

A Brief Analysis of The Historicity of Jesus' Resurrection

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Abstract

The resurrection of Jesus has been a debatable subject since the beginning of the 1st century AD; in as much as it is simple and easy to believe in the resurrection of Christ for Christians, it is not quite so in the world today, where skepticism and agnosticism dominate the culture. In the last two centuries, with various revolutions emerging, due to the prevalence of naturalistic view in the literature world, and theology, in particular, several leading scholars started a quest to re-study the historicity of Jesus' resurrection and subsequently considered the four accounts of the four gospels to be merely a myth. This article attempts to briefly analyze the quest and, most importantly, provide legitimate evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this article, the gospels' account is considered ancient literature since our main priority is to know whether it is historical. Therefore, the historicity of the gospel account is analyzed through the methodology employed by both the secular and religious scholars, which in turn makes the study not biased. The analysis concludes and reclaims that the account of the gospel is historical.

Keywords: Resurrection, Christians, Theology, History, Jesus Christ, Early Christianity.

Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus is a pivotal truth in Christian beliefs (Hasel 2011, 1). This belief, however, has been controversial since the beginning of Jesus' resurrection. The empty tomb is not considered to be supernaturally possible. Thus, they "attributed to grave robbery" (Matt 28:11-15), and the "idea of resurrection" was considered foolishness (Acts 26:24) (Evans, 2004, p. 3). Generally, every Christian will admit that Jesus' resurrection is the pillar of Christian faith and belief. Apostle Paul noticed the vital importance of this principle, saying, "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in sins" (1 Cor 15:14-17). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was proof of His divinity, according to Paul (Rom 1:4), and it is an assurance for humanity of the resurrection in the future (1 Cor 15: 20).

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For this reason, several works of literature deal with Christ's resurrection (Licona, 2008; Licona, 2010; Wright, 2012; Licona & Habermas, 2004; Vincent, 2013; Craig, 2000). Gary Habermas (2005) states that the historical Jesus is the most exciting subject in North America (p.135). He mentions further that since 1975, there have been more than 1400 scholarly publications on the death and resurrection of Jesus (p.153). Marcus Borg also stated that the renaissance occurred in North America concerning Jesus' studies (Borg, 1988, pp. 280-92). On the other hand, several pieces of literature written against Jesus' resurrection are also available. For instance, Michael Martin authored *The Case Against Christianity* to argue against the evidence of the reliability of Jesus' resurrection (Martin, 1991, pp. 76-77). He assumed that the gospel account of the resurrection story was inconsistent (81). Other theories, such as "Hallucination Theories," was popularized, similarly against the evidence of Jesus' resurrection (Ludemann, 1995; 2004). Habermas also reviewed the hallucination theory popularized by David Strauss (Habermas, 2001, pp. 26-27).

John Dominic Crossan did not believe in the literalness of the resurrection (Crossan, 1991, p. 571). Borg possessed the same idea as Crossan that the resurrection is the "entry into another kind or mode of existence, one beyond death, space and time" (Borg, 1995, pp. 6-16). It is also believed that the historical Jesus differs from the Jesus of the gospel accounts (McKnight, 1995, pp. 51-72). Albert Schweitzer, a Lutheran theologian, produced a book that dealt with a survey on the controversy on the historicity of Jesus in 1906, which was translated into English in 1910 by William Montgomery and compiled the origin of the quest of his days (Schweitzer, 1910). In 1953, the new quest began with Ernst Kasemann, who lectured on "The Problem of Historical Jesus" at the University of Marburg; however, in the early 1970s, the quest had gone unrecognized (Kasemann, 1964; Witherington, 1997). The quest was renewed again in the 1980s, becoming the third one, according to N. T. Wright (Anderson, 2007, p. 127). Out of the investigations comes several conclusions, one of which could be Christ and gospel narrative as a myth (Strauss, 2009). Thus, the controversy of the historical Jesus demands one to re-analyze the possible rationale for the resurrection of Jesus.

Though every orthodox Christian believes Jesus' resurrection is a historical event, historical criticism has relegated the subject of Jesus' resurrection to a myth. As a result, it rejects the four Gospels' miracles or supernatural acts (Drews 2021, Digital Edition). Because this criticism has impacted the cornerstone of Christian belief, it is critical to comprehend the criterion for the veracity of Jesus' resurrection. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to analyze the event of the resurrection of Jesus from inside and outside the Bible, attempting to overview the argument several scholars have proposed to bring historical reliability according to the methodology employed by both religious and secular scholars.

The significance of this article could be the brief review of the argument in the history of the quest on the Historical Jesus, Christ Myth theory, and the general apologetical responses. Though the study can be vastly extendable in surveying each view and argument of the scholars, from the first quest to the third quest on the original Jesus and Christ Myth theory, this article will only focus on resurrections about the investigations of historical Jesus.

The study required a well-defined methodology to be consistent in historical analysis. Historians use the word "Historiography," which means the method employed by historians to gain knowledge of past events (Shaw, 2010, p. 4). The research discipline

of history is different from that of science because the data and findings cannot be repeated (Licona, 2008, p. 16). Reliable documents and newspapers can verify this historical event, and so on. An accurate history analysis also depends on the factors that influence the historian, such as culture, gender, nationality, values, and religious convictions (Shaw, 2010, p. 16). As a result, one can be biased with the conclusion. To prevent bias-ness, we will be employing a minimal facts approach. With this approach, the Bible will not be considered inspired, infallible, and trustworthy material; instead, it will be treated merely as another ancient literature. Since atheists, agnostics, and skeptics at least agreed that some part of the bible is historical data, the data that is only accepted as historical by the expertise would merely be employed as material (Licona and Habermas, 45). To avoid any possible biased view, the historical data to be studied would be accepted as objective data if only these several theological streams agree: skeptics, Christian conservatives and liberals, and agnostic.

Scholars of different worldviews and theological spectrums can only make the same conclusion on defining the authenticity of the past event through these criteria: “early testimony, eyewitness testimony, multiple and independent sources, enemy attestation, embarrassing testimony, and consensus” (Shaw 2010, 8). McCullagh (1984) provided extremely relevant criteria for resurrection to establish the best possible explanation of the historical conclusion (19). Therefore, we will also employ these criteria for the analysis.

Several articles, books, and dissertations have been written on the resurrection of Christ, its historical evidence, and arguments. Some prominent figures for this modern time will be N.T. Wright, Mike Licona, John Dominic Crossan, Gary Habermas, etc. Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, the historical analyzing methodology is one of the most important criteria. There are several criteria to follow so that the presupposition will be independent of the study.

Historical Assessment of Jesus’ Quests and Christ Myth Theory concerning the Resurrection of Christ

The study of the life and person of Jesus Christ has been a subject of interest for the church all through the centuries; however, the last two centuries have been a remarkable search for historical Jesus from inside and outside of the church. Contemporary scholars divided Jesus’ research into four distinct periods such as the first quest, or the old quest, from 1778 to 1906; the interim period, or the no quest, from 1906 to 1953; the new quest (second quest), from 1953 to the 1980s; and the third quest, from 1980s to present day (Tatum, 1982, p. 71; Bigalke Jr, 2007, pp. 19-31). The meaning of questing or searching can be defined as a “philosophical-motivated historical-critical construct,” concluding that Jesus of the Gospel is not similar to Jesus in history. According to the dominant conclusion of the quests, if one has to understand Jesus with a standard of “accepted historiography replete in the idea of historical criticism,” then Jesus in the gospel must not be identified fully as Jesus in history (Hagner, 2001, p. 83).

The first quest attempts to find Jesus of history compatible with modernism to shun supernaturalism (Farnell, 2012, p. 15). The “no quest” or the second quest has the same intention as the first quest with the addition of methodologies such as form criticism, redaction criticism, the criterion of authenticity, the criterion of dissimilarity, and so on. The third quest has a significant uniqueness though having employed the same methodology of historical criticism (Farnell, 21). The unique quality is the search for Jesus in the context of first-century or second-century Jewish

literature (22). However, Farnell observes that all three quests had the same ideological basis for the method of historical criticism in their search (21). The conclusions of the quests would result in doubt about the gospels and early Christianity. Keck (1994) observes this ideology being stranded since the first quest, stating,

Essential for all three Quests is the view that Matthew and Luke used both Mark and Q, and that between Jesus and all written sources stands oral traditions which shaped and expanded the Jesus materials so that recovering the Jesus of history entails differentiating what the texts report from what Jesus said and did (p. 785-86).

Most of the scholars who participated in the quest are liberal scholars who would assert that the gospel writers invented the life of Jesus, such as miracles and resurrection, to persuade the readers that Jesus is God's son. They regarded the gospel narratives were folklore and fables (Gromacki, 2002, p. 63). Some even go extreme in concluding that Jesus is merely a myth or a fairy tale that was made up (Drews, 1998; Voorst, 2000; Eddy & Boyd, 2007; Beilby & Eddy, 2009; Price, 2011; Casey, 2014). As a result, the veracity of Jesus' resurrection must be reconsidered.

The historicity of Jesus' Resurrection

As discussed earlier, there are historical facts concerning Jesus and His life on which experts from diverse backgrounds and worldviews can concur. We will provide these facts with an explanation of why it was accepted as a historical fact. We categorized the evidence into four parts: the evidence on Jesus' death, the evidence on Jesus' burial, the evidence on the empty tomb, and the evidence from the experience of early Christianity.

The Evidence of Jesus' Death

The death of Jesus Christ serves as a prerequisite for the resurrection. There is no resurrection without His death. As a result, evidence for the veracity of Jesus' death must be established. The death of Christ is the most agreeable event among all the data analyzed. Several pieces of literature from Christians and non-Christians about the death of Christ. Scholars discovered that there are earlier creedal passages that pre-date the New Testament. Several non-biblical pieces of literature describe the death of Jesus. One must know that crucifixion is a punishment whereby the chances of survival are minimal (Hengel, 1977). According to Alexander Metherell, a medical expert, crucifixion is an "agonizingly slow death due to asphyxiation." Due to this, there is only one account whereby the victim survives crucifixion. Josephus mentioned that Titus Caesar released three victims from the cross; however, two still died despite the best medical treatment they received.

Another fact is that, if necessary, the executioners must execute the crucified victim. It was reported that Jesus was pierced in His side (John 19: 34). One can also find that stabbing the victim of the cross was a customary practice of the executioner soldiers. This act is to ensure that the victims are dead. In the case of Jesus, the soldier should have been given another strike if Jesus was not dead. Moreover, most scholars believed in the death of Jesus by adopting the idea of David Strauss, a prominent scholar of the German Liberalism movement. He has a famous critique of

the swoon theory or apparent death theory, which made the evidence of Jesus' death agreed upon by scholars of different backgrounds and worldviews.

The Evidence of Jesus' Burial

Knowing the place of Jesus' burial is appropriate, which can contribute to evidence of the resurrection. However, one has to understand that Jesus' burial is not obligatory for the resurrection to occur because if one knows the certainty of Jesus' death, the resurrection is already possible. First, there are several biblical and non-biblical attestations to Jesus' burial. Second, the embarrassing narrative seen in the burial of Christ was another piece of evidence. It is embarrassing that the Jewish Sanhedrin chief, Joseph of Arimathea, buried Jesus rather than the disciples. Thus, put weighty evidence on the factuality of the burial story. Third, the tradition of the Jews demands that any corpse be buried before sunset (Deut 21: 23). Josephus mentioned that the Jewish revered a burial regardless of the person; they would even bury a dead stranger because of their traditional demand (Keener, 2009, p. 326). The tradition also likely supports the burial of Jesus.

Fourth, a skeptic like Ehrman asserted that the burial story could be a legend because the creed of 1 Corinthians 15: 3-7 does not describe Joseph and the women like another passion narrative (Craig & Ehrman, 2006, p. 21). However, the creed 1 Corinthians 15: 3-7 is an outline or summary of a passion narrative in a simplified form so that one can easily remember it. Moreover, one interesting fact is that the burial story has no other competing stories. It should have another competing story if it were a legendary story.

The Evidence on the Empty Tomb

One has to know that the empty tomb does not explicitly explain the occurrence of resurrection; however, it strengthens the possibility of physical resurrection. First, one can find multiple attestations from earlier ancient literature. Second, the tomb's location in Jerusalem made the claims of the disciples true because everyone could attest to it by checking the tomb at a near distance. Third, the Jewish authorities claimed that the body was stolen, which made the reality of an empty tomb (Matt 28: 11-15). Fourth, the notion of resurrection is always physical in pagan and Jewish understanding, implying the empty tomb. Fifth, the tomb of Jesus was not honored as a shrine which implies that Jesus' body did not remain because if it remained in the tomb, it would have been venerated as a shrine. Thus, for all these reasons, even critical scholars consider the empty tomb historically reliable.

The Evidence from the Experience of Early Christianity

There are various sources that support the disciples' claims for their risen savior. Astonishingly, the Christian movement, as compared to other movements, did not die out even when its leader died. The disciples were willing to die for their belief instead. For instance, James, the brother of Jesus, was known to be skeptical all his life about the messiahship of Jesus. However, James was ironically converted to Christianity because he believed in resurrection and was eventually martyred for his faith. Another person who needs to be separately identified from James was Paul because he was not merely skeptical but a church persecutor. He was skeptical about the Christians and their risen savior, leading him to persecute them. However, his transformation makes much sense regarding the resurrection of Jesus. This

embarrassing testimony of Paul confirms that the resurrection of Jesus must be historically accurate.

Conclusion

Since the quest for the historical Jesus arose from a naturalist worldview, it is apparent that the pioneer of the search was somehow prejudiced in examining ancient literature because they were more likely inclined to discredit the authenticity of the NT and gospel in particular. After all, it includes many supernatural actions, including miracles and resurrection. However, when Albert Schweitzer summarized several contributions to the quest for a century, he ensured that all the claims were untrue. In the subsequent 21st century, the second and third quests produced numerous methodologies to analyze historical data; of all these methodologies, there are methodologies whereby all scholars of several backgrounds would agree upon exploring the historical information. This study used procedures that are acknowledged by practically every scholar, even critical and agnostic ones. However, when the ancient literature is examined using these approaches, it is highly likely that the resurrection of Jesus is historically accurate. As a Christian, one can have faith in Jesus. However, the study's findings indicate that if it is difficult to generate faith to believe in Jesus and his resurrection, one should be aware that the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus occurred historically, according to the finest methodological medium employed by scholars. As a result, if Jesus died and physically rose from the dead, one must have faith in response to historical evidence.

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