The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Article by W. H. Griffith Thomas

Contents

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ ................................................................. 2
1. First Proof: The Life of Jesus ..................................................................... 2
2. Second Proof: The Empty Grave .............................................................. 2
3. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples .......................................... 4
4. Fourth Proof: Existence Of The Primitive Church .................................. 5
5. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul .............................................................. 6
7. Summary and Conclusion ........................................................................ 8
8. Theology of the Resurrection ................................................................. 9
Literature ...................................................................................................... 9

About the author:

W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) was born and raised in England. He received his B.A. from King’s College, London and his D.D. from Oxford (in England Doctor of Divinity is an earned, not an honorary degree). In Canada he taught at Wycliffe Hall, Toronto. Moving to Philadelphia as his headquarters, he maintained a wide writing and preaching ministry in North America, Britain, and elsewhere. He was a prime mover in the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924, the year he died.

Posted by Theologue (theologue.wordpress.com)

---

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Resurrection has always been felt to be vital in connection with Christianity. As a consequence, opponents have almost always concentrated their attacks, and Christians have centered their defense, upon it. It is therefore of the utmost importance to give attention to the subject, as it appears in the New Testament. There are several converging lines of evidence, and none can be overlooked. Each must have its place and weight. The issues at stake are so serious that nothing must be omitted.

1. First Proof: The Life of Jesus

The first proof is the life of Jesus Christ Himself. It is always a disappointment when a life which commenced well finishes badly. We have this feeling even in fiction; instinct demands that a story should end well. Much more is this true of Jesus Christ. A perfect life characterized by divine claims ends in its prime in a cruel and shameful death. Is that a fitting close? Surely death could not end everything after such a noble career. The Gospels give the resurrection as the completion of the picture of Jesus Christ. There is no real doubt that Christ anticipated His own resurrection. At first He used only vague terms, such as, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But later on He spoke plainly, and whenever He mentioned His death, He added, "The Son of man .... must be raised the third day." These references are too numerous to be overlooked, and, in spite of difficulties of detail, they are, in any proper treatment of the Gospels, an integral part of the claim made for Himself by Jesus Christ (Mt 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9,23; 20:19; 27:63; Mt 8:31; 9:9,31; 10:34; 14:58; Lu 9:22; 18:33; Joh 2:19-21). His veracity is at stake if He did not rise. Surely the word of such a One must be given due credence. We are therefore compelled to face the fact that the resurrection of which the Gospels speak is the resurrection of no ordinary man, but of Jesus--that is of One whose life and character had been unique, and for whose shameful death no proper explanation was conceivable (Denhey, Jesus and the Gospel, 122 f). Is it possible that, in view of His perfect truthfulness of word and deed, there should be such an anti-climax as is involved in a denial of His assurance that He would rise again (C.H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection, 30)?

Consider, too, the death of Christ in the light of His perfect life. If that death was the close of a life so beautiful, so remarkable, so Godlike, we are faced with an insoluble mystery--the permanent triumph of wrong over right, and the impossibility of believing in truth or justice in the world (C.H. Robinson, op. cit., 36). So the resurrection is not to be regarded as an isolated event, a fact in the history of Christ separated from all else. It must be taken in close connection with what precedes. The true solution of the problem is to be found in that estimate of Christ which "most entirely fits in with the totality of the facts" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 14).

2. Second Proof: The Empty Grave

Another line of proof is the fact of the empty grave and the disappearance of the body. That Jesus died and was buried, and that on the third morning the tomb was empty, is not now seriously challenged. The theory of a swoon and a recovery in the tomb is impossible, and to it Strauss "practically gives its deathblow" (Orr, op. cit., 43). At Christ's burial a stone was rolled before the tomb, the tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed before it. Yet on the third morning the body had disappeared, and the tomb was empty. There are only two alternatives. His body must have been taken out of the grave by human hands or else by superhuman power. If the hands were human, they must have been those of His friends or of His foes. If His friends had wished to take out His body, the question at once arises whether they could have done so in the face of the stone, the seal and the guard. If His foes had contemplated this action, the question arises whether they would seriously have considered it. It is extremely improbable that any effort should have been made to remove the body out of the reach of the disciples. Why should His enemies do the very thing that would be most likely to spread the report of His resurrection? As Chrysostom said, "If the body had been stolen, they could not have stolen it naked, because of the delay in stripping it of the burial clothes and the trouble caused by the drugs adhering to it" (quoted in Day, Evidence for the Resurrection, 35). Besides, the position of the grave-clothes proves the impossibility of the theft of the body (see Greek of Joh 20:6,7; 11:44; Grimley, Temple of Humanity, 69, 70;
Latham, The Risen Master; The Expository Times, XIII, 293 f; XIV, 510). How, too, is it possible to account for the failure of the Jews to disprove the resurrection? Not more than seven weeks afterward Peter preached in that city the fact that Jesus had been raised. What would have been easier or more conclusive than for the Jews to have produced the dead body and silenced Peter forever? "The silence of the Jews is as significant as the speech of the Christians" (Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ, 357).

The fact of the empty tomb with the disappearance of the body remains a problem to be faced. It is now admitted that the evidence for the empty tomb is adequate, and that it was part of the primitive belief (Foundations, 134, 154). It is important to realize the force of this admission, because it is a testimony to Paul's use of the term "third day" (see below) and to the Christian observance of the first day of the week. And yet in spite of this we are told that a belief in the empty tomb is impossible. By some writers the idea of resurrection is interpreted to mean the revival of Christ's spiritual influence on the disciples, which had been brought to a close by His death. It is thought that the essential idea and value of Christ's resurrection can be conserved, even while the belief in His bodily rising from the grave is surrendered (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 23). But how can we believe in the resurrection while we regard the basis of the primitive belief in it as a mistake, not to say a fraud? The disciples found the tomb empty, and on the strength of this they believed He had risen. How can the belief be true if the foundation be false? Besides, the various forms of the vision-theory are now gradually but surely being regarded as inadequate and impossible. They involve the change of almost every fact in the Gospel history, and the invention of new scenes and conditions of which the Gospels know nothing (Orr, op. cit., 222). It has never been satisfactorily shown why the disciples should have had this abundant experience of visions; nor why they should have had it so soon after the death of Christ and within a strictly limited period; nor why it suddenly ceased. The disciples were familiar with the apparition of a spirit, like Samuel's, and with the resuscitation of a body, like Lazarus', but what they had not experienced or imagined was the fact of a spiritual body, the combination of body and spirit in an entirely novel way. So the old theory of a vision is now virtually set aside, and for it is substituted theory of a real spiritual manifestation of the risen Christ. The question at once arises whether this is not prompted by an unconscious but real desire to get rid of anything like a physical resurrection. Whatever may be true of unbelievers, this is an impossible position for those who believe Christ is alive.

Even though we may be ready to admit the reality of telepathic communication, it is impossible to argue that this is equivalent to the idea of resurrection. Psychical research has not proceeded far enough as yet to warrant arguments being built on it, though in any case it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain material from this quarter which will answer to the conditions of the physical resurrection recorded in the New Testament. "The survival of the soul is not resurrection." "Whoever heard of a spirit being buried?" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 229).

In view of the records of the Gospels and the general testimony of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" as to what happened at the grave of Jesus, even though we are quite sure that He who died now lives and reigns. It is sometimes said that faith is not bound up with, holding a particular view of the relations of Christ's present glory with the body that was once in Joseph's tomb, that faith is to be exercised in the exalted Lord, and that belief in a resuscitation of the human body is no vital part of it. It is no doubt true that faith today is to be exercised solely in the exalted and glorified Lord, but faith must ultimately rest on fact, and it is difficult to understand how Christian faith can really be "agnostic" with regard to the facts about the empty tomb and the risen body, which are so prominent in the New Testament, and which form an essential part of the apostolic witness. The attempt to set faith and historical evidence in opposition to each other, which is so marked a characteristic of much modern thought will never satisfy general Christian intelligence, and if there is to be any real belief in the historical character of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" about facts that are writ so large on the face of the records. When once the evidence for the empty tomb is allowed to be adequate, the impossibility of any other explanation than that indicated in the New Testament is at once seen. The evidence must be accounted for and adequately explained. And so we come again to the insuperable barrier of
the empty tomb, which, together with the apostolic witness, stands impregnable against all the attacks of visionary and apparitional theories. It is becoming more evident that these theories are entirely inadequate to account for the records in the Gospels, as well as for the place and power of those Gospels in the early church and in all subsequent ages. The force of the evidence for the empty grave and the disappearance of the body is clearly seen by the explanations suggested by various modern writers (those of Oscar Holtzmann, K. Lake, and A. Meyer can be seen in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, chapter viii, and that of Reville in C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, 69; see also the article by Streeter in Foundations). Not one of them is tenable without doing violence to the Gospel story, and also without putting forth new theories which are not only improbable in themselves, but are without a shred of real historical or literary evidence. The one outstanding fact which baffles all these writers is the empty grave.

Others suggest that resurrection means a real objective appearance of the risen Christ without implying any physical reanimation, that the "resurrection of Christ was an objective reality, but was not a physical resuscitation" (C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, 12). But the difficulty here is as to the meaning of the term "resurrection." If it means a return from the dead, a rising again, must there not have been some identity between that which was put in the tomb and the "objective reality" which appeared to the disciples? Wherein lies the essential difference between an objective vision and an objective appearance? If we believe the apostolic testimony to the empty tomb, why may we not accept their evidence to the actual resurrection? They evidently recognized their Master, and this recognition must have been due to some familiarity with His bodily appearance. No difficulty of conceiving of the resurrection of mankind hereafter must be allowed to set aside the plain facts of the record about Christ. It is, of course, quite clear that the resurrection body of Jesus was not exactly the same as when it was put in the tomb, but it is equally clear that there was definite identity as well as definite dissimilarity, and both elements must be faced and accounted for. There need be no insuperable difficulty if we believe that in the very nature of things Christ's resurrection must be unique, and, since the life and work of Jesus Christ transcend our experience (as they certainly should do), we must not expect to bring them within the limitations of natural law and human history. How the resurrection body was sustained is a problem quite outside our ken, though the reference to "flesh and bones," compared with Paul's words about "flesh and blood" not being able to enter the kingdom of God, may suggest that while the resurrection body was not constituted upon a natural basis through blood, yet that it possessed "all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature" (Church of England Article IV). We may not be able to solve the problem, but we must hold fast to all the facts, and these may be summed up by saying that the body was the same though different, different though the same. The true description of the resurrection seems to be that "it was an objective reality, but, that it was not merely a physical resuscitation." We are therefore brought back to a consideration of the facts recorded in the Gospels as to the empty tomb and the disappearance of the body, and we only ask for an explanation which will take into consideration all the facts recorded, and will do no violence to any part of the evidence. To predicate a new resurrection body in which Christ appeared to His disciples does not explain how in three days' time the body which had been placed in the tomb was disposed of. Does not this theory demand a new miracle of its own (Kennett, Interpreter, V, 271)?

3. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples

The next line of proof to be considered is the transformation of the disciples caused by the resurrection. They had seen their Master die, and through that death they lost all hope. Yet hope returned three days after. On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty. When the message of the resurrection first came they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but when once they became assured they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time? The mere removal of the body from the grave could never have transformed their spirits and characters. Three days are not enough for a legend to spring up which should so affect them. Time is needed for a process of legendary growth. There is nothing more striking in the history of primitive Christianity than this
marvelous change wrought in the disciples by a belief in the resurrection of their Master. It is a psychological
fact that demands a full explanation. The disciples were prepared to believe in the appearance of a spirit, but
they never contemplated the possibility of a resurrection (see Mt 16:11). Men do not imagine what they do not
believe, and the women's intention to embalm a corpse shows they did not expect His resurrection. Besides, a
hallucination involving five hundred people at once, and repeated several times during forty days, is
unthinkable. 4. Fourth Proof: Existence of the Primitive Church:

From this fact of the transformation of personal life in so incredibly short a space of time, we proceed to the
next line of proof, the existence of the primitive church. "There is no doubt that the church of the apostles
believed in the resurrection of their Lord" (Burkitt, The Gospel History and Its Transmission, 74).

It is now admitted on all hands that the church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the
resurrection of Christ. When we consider its commencement, as recorded in the Book of the Acts of the
Apostles, we see two simple and incontrovertible facts:

(1) the Christian society was gathered together by preaching;
(2) the substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was put to death on a
cross, and would therefore be rejected by Jews as accursed of God (De 21:23).

Yet multitudes of Jews were led to worship Him (Acts 2:41), and a great company of priests to obey Him (Acts
6:7). The only explanation of these facts is God's act of resurrection (Acts 2:36), for nothing short of it could
have led to the Jewish acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The apostolic church is thus a result of a
belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The early chapters of Acts bear the marks of primitive documents, and
their evidence is unmistakable. It is impossible to allege that the early church did not know its own history, that
myths and legends quickly grew up and were eagerly received, and that the writers of the Gospels had no
conscience for principle, but manipulated their material at will, for any modern church could easily give an
account of its history for the past fifty years or more (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 144). And it is simply
absurd to think that the earliest church had no such capability. In reality there was nothing vague or intangible
about the testimony borne by the apostles and other members of the church. "As the church is too holy for a
foundation of rottenness, so she is too real for a foundation of mist" (Archbishop Alexander, The Great
Question, 10).

4. Fourth Proof: Existence Of The Primitive Church

From this fact of the transformation of personal life in so incredibly short a space of time, we proceed to the
next line of proof, the existence of the primitive church. "There is no doubt that the church of the apostles
believed in the resurrection of their Lord" (Burkitt, The Gospel History and Its Transmission, 74).

It is now admitted on all hands that the church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the
resurrection of Christ. When we consider its commencement, as recorded in the Book of the Acts of the
Apostles, we see two simple and incontrovertible facts: (1) the Christian society was gathered together by
preaching; (2) the substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was put to death
on a cross, and would therefore be rejected by Jews as accursed of God (De 21:23). Yet multitudes of Jews were
led to worship Him (Acts 2:41), and a great company of priests to obey Him (Acts 6:7). The only explanation of
these facts is God's act of resurrection (Acts 2:36), for nothing short of it could have led to the Jewish
acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The apostolic church is thus a result of a belief in the resurrection
of Jesus Christ. The early chapters of Acts bear the marks of primitive documents, and their evidence is
unmistakable. It is impossible to allege that the early church did not know its own history, that myths and
legends quickly grew up and were eagerly received, and that the writers of the Gospels had no conscience for
principle, but manipulated their material at will, for any modern church could easily give an account of its history for the past fifty years or more (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 144). And it is simply absurd to think that the earliest church had no such capability. In reality there was nothing vague or intangible about the testimony borne by the apostles and other members of the church. "As the church is too holy for a foundation of rottenness, so she is too real for a foundation of mist" (Archbishop Alexander, The Great Question, 10).

5. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul

One man in the apostolic church must, however, be singled out as a special witness to the resurrection. The conversion and work of Saul of Tarsus is our next line of proof. Attention is first called to the evidence of his life and writings to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some years ago an article appeared (E. Medley, The Expositor, V, iv, 359) inquiring as to the conception of Christ which would be suggested to a heathen inquirer by a perusal of Paul's earliest extant writing, I Thessalonians. One point at least would stand out clearly—that Jesus Christ was killed (2:15; 4:14) and was raised from the dead (4:14). As this Epistle is usually dated about 51 AD—that is, only about 22 years after the resurrection—and as the same Epistle plainly attributes to Jesus Christ the functions of God in relation to men (1:1,6; 2:14; 3:11), we can readily see the force of this testimony to the resurrection. Then a few years later, in an epistle which is universally accepted as one of Paul's, we have a much fuller reference to the event. In the well-known chapter (1 Cor 15) where he is concerned to prove (not Christ's resurrection, but) the resurrection of Christians, he naturally adduces Christ's resurrection as his greatest evidence, and so gives a list of the various appearances of Christ, ending with one to himself, which he puts on an exact level with the others: "Last of all he was seen of me also." Now it is essential to give special attention to the nature and particularity of this testimony. "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3 f). This, as it has often been pointed out, is our earliest authority for the appearances of Christ after the resurrection, and dates from within 30 years of the event itself. But there is much more than this: "He affirms that within 5 years of the crucifixion of Jesus he was taught that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures' " (Kennett, Interpreter, V, 267). And if we seek to appreciate the full bearing of this act and testimony we have a right to draw the same conclusion: "That within a very few years of the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was, in the mind of at least one man of education, absolutely irrefutable" (Kennett, op. cit., V, 267).

Besides, we find this narrative includes one small but significant statement which at once recalls a very definite feature of the Gospel tradition—the mention of "the third day." A reference to the passage in the Gospels where Jesus Christ spoke of His resurrection will show how prominent and persistent was this note of time. Why, then, should Paul have introduced it in his statement? Was it part of the teaching which he had "received"? What is the significance of this plain emphasis on the date of the resurrection? Is it not that it bears absolute testimony to the empty tomb? From all this it may be argued that Paul believed the story of the empty tomb at a date when the recollection was fresh, when he could examine it for himself, when he could make the fullest possible inquiry of others, and when the fears and opposition of enemies would have made it impossible for the adherents of Jesus Christ to make any statement that was not absolutely true. "Surely common sense requires us to believe that that for which he so suffered was in his eyes established beyond the possibility of doubt" (Kennett, op. cit., V, 271).

In view, therefore, of Paul's personal testimony to his own conversion, his interviews with those who had seen Jesus Christ on earth before and after His resurrection, and the prominence given to the resurrection in the apostle's own teaching, we may challenge attention afresh to this evidence for the resurrection. It is well known that Lord Lytton and his friend Gilbert West left Oxford University at the close of one academic year, each determining to give attention respectively during the long vacation to the conversion of Paul and the resurrection of Christ, in order to prove the baselessness of both. They met again in the autumn and compared
experiences. Lord Lyttelton had become convinced of the truth of Paul's conversion, and Gilbert West was convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Paul's 25 years of suffering and service for Christ were a reality, his conversion was true, for everything he did began with that sudden change. And if his conversion was true, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for everything Paul was and did he attributed to the sight of the risen Christ.

6. Sixth Proof: The Gospel Record

The next line of proof of the resurrection is the record in the Gospels of the appearances of the risen Christ, and it is the last in order to be considered. By some writers it is put first, but this is in forgetfulness of the dates when the Gospels were written. The resurrection was believed in by the Christian church for a number of years before our Gospels were written, and it is therefore impossible for these records to be our primary and most important evidence. We must get behind them if we are to appreciate fully the force and variety of the evidence. It is for this reason that, following the proper logical order, we have reserved to the last our consideration of the appearances of the risen Christ as given in the Gospels. The point is one of great importance (Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, 111).

Now, with this made clear, we proceed to consider the evidence afforded by the records of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Modern criticism of the Gospels during recent years has tended to adopt the view that Mark is the earliest, and that Matthew and Luke are dependent on it. This is said to be "the one solid result" (W. C. Allen, "St. Matthew," International Critical Commentary, Preface, vii; Burkitt, The Gospel History, 37) of the literary criticism of the Gospels. If this is so, the question of the records of the resurrection becomes involved in the difficult problem about the supposed lost ending of Mark, which, according to modern criticism, would thus close without any record of an appearance of the risen Christ. On this point, however, two things may be said at the present juncture: (1) There are some indications that the entire question of the criticism of the Gospels is to be reopened (Ramsay, Luke the Physician, chapter ii; see also Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 63 ff). (2) Even if the current theory be accepted, it would not seriously weaken the intrinsic force of the evidence for the resurrection, because, after all, Mark does not invent or "doctor" his material, but embodies the common apostolic tradition of his time (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 62).

We may, therefore, meanwhile examine the record of the appearances without finding them essentially affected by any particular theory of the origin and relations of the Gospels. There are two sets of appearances, one in Jerusalem and the other in Galilee, and their number, and the amplitude and weight of their testimony should be carefully estimated. While we are precluded by our space from examining each appearance minutely, and indeed it is unnecessary for our purpose to do so, it is impossible to avoid calling attention to two of them. No one can read the story of the walk to Emmaus (Lu 24), or of the visit of Peter and John to the tomb (Joh 20), without observing the striking marks of reality and personal testimony in the accounts. As to the former incident: "It carries with it, as great literary critics have pointed out, the deepest inward evidences of its own literal truthfulness. For it so narrates the intercourse of 'a risen God' with commonplace men as to set natural and supernatural side by side in perfect harmony. And to do this has always been the difficulty, the despair of imagination. The alternative has been put reasonably thus: Luke was either a greater poet, a more creative genius, than Shakespeare, or--he did not create the record. He had an advantage over Shakespeare. The ghost in Hamlet was an effort of laborious imagination. The risen Christ on the road was a fact supreme, and the Evangelist did but tell it as it was" (Bishop Moule, Meditations for the Church's Year, 108). Other writers whose attitude to the Gospel records is very different bear the same testimony to the impression of truth and reality made upon them by the Emmaus narrative (A. Meyer and K. Lake, quoted in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 176 ff).

It is well known that there are difficulties connected with the number and order of these appearances, but they are probably due largely to the summary character of the story, and certainly are not sufficient to invalidate the
uniform testimony to the two facts: (1) the empty grave, (2) the appearances of Christ on the third day. These are the main facts of the combined witness (Orr, op. cit., 212).

The very difficulties which have been observed in the Gospels for nearly nineteen centuries are a testimony to a conviction of the truth of the narratives on the part of the whole Christian church. The church has not been afraid to leave these records as they are because of the facts that they embody and express. If there had been no difficulties men might have said that everything had been artificially arranged, whereas the differences bear testimony to the reality of the event recorded. The fact that we possess these two sets of appearances--one in Jerusalem and one in Galilee--is really an argument in favor of their credibility, for if it had been recorded that Christ appeared in Galilee only, or Jerusalem only, it is not unlikely that the account might have been rejected for lack of support. It is well known that records of eyewitnesses often vary in details, while there is no question as to the events themselves. The various books recording the story of the Indian mutiny, or the surrender of Napoleon III at Sedan are cases in point, and Sir William Ramsay has shown the entire compatibility of certainty as to the main fact with great uncertainty as to precise details (Ramsay, Paul the Traveler, 29). We believe, therefore, that a careful examination of these appearances will afford evidence of a chain of circumstances extending from the empty grave to the day of the ascension.

7. Summary and Conclusion

When we examine carefully all these converging lines of evidence and endeavor to give weight to all the facts of the case, it seems impossible to escape from the problem of a physical miracle. That the prima facie view of the evidence afforded by the New Testament suggests a miracle and that the apostles really believed in a true physical resurrection are surely beyond all question. And yet very much of present-day thought refuses to accept the miraculous. The scientific doctrine of the uniformity and continuity of Nature bars the way, so that from the outset it is concluded that miracles are impossible. We are either not allowed to believe (see Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 44), or else we are told that we are not required to believe (C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, chapter ii), margin, the reanimation of a dead body. If we take this view, "there is no need, really, for investigation of evidence: the question is decided before the evidence is looked at" (Orr, op. cit., 46).

We challenge the tenableness of this position. It proves too much. We are not at all concerned by the charge of believing in the abnormal or unusual. New things have happened from the beginning of the present natural order, and the Christian faith teaches that Christ Himself was a "new thing," and that His coming as "God manifest in the flesh" was something absolutely unique. If we are not allowed to believe in any divine intervention which we may call supernatural or miraculous, it is impossible to account for the Person of Christ at all. "A Sinless Personality would be a miracle in time." Arising out of this, Christianity itself was unique, inaugurating a new era in human affairs. No Christian, therefore, can have any difficulty in accepting the abnormal, the unusual, the miraculous. If it be said that no amount of evidence can establish a fact which is miraculous, we have still to account for the moral miracles which are really involved and associated with the resurrection, especially the deception of the disciples, who could have found out the truth of the case; a deception, too, that has proved so great a blessing to the world. Surely to those who hold a true theistic view of the world this a priori view is impossible. Are we to refuse to allow to God at least as much liberty as we possess ourselves? Is it really thinkable that God has less spontaneity of action than we have? We may like or dislike, give or withhold, will or not will, but the course of Nature must flow on unbrokenly. Surely God cannot be conceived of as having given such a constitution to the universe as limits His power to intervene if necessary and for sufficient purpose with the work of His own hands. Not only are all things of Him, but all things are through Him, and to Him. The resurrection means the presence of miracle, and "there is no evading the issue with which this confronts us" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 53). Unless, therefore, we are prepared to accept the possibility of the miraculous, all explanation of the New Testament evidence is a pure waste of time.
Of recent years attempts have been made to account for the resurrection by means of ideas derived from Babylonian and other Eastern sources. It is argued that mythology provides the key to the problem, that not only analogy but derivation is to be found. But apart from the remarkable variety of conclusions of Babylonian archaeologists there is nothing in the way of historical proof worthy of the name. The whole idea is arbitrary and baseless, and prejudiced by the attitude to the supernatural. There is literally no link of connection between these oriental cults and the Jewish and Christian beliefs in the resurrection.

And so we return to a consideration of the various lines of proof. Taking them singly, they must be admitted to be strong, but taking them altogether, the argument is cumulative and sufficient. Every effect must have its adequate cause, and the only proper explanation of Christianity today is the resurrection of Christ. Thomas Arnold of Rugby, no ordinary judge of historical evidence, said that the resurrection was the "best-attested fact in human history." Christianity welcomes all possible sifting, testing, and use by those who honestly desire to arrive at the truth, and if they will give proper attention to all the facts and factors involved, we believe they will come to the conclusion expressed years ago by the Archbishop of Armagh, that the resurrection is the rock from which all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment (The Great Question, 24).

8. Theology of the Resurrection

The theology of the resurrection is very important and calls for special attention. Indeed, the prominence given to it in the New Testament affords a strong confirmation of the fact itself, for it seems incredible that such varied and important truths should not rest on historic fact. The doctrine may briefly be summarized:

1) evidential: the resurrection is the proof of the atoning character of the death of Christ, and of His Deity and divine exaltation (Rom 1:4);
2) evangelistic: the primitive gospel included testimony to the resurrection as one of its characteristic features, thereby proving to the hearers the assurance of the divine redemption (1 Cor 15:1-4; Rom 4:25);
3) spiritual: the resurrection is regarded as the source and standard of the holiness of the believer. Every aspect of the Christian life from the beginning to the end is somehow associated therewith (Rom 6); 4) eschatological: the resurrection is the guaranty and model of the believer’s resurrection (1 Cor 15). As the bodies of the saints arose (Mt 27:52), so ours are to be quickened (Rom 8:11), and made like Christ’s glorified body (Php 3:21), thereby becoming spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:44), that is, bodies ruled by their spirits and yet bodies.

These points offer only the barest outline of the fullness of New Testament teaching concerning the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ.

Literature

James Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, 1908;
W. J. Sparrow Simpson, The Resurrection and Modern Thought;

Very full literary references in Bowen, The Resurrection in the New Testament, 1911, which, although negative in its own conclusions, contains a valuable refutation of many negative arguments.