel rather than any connection to the Zodiac. Except for a few, the personalities of each of the twelve are not described and we cannot even be sure of the precise names of the twelve. In addition, the twelve are only mentioned once outside of the Gospels (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Murdock points out a number of titles given to Horus: “Horus was known by many gestural names such as The Truth, The Light, God’s Anointed Son, The Good Shepherd, The Lamb of God, and many others.”<sup>416</sup> It is difficult to understand the point of these comparisons. Most of these are extremely generic religious titles drawing from the common pool of spiritual imagery. There should be no surprise that there are similarities and such similarities should not lead to a conclusion about cause.

One of the most controversial aspects of the Jesus Myth is this: “After being ‘betrayed’ by Typhon, Horus was “crucified,” buried for three days, and thus, resurrected.”<sup>417</sup> Murdock presents the problem that many critics of the Jesus Myth have:

It needs to be reiterated here that the ancient texts did not necessarily spell out the myths in a linear fashion, resembling a story following a certain timeframe. Mythical motifs found disparately in the ancient Egyptian texts are combined in this paragraph, as they are in modern encyclopedia entries.<sup>418</sup>

What Murdock is admitting here is that there is no one text that makes the claim that she is making. Murdock must draw on

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<sup>415</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 23.

<sup>416</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 25.

<sup>417</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 26.

<sup>418</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 26.

images and symbols from numerous texts across a long time period and combine them into a form resembling the Gospel narrative.

The first claim is that Horus is betrayed by Seth/Typhon in a way similar to how Jesus was betrayed by Judas. There are many differences between the stories. Typhon was never one of Horus' followers, did not betray him through deception but instead was his ongoing enemy and Typhon took a much more active role in Horus' death than Judas. One would never read the story of Horus and conclude that Typhon must have been the inspiration for Judas.

The supposed crucifixion is another problem for Jesus Mythicists. Murdock, to her credit, tackles this problem head on.

The "crucifixion" of Horus is misunderstood because many erroneously assume that the term denotes a direct resemblance to the crucifixion narrative of Jesus Christ. Hence, it is critical to point out that we are dealing with metaphors here, not "history," as the "crucifixions" of both Horus and Jesus are improvable events historically. The issue at hand is not a man being thrown to the ground and nailed to a cross, as Jesus is depicted to have been, but the portrayal of gods and goddesses in "cruciform," whereby the divine figure appears with arms outstretched in a symbolic context.<sup>419</sup>

There are a number of problems with this statement. First of all, the crucifixion of Jesus is much more in the realm of history.<sup>420</sup> Historians can pin down the date within a number of years and accounts of the crucifixion were written within the lifetime of the witnesses. Also, it is problematic to define crucifixion in the way that Murdock does. The word for cross is *stauros*, which literally means a stake. While Christian

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<sup>419</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 27.

<sup>420</sup> John Dominic Crossan, part of the controversial Jesus Seminar, makes this comment: "I take it absolutely for granted that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate." John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 1993), p. 372.

tradition later adopted a ‘t’ shape for the cross, the Romans also used ‘T’ and ‘I’ shapes as well.<sup>421</sup> We do not know what position Jesus was crucified and if the evangelists wanted to identify Jesus with the death of Egyptian gods, the point could have been made much clearer. Finally, by redefining crucifixion the way she does, Murdock has given herself the freedom to make almost any death a crucifixion, creating a parallel where this none.

Murdock points out one of the main problems of this comparison in her section on the betrayal. She recounts two versions of Horus’ death: one by a scorpion sting and the other by drowning.<sup>422</sup> It is very difficult to see how either one of these deaths, even with a generous definition of the word, could be considered a crucifixion. More than this, there is no indication that Horus’ death played any major theological role. In Christianity, Jesus’ death was not just an unfortunate injustice, it was God’s plan to provide redemption from sins. Horus was not crucified in any way similar to Jesus.

Murdock also suggests that Horus was resurrected on the third day as Jesus was. Yet in her description of the resurrection, the role of the third day is left out. This description is common among Jesus Mythicists, but it is not found in the actual Egyptian texts. In the account of Horus dying from a scorpion sting, Isis prays for help and Horus is immediately returned to life by Thoth. In the account of the drowning, Isis gives Horus an elixir that brings him back to life. As with the crucifixion, the resurrection of Horus lacks all of the theological significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’ resurrection was not just an opportunity for him to continue his life, but the first stage of the general resurrection that all believers looked forward to. While more similar than the

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<sup>421</sup> This makes Murdock’s point about the ancient nature of the cross shape meaningless. *Sourcebook*, p. 28. It makes much more sense to see the cross as a historical Roman means of execution than to look for pagan mystical meanings.

<sup>422</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 27.

crucifixion, the resurrection of Horus is quite different from the experience of Jesus.

### Other Pagan Parallels

Murdock attempts to strengthen her argument by bringing in other pagan parallels. She begins with a look at Attis.<sup>423</sup> The problems with Attis are the same as those of Horus. While in a manner, Attis was conceived by virginal conception, there was a male phallus involved. Agdistis, who had both male and female organs, was castrated and from that organ an almond tree grew. From that fruit, Nana became impregnated with Attis. This is far from the biblical picture of the Spirit overshadowing Mary. Descriptions of Nana as a perpetual virgin are meaningless, as Mary is never described in such a way in the Bible.<sup>424</sup> In the same way, any connection with the winter solstice is irrelevant as the Bible never offers the date of Jesus' birth.<sup>425</sup> The most common description of Attis' fate is that of castration. According to the myth, Cybele drove Attis insane and in a frenzy he castrated himself. Calling such a thing crucifixion is forcing a parallel that does not exist. While a tree played a part in what happened to Attis, the castration took place under a tree, it was not a crucifixion to a tree. What about the resurrection of Attis? It was not until centuries after the appearance of Christianity that anything like a resurrection appeared.<sup>426</sup> Originally, Cybele was only able to preserve the body with the hair continuing to grow and some slight

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<sup>423</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 32-38. For information on the Attis myth, see Leeming, "Attis" in *Oxford Companion*, p. 38, Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 111-54, Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987), pp. 77-78.

<sup>424</sup> The natural reading of passages describing Jesus' brothers and sisters is that Mary had other children with Joseph after the birth of Jesus.

<sup>425</sup> Murdock will continue to make this point with other gods such as Dionysus, Mithras. This argument has no weight.

<sup>426</sup> Ronald Nash *Christian Research Journal* Winter 1994, p. 8f.

movement in his little finger. Other versions have a transformation into an evergreen tree. There is no similarity to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Referring to Attis among others, Walter Burkett concludes: "The evidence for resurrection is late and tenuous in the case of Adonis, and practically nonexistent in the case of Attis; not even Osiris returns to real life, but instead attains transcendent life beyond death."<sup>427</sup>

Another common comparison with Jesus is that of Dionysus.<sup>428</sup> Again, an examination of the actual myths demonstrate that any parallels are superficial if not completely fictional. One of the mistakes that Murdock makes is in the identification of Dionysus and Osiris. It is true that some ancients did identify these two gods with each other, but it is not true that they took the stories of each god and merged them into one combined story. Regarding the virgin birth, Dionysus was not conceived in such a way. While Murdock is able to quote secondary sources that make such a claim, the primary sources do not provide such evidence. While there are numerous versions of Dionysus' conception, they all include some sexual intercourse. Murdock also misrepresents the supposed death and resurrection of Dionysus. The impression is given that he is killed and raised as an adult, similar to Jesus. The truth is that in most versions of the myth Dionysus never dies. The only example is when Dionysus is consumed as a child by the Titans. Zeus consumes the heart and impregnates Semele, thus allowing Dionysus to be born a second time. This is more of an example of his miraculous birth than a death and resurrection.

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<sup>427</sup> Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 101.

<sup>428</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 42-47. For more information on the Dionysus myth, see Euripides, *Bacchae* (Mineola: Dover, 1997), Leeming, "Dionysos" in *Oxford Companion*, pp. 103-104, Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 61-110.



While not every god/hero dealt with by Murdock will be looked at here, it is important to look at Mithras.<sup>429</sup> The problem with Mithras' virgin birth is that he was born of a rock. This is the traditional form of the myth that would have been known to the evangelists if they knew of Mithras at all.<sup>430</sup> Admitting this, Murdock turns to a much less known version that has Mithra being born of a goddess named Anahita. What Murdock does not reveal is that it is very controversial regarding how much connection there is between the Persian Mithras and the Mithras of the Roman mystery cults. As Peter van Nuffelen states: "Mithraism ... is now seen less as bringer of Mazdic ideas to the Roman Empire, and more as an original development from an Iranian ferment in the Roman Empire."<sup>431</sup> It is unlikely that the authors of the New Testament had any knowledge of the Persian Mithras. There is also a problem with claiming that Mithras had twelve disciples or companions. There are no narratives of Mithras interacting with these twelve men. What there are, are artifacts that portray Mithras with the signs of the Zodiac. The signs of the Zodiac were common artistic symbols. There are even ancient Jewish synagogues decorated with the signs of Zodiac. In no way do these symbols play a parallel role to the twelve disciples of Jesus. One of the surprising claims by Jesus Mythicists is that Mithras was a dying and rising god. Murdock continues that claim without citing text but simply highlighting the importance

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<sup>429</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 47-52. For a response to the Mithras connection, see Porter and Bedard, *Unmasking*, pp. 95-104. For more information on the Mithras myth, see Leeming, "Mithra" in *Oxford Companion*, p. 266, Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, pp. 197-222, Franz Cumont, *Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, pp. 47-65.

<sup>430</sup> One of the difficulties of suggesting Mithraic origins to the Gospels is that most of our texts concerning Mithra are post-New Testament.

<sup>431</sup> Peter Van Nuffelen, "Pagan Monotheism as a Religious Phenomenon" in Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds.) *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 30.

of death and life in the mysteries. The reason for this is that Mithras never died and therefore was never resurrected.

Having presented these pagan “parallels,” Murdock goes on to explain the connection with Jesus Christ, who she describes as “the most recent of the solar messiahs.”<sup>432</sup> According to Murdock: “Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary on December 25th in Bethlehem... his birth was announced by a star in the east, which three kings or magi followed to locate and adore the new savior.”<sup>433</sup> However, even Murdock admits that the Bible never says that Jesus was born on December 25 or that there were precisely three kings. Murdock attempts to bypass this by looking at later traditions. It is possible that certain details in later traditions (especially the birth date) were influenced by pagan motifs, but that says nothing with regard to influence on the Bible. The claim that the three wise men were three stars that followed the star Sirius is nonsensical.<sup>434</sup> There is nothing in Matthew that suggests that the magi were to be seen as anything other than people looking for a special baby. What complicates the allegorical reading of the text is the fact that the magi interact with the historical figure of Herod the Great.

Murdock also attempts to identify Mary with the astrological sign Virgo.<sup>435</sup> There is no reason to make such an identification. Although later Catholic theology would expand the story of Mary, claiming that she was a perpetual virgin and she also was conceived by a virgin, such details are not found in the Bible. Mary is only identified as a virgin in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke and never is she referred to as the “Virgin Mary.” If Mary was seen as Virgo, this virginal identification would have been mentioned in her other appearances in the Gospels and it is unlikely that her other children would be mentioned. Murdock continues with numerous astronomical interpretations that hold very little

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<sup>432</sup> Sourcebook, p. 52.

<sup>433</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>434</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 55.

<sup>435</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 56.

weight. Murdock attempts to identify the cross with the Southern Cross constellation.<sup>436</sup> Aside from the fanciful nature of the interpretation, there are two immediate problems. First of all, the cross was a historical Roman means of execution used at the time and place where Jesus is said to have lived. Secondly, the Greek word *stauros* does not tell us the shape of the cross. If the evangelists wanted to identify the cross with a constellation, they could have been much clearer.

Murdock attempts to use this astrological interpretation to explain the length of Jesus' time in the tomb. She explains:

And after this time on December 25th, the sun moves one degree, this time north, foreshadowing longer days, warmth, and Spring. And thus it was said: the sun died on the cross, was dead for three days, only to be resurrected or born again. This is why Jesus and numerous other sun gods share the crucifixion, three-day death, and resurrection concept.<sup>437</sup>

The connection of the death of Jesus with December 25 is confusing, since it is unlikely that his birth is connected with it either. Also, despite her claims, Murdock has not demonstrated that the sun gods had actually been dead for three days. Finally, Jesus was not dead for three days. Jesus was raised on the third day and it is likely that he was actually in the tomb for approximately a day and a half. Murdock then moves to the placing of the death and resurrection near the spring equinox, assuming that once more it was astrologically symbolic.<sup>438</sup> A reading of the Gospels however, demonstrate that the timing of the passion and resurrection is based firmly in the Jewish concept of the Passover. Jesus is seen as the Passover lamb that takes away the sins of the world. There is a lack of solar imagery in the passion narrative. The one example of the sun turning dark is clearly a part of the Old Testament image of God's judgment.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 61.

<sup>437</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 63.

<sup>438</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 65.

<sup>439</sup> See Joel 2:10, Matthew 27:45.

Regarding the twelve disciples, Murdock claims:

Now, probably the most obvious of all the astrological symbolism around Jesus regards the 12 disciples. They are simply the 12 constellations of the Zodiac, which Jesus, being the Sun, travels about with.<sup>440</sup>

Murdock provides an impressive list of examples of the use of 'twelve' in biblical and pagan texts. There is no doubt that this number was highly symbolic in the ancient world. The question is: what role did the twelve disciples play in the biblical narrative? Scholars seem to agree that the twelve disciples were symbolic of a reconstitution of Israel with its twelve tribes.<sup>441</sup> There is also the important question of why the twelve are mentioned only once outside of the Gospels? It is also notable that the twelve disciples never received the unique personalities or characteristics of the twelve signs. Finally, there is the universal witness of the early church that the twelve were actual historical figures.

Murdock provides a creative and lengthy investigation into the astrological interpretations of the story of Jesus. Unfortunately, it is not convincing based on the biblical evidence. For example, Murdock relies mainly on the Matthean nativity account with its star and wise men to make the connections between Jesus and solar religions. However, Luke also presents the nativity without those same images, suggesting that the nativity was not based in solar religion. Murdock makes a great deal out of the concept of astrological ages.<sup>442</sup> It is not clear that even pagan religions were interpreted by such a scheme. However, it is only necessary to go so far as Jewish apocalyptic views to understand the interest in ages. Regarding the identification of Mary with the universal virgin figure, it must be noted that Paul never mention the virgin connection and Mary is only called a virgin three times in the New Testament (Matt 1:23, Luke 1:27, 34).

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<sup>440</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 65.

<sup>441</sup> R.T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 176.

<sup>442</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 71-79.

Murdock plainly announces her theory:

Furthermore, the character of Jesus, being a literary and astrological hybrid, is most explicitly a plagiarization of the Egyptian sun god Horus. For example, inscribed about 3,500 years ago, on the walls at the Temple of Luxor in Egypt are images of the enunciation, the miracle conception, the birth, and the adoration of Horus. The images begin with Thoth announcing to the virgin Isis that she will conceive Horus, then Kneph the holy ghost impregnating the virgin, and then the virgin birth and the adoration.<sup>443</sup>

Murdock even reproduces the inscription for all to see the truth of the claim. However, atheist Richard Carrier disagrees. Carrier, who has a background in ancient history, notes the numerous errors made by Murdock. For example, not only are the names of the gods wrong, the conception of the child not virginal but the product of sexual intercourse between a god disguised as the husband and a mortal woman.<sup>444</sup> Referring to Murdock by her pseudonym, Carrier concludes:

Understanding their background and cultural and historical context is certainly helpful, and necessary, but it doesn't lead to any plagiaristic scandal of the sort Acharya S wants there to be. She may still be right that what we are told is actually a myth about Jesus, not historical fact, but that is a conclusion that requires a lot more evidence than what we find at Luxor.

This is another example of the author using the general ignorance regarding Egyptology to attempt to make a connection that is not there.

Justin Martyr, the early church father, is often cited as one who acknowledged the dependency of Christianity to pagan myths.<sup>445</sup> Taken out of context, Justin does seem to support the

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<sup>443</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 79.

<sup>444</sup> Richard C. Carrier "Brunner's Gottkoenigs & the Nativity of Jesus: A Brief Communication" [http://www.frontline-apologetics.com/Luxor\\_Inscription.html](http://www.frontline-apologetics.com/Luxor_Inscription.html)

<sup>445</sup> *Sourcebook*, pp. 89-90.

Jesus Myth hypothesis. However, it is important to read Justin's full text and to understand his role as a Christian philosopher. When Justin compares the virgin birth to pagan myths, he is not attempting to determine a line of dependance. Justin is simply attempting to demonstrate that the virgin birth and other miracles are rational and coherent claims even for people coming from a pagan background. Justin then goes on to contrast the story of Jesus with the myths, demonstrating that the Gospel is unique in its truth.

### **Was There a Historical Jesus?**

In order to make this interpretation secure, Jesus Mythicists often attempt to discredit the historicity of Jesus. Murdock quotes herself claiming:

We have no primary sources proving that Jesus Christ actually existed, no legal documents, no "glyphs," no papyri, no statuary, coins—nothing. All we have to go on is hearsay, the bulk of which is secondary, tertiary and so on. ...[O]nly two gospels are accepted as having come from alleged eyewitnesses, and these constitute but a few dozen pages with little biographical or historical material yet full of miracles, impossibilities and improbabilities. All the rest of Christian literature represents sources that are secondary and tertiary, etc.<sup>446</sup>

This statement is almost completely nonsensical. It could be asked: What Jewish religious leader ever had statuary or coins representing them? Jewish sensitivity toward graven images would make this almost impossible. Regarding original papyri, the climate of Jerusalem and surrounding area makes that also very unlikely. Regarding the sources that are available, Murdock misunderstands primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are simply the texts that we have that were written close to the events being described. All of the New Testament would be primary sources, with the later church fathers who cited the New Testament being secondary sources.

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<sup>446</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 92.

The Apostle Paul gives both early and valuable evidence of a historical Jesus.<sup>447</sup> Murdock is also mistaken regarding the biographical nature of the Gospels. Although they may not be twenty-first century biographies, they do fit well into first century biography.<sup>448</sup>

While there are some important Roman witnesses to early Christianity, one of the best extra-biblical evidences for the historical Jesus is that of Josephus. However, Murdock discounts this witness with this statement:

Despite the best wishes of sincere believers and the erroneous claims of truculent apologists, the *Testimonium Flavianum* has been demonstrated continually over the centuries to be a forgery, likely interpolated by Catholic Church historian Eusebius in the fourth century. So thorough and universal has been this debunking that very few scholars of repute continued to cite the passage after the turn of the 19th century. Indeed, the TF was rarely mentioned, except to note that it was a forgery, and numerous books by a variety of authorities over a period of 200 or so years basically took it for granted that the *Testimonium Flavianum* in its entirety was spurious, an interpolation and a forgery.<sup>449</sup>

Murdock is mistaken in this conclusion. It is true that Christians did modify Josephus' original statement about Jesus, but it is not true that it has been accepted as a complete forgery by scholars. It is also important to note that Josephus speaks of John the Baptist and James, who he identifies as the brother of Jesus.

What are scholars saying about this controversial passage? Steve Mason, today's foremost expert on Josephus states:

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<sup>447</sup> Stephen J. Bedard, "Paul and the Historical Jesus: A Case Study in First Corinthians," in *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 2006 7:9-22.

<sup>448</sup> Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2004).

<sup>449</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 94.

The vast majority of commentators hold a middle position between authenticity and inauthenticity, claiming that Josephus wrote *something* about Jesus that was subsequently edited by Christian copyists. Such a view has the best of both worlds, for it recognizes all of the problems with the passage as well as the factors that support its authenticity.<sup>450</sup>

Mason then concludes with these wise words that put this question in its scholarly context: “since most of those who know the evidence agree that he said something about Jesus, one is probably entitled to cite him as independent evidence that Jesus actually lived, if such evidence were needed.”<sup>451</sup> Raymond Brown notes: “In vocabulary and style large parts of it are plausibly from the hand of Josephus; and the context in which the passage appears in *Ant.* (i.e., among the early unpleasant relations involving the Jewish leaders and Pilate is appropriate.”<sup>452</sup>

It is true that there seems to be some Christian interpolation to what Josephus has originally written about Jesus, but it is within our power to reconstruct a likely original form of the passage.<sup>453</sup> Here is one possible version:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man... For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks... When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for

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<sup>450</sup> Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, Hendrickson, 2003), p. 235.

<sup>451</sup> Mason, p. 236.

<sup>452</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 374

<sup>453</sup> F.F. Bruce offers a number of alternatives to explain how find the original text in our current Christianized version. F.F. Bruce, *New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), pp. 108-12.



him... And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.<sup>454</sup>

The fact that there was once an original testimony by Josephus to Jesus without the Christian additions is supported by Origen's remarks that Josephus did not accept Jesus as being the Christ.<sup>455</sup> There is no manuscript evidence that the *Testimonium Flavianum* was a complete insertion into Josephus' writing and so it is safe to say that there is strong non-biblical evidence for the historical existence of Jesus.<sup>456</sup>

The question could be asked: Why is there not more evidence?<sup>457</sup> This must be countered with the question: What other evidence should be expected? Should there be Roman legal records? There would have been thousands of trials throughout the Roman Empire and we have almost no records of any but the most famous Romans. It is not as if Jesus' records are the only ones missing. Should there be written records by the people who witnessed the miracles? The literacy rate was relatively low and so it is not surprising that they are missing. In addition, such records would have likely been destroyed by now. It is very likely that some of the eyewitness accounts did make it into the biblical accounts. Paul seemed to think that there were eyewitnesses who were available at his time that people could interview (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

If Murdock and other Jesus Mythicists are correct, one could ask: How did the world come to believe that Jesus was a historical figure? Murdock has an answer:

It was the political establishment that sought to historicize the Jesus figure for social control. In 325 A.D. in Rome, Emperor Constantine convened the

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<sup>454</sup> Loeb Classical Library, modified by Stanley Porter. Porter and Bedard, p. 142.

<sup>455</sup> *Contra Celsum* i. 47, *Commentary on Matthew* x. 17. See *Jesus Legend*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>456</sup> Eddy and Boyd deal with all the questions of authenticity. Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *Jesus Legend* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 190-98.

<sup>457</sup> Murdock, herself asks this question. *Sourcebook*, p. 96.

Council of Nicea. It was during this meeting that the politically motivated Christian doctrines were established and thus began a long history of religious bloodshed and spiritual fraud.<sup>458</sup>

There are many things wrong with this statement. First of all, there are many comments by church fathers before Nicea that Jesus was understood as historical.<sup>459</sup> Secondly, the purpose of Nicea was not to determine the historicity of Jesus.<sup>460</sup> Nicea was convened to deal with the Arian controversy that claimed that Jesus was a divine creature rather than the co-eternal Son. While Constantine makes a convenient scapegoat to blame anything that later critics dislike, Murdock can find no support for her theory at Nicea.

### Conclusion

The *Zeitgeist* movie has garnered an incredible amount of popularity. What it has not demonstrated is historical evidence or scholarly support its claims about the historical Jesus. D.M. Murdock has attempted to provide this evidence with her astrological interpretation, Egyptian comparison and concerns about historicity. It seems likely that there were some pagan influences on Christianity, especially in later depictions of Mary and the dating for certain celebrations. What is lacking is evidence that pagan myths influenced the biblical texts themselves. Those who are considering the theory that Christianity is the latest version of a pagan solar myth, should not rely on the conspiracy-laden claims of Jesus Mythicists such as D.M. Murdock, but should read the New Testament, Church Fathers and Egyptian myths for themselves. Such a study may lead to the conclusion that Christianity is the story of the unique Jesus and not a pagan counterfeit.

Rudolf Bultmann, a liberal scholar far from being an evangelical defender of the faith, said: "It is clear, first of all,

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<sup>458</sup> *Sourcebook*, p. 99.

<sup>459</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.22.1-6; Origen, *De Principiis* Preface 4.

<sup>460</sup> Nor was it to determine the canon, despite popular beliefs.

that the Christ occurrence is not a myth like the cult myths of the Greek or Hellenistic gods.”<sup>461</sup> Burton Mack, member of the controversial Jesus Seminar, should be quoted at length:

As for the notion of “dying and rising gods,” it is true that a death of some kind can be found in each of the mythologies of these cults, but none of them describes the deity’s destiny as one of dying and rising. Persephone is abducted, then lives alternatively in the upper and lower worlds, as does vegetation. Dionysos does not die in most of his myths, though his vine gets pruned, his celebrations were ecstatic and orgiastic, and one of his animals might be killed and eaten by Maenads (female votaries of Dionysos). Only the Orphics imagined that the Titans killed, roasted, and ate Dionysos before Zeus incinerated the Titans, and from their ashes arose the human race, part evil from the Titans, part divine from Dionysos, thus calling for an ascetic way of life. Adonis is killed by a wild boar and mourned by Aphrodite in some versions of his myth; in others he spends part of the year with Persephone in the underworld. Attis pledged his fidelity to Cybele, the Great Mother of the wild mountains, but fell under the spell of a nymph, and so, in a frenzy, he castrated himself and thus became immune to human desires. Osiris was the mythic king of Egypt, killed by his brother Seth and “awakened” by Isis to father Horus the next king, but he remained in the underworld as its sovereign and judge. Mithras does not die, though he slays Taurus the bull as a sign of his cosmic and military powers. So it has become clear that Frazer and other scholars misread these myths and rituals. They had the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in mind when reading them, and thought of the mystery religions as precursors and parallels to Christianity, offering eternal

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<sup>461</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament Theology and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), p. 32.

life on the basis of a myth-ritual dramatization of a violent death and return to life.<sup>462</sup>

Thus, despite its popularity, the *Zeigist* movie and other examples of the Jesus Myth should be seen for what they are: appeals to the human interest in conspiracy theories rather than the results of extensive research and scholarship.

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<sup>462</sup> Burton L. Mack, *Myth and the Christian Nation* (Indonesia: Equinox, 2008), p. 110.

## REVIEWS

John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 204 pp. Pbk. US\$17.99.

There is no lack of books that argue that the Bible is no different from any other ancient mythology. From one perspective, there seems to be logic to such a theory. The Bible shares with ancient myths a belief in divine beings, miracles and heroes performing fantastic deeds. Perhaps the only difference is that the “biblical myth” continues to have believers today.

John Oswalt deals with these questions in his book: *The Bible Among the Myths*. It would be tempting to tackle this issue by simply comparing biblical stories with mythological stories. However, Oswalt takes a more useful route by looking at the different worldviews found within the Bible and ancient myths. Building from this foundation, Oswalt provides a persuasive argument that the Bible is fundamentally different than ancient myths.

Oswalt does a good job of taking a look at the very nature of mythology. He investigates etymological, literary and phenomenological definitions of myth in an attempt to have the best understanding of the nature of myths. After looking at these definitions, Oswalt concludes that the common link between all myths is the concept of continuity. By continuity, Oswalt means that all things are continuous with each other. This link explains how the ancients attempted to manipulate their gods. A worshipper may enter into sexual intercourse or some other activity to try and receive the assistance of a fertility god, since what is done on earth is continuous with what takes place in the heavenly world of the gods. Further investigation of ancient myths provides additional common characteristics including: polytheism, images, eternity of chaotic matter, personality not essential to reality, low view of the gods, conflict as the source of life, low view of humanity, no single standard of ethics, and a cyclical concept of existence. With a solid foundation of the true nature of myths, Oswalt then prepares the reader for the way in which the Bible differs.

Just as continuity is the foundation of all mythological thinking, Oswalt finds an underlying principle for the biblical worldview in the concept of transcendence. Central to biblical thinking is that God is other than his creation. This belief shapes all that is found in biblical narratives. Oswalt also finds a number of

common characteristics of the biblical worldview that are diametrically opposed to the mythic worldview, including: monotheism, iconoclasm, first principle as spirit, absence of conflict in the creation process, high view of humanity, reliability of God, God as supra-sexual, sex being desacralized, prohibition of magic, ethical obedience as a religious response and the importance of human-historical activity. By contrasting these concepts with those found among myths, Oswalt demonstrates that the Bible is indeed fundamentally different from mythology.

The second part of Oswalt's book deals with the issue of history. What does one really mean when they claim that the Bible is either historical or unhistorical? To investigate this, Oswalt looks at the different ways that ancient non-biblical texts recorded information, including: omens, king lists, date formulae, epics, royal annals and chronicles. Oswalt argues that ancient history writing was handicapped by its worldview of continuity. If all things are continuous, it is impossible to take seriously an individual person or event. On the other hand, the biblical view of God's transcendence provides a better environment for history writing as all events can be examined separately and individually. Unlike the myths, who may use a historical setting as a context for a moral message, the Bible presents itself as book where one personal God acts in history, using real historical people and makes himself known in real historical events. Oswalt is very well aware that not everyone agrees with his view of faith and history. Oswalt does take a look at other attempts to redefine the role of history by Rudolf Bultmann and Alfred North Whitehead, examining their positions and providing helpful critiques.

This book is a very helpful resource for biblical scholars. Although Oswalt is an Old Testament scholar and uses that knowledge in this study, Oswalt takes his investigation beyond the limits of Old Testament study. Oswalt does include the New Testament, myth scholarship and philosophy of history in his research. Oswalt is also open about his own bias as an evangelical Christian. This is not a weakness as every author has a bias, Oswalt is simply more honest. Oswalt does seem to make an attempt to not just repeat evangelical beliefs and he carefully interacts with opposing viewpoints. Oswalt does not take the position that the Bible is true because it says it is but rather by research into mythology and history, is able to argue persuasively that the Bible does not belong to the genre of mythology.

It is difficult to find any weaknesses in Oswalt's work. However, at one point Oswalt acknowledges the difficulties of numbers in the Old Testament and the challenges archaeology has presented for Old Testament historicity. Unfortunately, Oswalt does not provide the reader with any help in understanding these problems in the context of a historical Bible. He simply acknowledges that these problems exist but continues to assert the historicity of the Bible. Despite this one disappointment, *The Bible Among the Myths* is a very useful resource. It is very readable and helpful for the interested layperson and still has enough content to be valuable for scholars. John Oswalt has provided a very important work both for Old Testament studies in particular and Christian studies in general.

Stephen J. Bedard

Swinburne, Richard, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 373pp. Pbk. US\$49.95.

Richard Swinburne offers what may be his tour de force in "Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy". It is one of those rare books which forces one to think about and analyze every argument it contains. The work addresses claims of divine revelation.

The book starts off with a section on "Meaning" which analyzes terminology, presupposition, analogy and metaphor, and genre. He argues that presuppositions are not contained in the message conveyed in spoken or written word. He writes, "In order to separate statement from presupposition, we must ask, whatever the speaker's actual beliefs, are there any common beliefs of the culture presupposed in the utterance which can be siphoned off, leaving what the culture would naturally suppose to be its message intact?" (p. 30). This "siphoning" of meaning is necessary because "[a]lthough speakers may use declarative sentences for many different purposes... the paradigm job of such sentences is to convey information, to add to the hearer's stock of beliefs" (p. 29). Swinburne offers an example: suppose a Roman historian wrote that "The divine Augustus traveled to Brindisi." This sentence is not intended to convey the information that Augustus is divine. That Augustus is divine is *presupposed* by the author of the sentence. Rather,

the sentence is intended to tell the reader that Augustus traveled to Brindisi (p. 29).

The next part of the book argues for four possible tests to determine whether a divine revelation has occurred. These tests are 1) whether the content is the “kind of thing which God would have chosen to reveal to humans” 2) “whether the method of expression is one to be expected of God, 3) whether “the church has developed the original revelation in a way which plausibly brings out what was involved in it ...”, and 4) “whether the interpretations provide the sort of teaching which God would have chosen to give to humans” (pp. 107-108). He argues convincingly for each of these tests applying to the Christian Revelation. Thus, this section will be useful to the Christian apologist who wishes to demonstrate that Christianity interacts with the divine.

The third part of “Revelation” examines the Christian Revelation specifically. Swinburne argues that Jesus and His message were the “original revelation” provided to believers (pp. 145ff). This “original revelation” contained the teachings of Jesus, which Swinburne divides into five parts. These teachings are that Jesus is divine (pp. 145ff), that His death is a sacrifice for sin (pp. 150ff), His founding of the Church (pp. 151ff), that God loves His people and His people should “forgive each other and show unlimited love to each other” (pp. 154ff), and that the world would come to an end, at which point God would judge the world (pp. 156ff). These teachings are essential to Christianity, and Swinburne’s discussions are valuable. It is in his interpretations of the meanings of the Church and the Bible, however, wherein Swinburne forwards his most controversial claims.

Swinburne argues that the Church has a central place alongside Scripture in Christianity. The creedal statements central to Christian faith may not have been derived had it not been for the Church (pp. 189ff). Further, the Church acts as a method for assessing “rival interpretations” of various Scriptural truths (p. 200). It is undeniable that Swinburne advocates the Church as a high authority—perhaps even on a higher level than Scripture, for he argues that many conflicting interpretations of Scripture can receive almost equal footing on Scripture alone, so the Church is required to determine which of these should be approved. Swinburne’s view of the Church is one of the most important things in *Revelation* for the Christian to read and digest, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees. This is because one’s view of the authority of a church



body is vastly important with regards to how one views other doctrines. As Swinburne writes, "Which doctrines are to count as central Christian doctrines... depend[s] very much on which ecclesial bodies we judge to be part of the Church. The wider our Church, the fewer such doctrines there will be" (p. 214). If one takes only the Roman Catholic Church, for example, as a valid ecclesial body, then one's net of central Christian doctrines can include everything sanctioned by the Roman Catholics. But let us say they take the Orthodox, Roman, and Lutheran churches as authoritative. Then only those doctrines on which all these bodies agree can be regarded as central, or essential to, true faith, for if one church contains a doctrine which the others do not, it cannot be regarded as absolutely essential if the other churches are still legitimate. If it were essential and the other bodies disagreed, then those other bodies would not be legitimate, by the criterion of not agreeing on an essential Christian doctrine.

The Bible is the final major topic Swinburne addresses in "Revelation." What do genre, presuppositions, etc. tell us about the meaning and interpretation of Scripture? Swinburne argues that we must take Scripture as being entirely true, but he qualifies this claim by arguing we must also realize what Scripture is—a collection of books written with divine approval but by human hands. Thus, he argues, we should take great care to realize the difference between presupposition and message, history and allegory, etc. While I do not agree with Swinburne on every point, I find his insights particularly interesting. He notes that "[t]he falsity of the presuppositions does not, therefore... affect the truth-value of a sentence which uses them" (p. 244). This kind of argument can be of direct worth to the apologist. For example, Swinburne utilizes Genesis 8:2 ("The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained" ESV) as an example: "The sky has no windows out of which the rain comes, but the quoted sentence is just the author's way of saying, within the presuppositions of his culture, that the rain ceased" (pp. 244-245). This is a different approach apologetically than the one this reviewer would tend to favor, which would argue that the word "window" is used here in a metaphorical or analogous way.

Swinburne's high view of the church is necessary alongside his view of Scripture. Swinburne writes that "The slogan of Protestant confessions, 'the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself', is quite hopeless" (p. 255). For it is

the Church which determines acceptable interpretations of Scripture.

He writes that "Scripture belongs to the Church" (p. 256). Reading and interpreting Scripture requires a guide. This guide "...is the Church's theological definitions and other central teaching, its tradition of the proper way to interpret the Bible, and its tradition of how particular passages should be interpreted" (p. 256). Regardless of whether readers agree with Swinburne here, he raises valuable points of discussion.

*Revelation* is undoubtedly a work that is vital for the Christian philosopher of religion. The issues Swinburne addresses are necessary to the Christian faith and the answers he gives, while sometimes controversial, are thought-provoking. The ideas are complex enough that the work should be considered readable only for those with some background in philosophy, but for those Christians who have such a background, *Revelation* is essential reading.

J.W. Wartick

Berlinski, David. *The Devil's Delusion. Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions*. (Basic Books: New York, 2009) 256 pp. Pbk. US\$15.95.

Into a very crowded genre of books redressing Richard Dawkins and the new breed of militant atheists comes an interesting and thought provoking submission by David Berlinski. With intellectual depth, helpful insight and more than a little sarcastic humour, Berlinski crafts a very readable and helpful book intended for those who feel that there is something seriously amiss in the recent best-selling category of anti-religious literature. "While science has nothing of value to say on the great and aching questions of life, death, love, and meaning, what the religious traditions of mankind have said forms a coherent body of thought. The yearnings of the human soul are not in vain. There is a system of belief adequate to the complexity of experience. There is recompense for suffering. A principle beyond selfishness is at work in the cosmos. All will be well. I do not know whether any of this is true. I am certain that the scientific community does not know that it is false." (p. xvi)

Berlinski is a self-described 'secular Jew' who does not approach the questions of religion and faith as a believer, but rather,

as a member of the scientific community who cannot stomach the poorly developed and intellectually indefensible arguments of so-called "scientific atheists." This might come as a surprise to the reader since the title of the book suggests a conservative religious perspective. *The Devil's Delusion* avoids grounding itself in any particular religious tradition choosing instead to advocate Intelligent Design from the perspective of science and philosophy.

*The Devil's Delusion* offers a stimulating and compelling journey through the major questions raised by scientific atheists. Berlinski fearlessly and, at times, ruthlessly tears into the arguments presented by writers such as Daniel Dennett, Victor Stenger, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins. The overall tone of his writing is one of incredulity – as if Tom Sawyer has tricked everyone into white washing the fence and no one has the slightest clue about how they've been deceived. Not everyone will appreciate Berlinski's tone as it is sometimes very harsh and vitriolic but anyone who has ever been upset by those who have openly attacked belief in God will undoubtedly find his counter punches entertaining and, at times, amusing. "Christopher Hitchens is prepared to denounce the Vatican for the ease with which it diplomatically accommodated Hitler, but about Hitler, the Holocaust, or the Nazis themselves he has nothing to say." (p. 27)

It is with a marked economy of expression that Berlinski writes. At times, it leaves one wondering if the point he is making has been adequately grasped. At other times, one is astounded by the speed with which he is able to drive home his point.

"Astronomical observations continue to demonstrate," Victor Stenger affirms, "that the earth is no more significant than a single grain of sand on a vast beach." What astronomical observations may, in fact, have demonstrated is that the earth is no more *numerous* than a single grain of sand on a vast beach. *Significance* is, of course, otherwise." (p. 8)

What one quickly realizes about Berlinski is that he is a man of depth and breadth. He has taught both philosophy and mathematics in university but he is able to navigate these and other fields of knowledge with great dexterity and ability. As an example, in Chapter 4 he shows an intimate familiarity with Thomas Aquinas' cosmological argument which is immediately followed by a summary of the key people and events which led to the development of the big bang cosmology. Berlinski is able to move effortlessly between a staggeringly diverse body of knowledge.

Atheistic attacks often rest on the popularly held belief that science is trustworthy since it is founded on the bare facts of observable phenomena while religious thought is based on human ideas and wishes that are completely lacking in evidentiary proof. *The Devil's Delusion* deftly exposes the fallacy of this reasoning demonstrating that many contemporary theories such as the Multiverse and String Theory are highly speculative and lack any observable evidence. In fact, many contemporary theories in vogue today *cannot* be observed. Why then is Intelligent Design frequently dismissed by the scientific establishment because its central argument, the Designer, is not observable? Berlinski argues passionately that many scientific theories are based on extrapolation from observable phenomena to an unobservable cause. In this way, Intelligent Design represents a legitimate scientific perspective as a growing body of research will attest.

Berlinski's philosophical critique of the scientific atheist's central argument – that science displaces God as an explanation for the universe – is as elegant as it is brief. The foundation of scientific enquiry is to explain the physical world empirically without appealing to supernatural causes. But it is logically incongruous to conclude that there is no supernatural cause if this is also one's original assumption. The starting point and conclusion cannot be the same.

If there is one criticism of the book it would be that there are no references when quotations are presented leaving the reader to trust the accuracy of the writer's recollection. While this does not deal a death blow to the relevance of the work, it does impose a great limitation should a reader wish to pick up a theme or author in more detail. For those who prefer something more academic with a careful building of one's argument without so much rhetoric, this book may well disappoint. Still, for those who are willing to engage Berlinski in his quest to embarrass the academics who should know better than to speak into disciplines for which they lack any knowledge or education, *The Devil's Delusion* presents a highly entertaining romp through religion, science, mathematics and reason.

Jonathan Mills

Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 718 pp. Pbk. US\$40.00.

There are no lack of books on the resurrection of Jesus. Pastors, scholars, apologists and critics have all weighed in on the issue. It is fair to ask: After N.T. Wright's massive *Resurrection of the Son of God*, is there anything left to say on the matter? Michael Licona suggests there is and his newest book (based on his Ph.D. dissertation) demonstrates that he is correct.

The impetus for this book is the observation that there seems to be a great divide between current historical methodology and attempts to write biblical history. Most biblical scholars have no training in the area of philosophy of history. Licona asks the question: What would happen if one came to the resurrection of Jesus purely through the lens of standard historiographical methods rather than the type of historiography that has developed within the biblical guild?

In the first chapter, Licona familiarizes the reader with the approaches of historians outside the community of biblical scholars. Licona explains that in general, historians have moved beyond postmodern attempts to do history. There is an important need for the historian to manage their horizon, that is the set of presuppositions they bring to the subject. Complete neutrality is impossible, but the historian must seek to be as unbiased as possible. Finally, historians compare competing versions of the past and choose the version that is the best explanation of the evidence according to how they fulfill a number of criteria.

The second chapter tackles the difficult issue of how one speaks historically of what Christians consider a miraculous event. Licona examines the objections offered by David Hume, C.B. McCullagh, John Meier, Bart Ehrman, A.J.M. Wedderburn and James D.G. Dunn. Licona responds to each and explains that professional historians are expressing a new openness to examine miraculous events historically. The resurrection of Jesus is a valid event to investigate historically.

In the third chapter, Licona identifies the sources that he will use in his historiographical investigation. He examines each possible text and ranks them according to their usefulness. Licona concludes that the letters of Paul are the best historical sources for examining the resurrection.

In the fourth chapter, Licona mines his sources for the basic facts concerning the fate of Jesus. What emerges from the study is that 1) Jesus was crucified, 2) shortly thereafter, the disciples experienced something that led them to believe that Jesus had been raised, and 3) a few years later Paul converted based on what he thought was an experience with the risen Jesus. Although not included in what Licona calls the historical bedrock, he also examines the conversion of Jesus' skeptical brother James.

In the fifth chapter, Licona pulls it all together by examining a number of representative theories that attempt to deal with these facts. Licona investigates the proposals of Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, Gerd Lüdemann, John Dominic Crossan and Pieter Craffert. Each theory is graded based on their explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, ad hoc nature, and the potential to illuminate other historical events. While some are better than others, none of these theories pass all of the tests. Only the actual resurrection of Jesus from dead meets all five criteria and therefore is the best historical explanation for the evidence.

Licona's work is a valuable addition to historical Jesus research in general and the investigation into the resurrection in particular. However, there are a couple of concerns. In his examination of investigating miracles, Licona a number of times uses the illustration that his son can do with his help what the son cannot do on his own. In the same way, what would seem impossible for the historical Jesus to do on his own is completely possible with the intervention of God. That is a helpful illustration for settings such as Christian sermons or devotions but is perhaps less than useful in a historical investigation that seeks to be taken seriously by skeptics. It leaves the Christian with the option of leaning on God's omnipotence every time one encounters a historical difficulty.

The other problem is with Licona's decision to rely on the letters of Paul and to avoid reliance on the Gospels. Licona relies on Paul because there is greater scholarly consensus on the date, authorship and genre of Paul's letters than there is for the Gospels. At the same time, the anonymous nature of the Gospels, their slightly later date and more flexible genre should not disqualify them as historical sources (Licona does not ignore the Gospels, but makes clear his focus is on Paul). In addition, it could be argued that aside from 1 Corinthians 15, the Gospels have a more direct connection to the eyewitness experiences of those who saw Jesus after his resurrection. While, very likely that Paul saw the risen Jesus at his

conversion, there still is debate as to the nature of it as either a post-ascension physical appearance or as a vision from heaven (Licona argues well for an actual resurrection appearance).

Despite these concerns, *The Resurrection of Jesus* is an important book. For too long, scholarly disciplines have been isolated from each other. Licona's use of professional historical methods to the resurrection of Jesus is a breath of fresh air. Licona's examinations of competing theories is where he is at his best. Instead of misrepresenting critical theories in order to destroy a 'straw man', Licona confronts the theories head-on, not afraid to mention their strengths. Licona is respectful toward these theories and the scholars behind them, but he does not back down in keeping them accountable to historical method. This book is a book that is long overdue. Licona, himself points out areas on where the conversation can move forward and where to build on his work. This is an essential book for anyone, Christian or skeptic, who is interested in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Stephen J. Bedard

Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 591 pp. Hdbk. US\$29.99.

Eric Metaxas is a versatile author, working on such projects as books on Wilberforce and Veggie Tales cartoons. This time, Metaxas turns his attention to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This is an important figure to write on as he is both well and little known. Many Christians are familiar with the name, may have heard of the phrase 'cheap grace' and are vaguely aware that Bonhoeffer participated in some assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler. Beyond that, Bonhoeffer is mostly a mystery to the average reader.

Metaxas takes the reader on a journey through Bonhoeffer's life. Beginning with his family, Metaxas paints a picture of Bonhoeffer's childhood. Much space is given to setting up the intellectual and cultural context to Bonhoeffer, while at the same time revealing the circumstances that would allow the Nazis to come to power. Bonhoeffer was early recognized as a brilliant student. He excelled at his theological studies and learned from some of the

greatest German scholars. Bonhoeffer studied under Adolf von Harnack and, while disagreeing with his liberal theology, was able to take his commitment to detail and apply it to his own studies. Metaxas also provides information concerning Bonhoeffer's relationship with Karl Barth and the impact of his theology.

As Hitler rose to power, there was increasing challenges for the church. Anti-semitism gradually increased, leading ultimately to the holocaust. The so-called 'German Christians,' those who gave in to the Nazi agenda, attempted to remove all Jewish influence and imagery from Christianity. Their attempts led to something that could no longer be recognized as Christianity. Responding to this, Bonhoeffer and others worked toward creating a confessing church, one that took biblical theology seriously. As Nazi violence increased, Bonhoeffer was sent to safety in America to teach at Union Seminary in New York. While still on the journey to America, Bonhoeffer realized that this was a mistake. Bonhoeffer soon returned to Germany and began some illegal seminaries to teach confessing pastors. As the situation deteriorated, it became apparent that things would not get better as long as Hitler was in power. Bonhoeffer was already connected with Germans open to assassinating Hitler and he eventually joined the plot. When the attempt failed, all those involved were imprisoned. While we do not have any of Bonhoeffer's writings from his last days, we do have accounts from other participants. Bonhoeffer went to his death with courage and confidence in eternal life.

What use does this book have in the area of apologetics? First of all, it is still claimed by skeptics that Hitler was a Christian and that the holocaust is an example of the evils of religion. Metaxas does a good job of demonstrating Hitler's contempt for Christianity and his willingness to use it temporarily for his own purposes. More importantly, Metaxas portrays Bonhoeffer as an apologist, even though he does not use that term. Bonhoeffer was a brilliant theologian who was willing to question the liberal assumptions of contemporary German scholarship. Bonhoeffer worked to keep orthodox theology centre, eventually leading to the creation of the confessing church. Even within the confessing church, Bonhoeffer was continually challenging them to remain loyal to biblical teachings.

The situation today is both different and similar to Bonhoeffer's. We do not experience the severe persecution under regimes such as the Nazis. However, there is continual pressure to compromise and to give in to trends and cultural changes. While the



result of remaining loyal to the Gospel are not likely to lead to time in a concentration camp, there is much we can learn from Bonhoeffer. We need to continually deepen our biblical and theological understanding, learning from the best in scholarship. It is from a keen mind and a passionate love for God that the church can respond to internal and external challenges. Bonhoeffer was able to see the best in other traditions (even having a great desire learn from Gandhi) and was willing to question his own traditions. All of this was based on what the Bible taught, testing all to the teachings of Jesus.

*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* is a well written and compelling book. If the reader is willing, it can be an inspiration to become a better scholar, pastor, Christian and even apologist. There is an opportunity to learn from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to share the passion for God's Word and the faithfulness of the Christian Church. Those familiar with Bonhoeffer's writings will appreciate the greater context in which they were written. This book is highly recommended for all Christians for both challenge and encouragement.

Stephen J. Bedard