

Defending the Resurrection of Jesus: Yesterday, Today and Forever

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Karl Barth's famous aversion to accepting biblical miracles as historically accessible included the resurrection of Jesus. This antipathy displayed itself in 1962 at George Washington University during a question-answer dialogue with 200 specially invited religious leaders. After Carl Henry identified himself as the editor of *Christianity Today*, he asked Barth:

"The question, Dr. Barth, concerns the historical factuality of the resurrection of Jesus." I pointed to the press table and noted the presence of leading religion editors ... If these journalists had their present duties in the time of Jesus, I asked, was the resurrection of such a nature that covering some aspect of it would have fallen into their area of responsibility? "Was it news," I asked, "in the sense that the man in the street understands news?"

Barth became angry. Pointing at me, and recalling my identification, he asked "Did you say *Christianity Today* or *Christianity Yesterday*?" The audience—largely nonevangelical professors and clergy—roared with delight. When encountered unexpectedly in this way, one often reaches for a Scripture verse. So I replied, assuredly out of biblical context, "*Yesterday, today and forever*."¹

Indeed! The historically verifiable, bodily resurrection of Jesus the Lord must be defended in every generation—a perennial responsibility with great privilege as part of Gospel proclamation. Christian leaders have done so from antiquity, and the Church now enjoys a wealth of resources for the challenge.

DEFENDING THE RESURRECTION FOREVER

Just *what* is to be defended forever? Since the resurrection of Jesus is the *sine qua non* of Christianity (1 Cor 15:17-19), it necessarily has been defended throughout the history of the Church. The proposition to defend perennially is succinctly expressed in the Apostles Creed: “The third day he rose again from the dead.” And for Christian orthodoxy this has always meant that the bodily raising of Jesus is a historical fact—because this was the clear witness of the apostles.² As N. T. Wright’s magisterial study demonstrates, the clear and uniform teaching of early Christianity is that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead in the same body only incorruptible and immortal.³ First century Jews and Pagans alike would have understood a non-bodily resurrection as an oxymoron.⁴ “The-what-to-be-defended,” then, necessarily includes the *historical, bodily* raising of *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Why must the resurrection of Jesus be perennially defended? Because from the beginning, alternate theories have been proposed to explain away the central miracle in human history (e.g., Matt 28:13). And these counter-theories are recurrent, arising in every time and place in which the historical resurrection of Jesus is announced. It matters little that these attacks are short on solid evidence and long on philosophy and theological speculation, they are nonetheless influential.

And *how* should the resurrection be defended? From the start, the truth of Jesus’ resurrection has been known and demonstrated by two means: the testimony of authoritative witnesses (Luke 1:2; 2 Pet 1:16) and the sight of faith rather than empirical perception (John 20:29; 1 Pet 1:8). The believer experiences the amazing certitude of the Holy Spirit through intimate knowledge of a saving relationship with the risen Lord as proclaimed in scripture. And the original eyewitnesses themselves appealed to publicly accessible historical facts to defend and present the truth of the resurrection (Acts 4:20; 1 Cor 15:3-8; 1 John 1:1-3).⁵

The model of New Testament (NT) apologetics set the stage for the Church's first 1500 years, with heavy emphasis upon the twin pillars of the miracles of Jesus and the fulfillment of Old Testament (OT) prophecy in his life, death and resurrection. Other Christian apologists responded to specific challenges presented in their time using the best tools available to them. But the one constant and necessary Christian apologetic has always been and will always be the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus: "critical sifting of the NT materials makes it indubitable that the Resurrection of Jesus held a place of unique importance in the earliest Christian apologetic."⁶

Two resurrection apologetics cases follow, one early in Christian history and one contemporary. Analysis of the two reveals striking similarities in the attacks on the resurrection and in the defenses. Remarkably different between the two cases is the expanded armamentarium available for today's apologist.

DEFENDING THE RESURRECTION YESTERDAY

Our first resurrection apologetics case developed in response to what many Christians perceived to be a devastating intellectual attack on the faith. Sometime around AD 180 a pagan philosopher, Celsus, wrote the first truly comprehensive challenge against Christianity, "The True Doctrine" (*Alēthēs Logos*).⁷ Until that time charges against Christians were often based on gross misconceptions, such as the well-known equating of the Lord's Supper with cannibalism.⁸ Rational Christian articulation of doctrines such as Christology and Trinitarianism were nascent during this period of the Church's youth. The intellectually sophisticated assault of Celsus exemplified something quite new, upsetting the faith of some Christians ill-prepared to respond.

The particular effectiveness of Celsus' attacks derives especially from his two-pronged perspective. In one section he writes as if a Jew: Christianity is a corruption of Judaism, not a completion. Are Christians guilty of contradicting their own scriptures? In another part, Celsus challenges Christianity head on from his personal philosophical perspective. And in particular, Celsus attacked and ridiculed the very heart of the Christian gospel, the resurrection of Jesus. The Christian proposal "that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead was just as controversial nineteen hundred years ago as it is today. The discovery that dead people stay dead was not first made

by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.”⁹ But Celsus’ anti-resurrection arguments seem strikingly contemporary.

For more than a half century “The True Doctrine” remained unanswered until a concerned Christian implored Origen to write a response. As a biblical scholar, theologian and philosopher renowned for his brilliant mind and tireless work habits, Origen was ideally suited for the challenge. Though his doctrinal errors were later rightly condemned, Christian apologists (and others) have greatly benefited from studying Origen’s masterful *Against Celsus*.¹⁰ In it Origen quotes *The True Doctrine* “verbatim to refute it,”¹¹ and not only

vindicate[s] the character of Jesus and the credibility of the Christian tradition; he also shows that Christians can be so far from being irrational and credulous illiterates such as Celsus thinks them to be that they may know more about Greek philosophy than the pagan Celsus himself and can make intelligent use of it to interpret the doctrines of the Church. In the range of his learning he towers above his pagan adversary, handling the traditional arguments of Academy and Stoa with masterly ease and fluency.¹²

In his preface Origen worries that writing

the defense (*apologia*) that you ask me to compose will weaken the force of the defense (*apologia*) that is in in the mere facts, and detract from the power of Jesus which is manifest to those who are not quite stupid. Nevertheless, that we may not appear to shirk the task that you have set us, we have tried our best to reply to each particular point in Celsus’ book and to refute it ... although his arguments cannot shake the faith of any true Christian.¹³

Origen goes on to say he is not sure about the faith of any presumed Christian whose faith can be shaken by such arguments. But because there may be people who are “supposed to believe” (*tōn pisteuein nomizomenōn*)¹⁴ who are shaken, and if his defense will destroy Celsus’ arguments and clarify the truth, then he will do it. At any rate, Celsus’ words “are despised with good reason (*eulogōs kataphronoumena*) even by the ordinary believer in Christ (*tou tychontos en Christō*) on account of the Spirit which is in him.”¹⁵

Celsus’ anti-resurrection strategy utilized counter-theories, plausible ways to explain away the miracle. Many of these theories, famously utilized

throughout history, continue in use to this day. For instance, Celsus suggests that Jesus' post-mortem appearances may have been due to day-dreaming or hallucinations produced by "wishful thinking."¹⁶ Origen counters not only were the appearances during daytime, but no evidence in the scriptural accounts exists of witnesses being "mentally imbalanced or ... suffering from delirium or melancholy (*ekphronōn kai phrenitizontōn ē melangcholōntōn*)."¹⁷

Celsus charges that Jesus' resurrection was just a poor copy of the "fantastic tales (*terateias*)"¹⁸ of pagan heroes having descended to Hades and returned. But Origen counters that unlike those tales, Jesus dies publicly so that no one can claim "that although he appeared to die, he did not really do so, but, when he wanted to, again reappeared and told the portentous tale (*eterateusato*) that he had risen from the dead."¹⁹ The resurrection is not analogous to pagan mythology precisely because Jesus genuine death was confirmed publicly. In one swoop, Origen also has countered one of Celsus' other maneuvers: Jesus' terrible wounds were not as described.²⁰ Origen will have nothing of the swoon theory because Jesus really died, publicly.

Origen not only responds to Celsus' skepticism about Jesus' coming to life again, Origen insists this new life was *embodied*. Thomas may have been willing to believe Jesus was raised as a spirit but not bodily, which explains why Thomas needed not just to see but to touch the risen Jesus. Origen makes clear Jesus' resurrection was *bodily*.²¹

Celsus also denies the historicity of the earthquake and darkness at the death of Jesus as inventions (*terateian*).²² But Origen argues that a historian had records of these events.²³ Unfortunately, Origen cites someone we now know to be a completely unreliable source.²⁴ The point is, however, Origen is keen to establish the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Origen notes Celsus' arbitrary historical criteria which rule out even ancient events that everyone accepted such as the Trojan War. Note Origen's philosophical awareness of the limits of historical knowledge: "Before we begin the defense (*apologias*), we must say that an attempt to substantiate almost any story, even if it is true, and to produce complete certainty²⁵ about it, is one of the most difficult tasks and in some cases is impossible."²⁶ Origen is keen to establish the *historicity* of Jesus' resurrection, and he sought to do so, as we shall see, with far inferior tools than we have today.

Celsus' Jewish persona asks if "anyone who really died ever rose again with the same body?"²⁷ Celsus assumes something here akin to naturalism,

that once the body dies it is impossible for it to live again. Origen notes that Celsus does not understand Judaism. No Jew would deny resurrections because Scripture records that very thing.²⁸ Origen refuses to grant any undefended presumption of naturalism.

Ultimately for Origen, “the clear and certain “proof”²⁹ for the resurrection is the changed lives of the disciples. Why would anyone *invent* the story that Jesus had risen from the dead, teach others to be willing to die for it, and then personally be willing to die for it themselves? Because no plausible answer to this question is apparent, Origen effectively undermined the fraud or conspiracy theory.³⁰

Origen’s defense of the raising of Jesus was faithful to the perennial necessities. Jesus’ resurrection was *bodily* and *historical*. Not all believers are able to defend their faith intellectually. But Origen taught that all believers stand on good ground when they trust in the gospel through which the risen Jesus powerfully manifests himself. The arguments of unbelievers won’t wreck the faith of true believers in which the Holy Spirit works.

None of this means Origen cannot answer the counter-theories of Celsus against the resurrection. These now perennial anti-resurrection strategies include alleging the resurrection is a copy of pagan dying-rising myths, or that Jesus did not really die on the cross (swoon), or the apostles invented the story (conspiracy/fraud), or the disciples’ resurrection experiences were strictly mental (wishful thinking, hallucinations, or emotional instability). And, not surprisingly, early in church history, Celsus makes an “argument” by assuming naturalism: by definition there can be no resurrection. On the other hand, Origen finds positive proof for the resurrection in the changed lives of the disciples.

If most of the anti-resurrection strategies surfaced already in the second century, we shall see that the rational tools for resurrection defense at that time paled in comparison to those available now.

DEFENDING THE RESURRECTION TODAY

Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, though early in the history of the Church, was a high water mark in resurrection defense in the first millennium. The middle ages saw little in the way of development in the field, but also saw little in the way of fresh attacks on the resurrection. With the “dawning” of the Enlightenment,

however, came a new wave of resurrection debates.³¹ The challenge became especially difficult when *Enlightenment* philosophy made its home in schools training the Church's leadership. Anti-supernaturalist perspectives applied to biblical studies became the norm. And for more than two centuries historical Jesus studies, which include the resurrection, have come to be associated with skepticism and even antagonism toward the Jesus of the Gospels. The start was certainly not auspicious for modern resurrection defense.

Historical Jesus Studies Today

Mark Allan Powell has chaired the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature and was a founding editor of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. After more than two centuries in the making,³² the current approach to historical Jesus studies is described by Powell as a science based only on historical research employing the same standards used to study anyone from antiquity. Scholars often maintain their goal is modest: only what can be verified about Jesus. However, "if (as a Christian) you want to believe Jesus was born to a virgin, that's fine, but (as a historian) you must recognize that this is not verifiable—at least, not in accord with any criteria that are normally employed for historical research."³³ Again, this does not sound particularly encouraging for anyone seeking to confirm the resurrection!

In a Society of Biblical Literature Forum piece, Powell described Jesus studies in the 1990s as:

a time when Bible scholars could blackball Jesus by dropping little marbles into bowls; when headlines could scream, "Scholars Decide: Jesus Did Not Teach the Lord's Prayer"; when John Dominic Crossan could announce that the post-crucifixion body of Jesus was devoured by wild dogs. Jane Schaberg called Jesus a (literal) bastard; Meier called him "a marginal Jew"; Leif Vaage said he was "a party animal"; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza characterized him as a feminist prophet of the goddess Sophia; Crossan described him as "a Galilean hippie in a world of Augustan yuppies." At one meeting I attended, a journalist named Russell Shorto—who was covering the event for (get this!) GQ magazine—turned to me and said, "You can't make this stuff up!"³⁴

But the first decade of 21st century, according to Powell, has seen orthodoxy gaining ground. "Conservatives, traditionalists, evangelicals—call them what

you will—have entered the field in droves and, in many cases, have seized the offensive.”³⁵ Those portraying the Gospels as largely inauthentic portrayals of Jesus are now on the defensive. Rationale no longer exists for skepticism toward the biblical Gospels by means of historical examination alone.³⁶

In response to these developments, *Christianity Today* polled several leading evangelical scholars in the field for their reactions. Craig Keener notes that historical methods will not compel faith, but nonetheless are something that would have invited him to consider it in his younger unchurched atheist days. “I contend that if skeptics really treated the Gospels as they treat other historical documents, they would be less skeptical. Using standard historical methods, we can challenge many skeptics’ doubts about Jesus.”³⁷ N. T. Wright agrees that history “is very good at clearing away the smoke screens behind which unfaith often hides. History and faith are, respectively, the left and right feet of Christianity.”³⁸

In the lead piece Scot McKnight seems less sanguine about the field currently. But the lack of consensus concerning the historical Jesus led him to affirm the point upon which all evangelical scholars should agree:

This is what I said to myself: As a historian I think I can prove that Jesus died and that he thought his death was atoning. I think I can establish that the tomb was empty and that resurrection is the best explanation for the empty tomb. But one thing the historical method cannot prove is that Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification. At some point, historical methods run out of steam and energy. Historical Jesus studies cannot get us to the point where the Holy Spirit and the church can take us. I know that once I was blind and that I can now see. I know that historical methods did not give me sight. They can’t. Faith cannot be completely based on what the historian can prove. The quest for the real Jesus, through long and painful paths, has proven that much.³⁹

Of course McKnight is correct that historical studies cannot produce the healing necessary for spiritual blindness, but perhaps one might be permitted to ask: who ever made such a promise? Even so, his point is important and is reminiscent of Origen’s, Christian certainty derives from our personally knowing the risen Lord.

But if historical Jesus studies are now cautiously open to “orthodoxy,” how do things stand today in the specific field of Jesus resurrection studies?

Resurrection Studies

If the resurrection of Jesus was historical, then its defense demands examination of the relevant historical evidence. Broadly speaking, historical resurrection evidence is a subset of the evidence for the historical Jesus. And if current historical Jesus studies are somewhat more open to the canonical Jesus, recent resurrection studies have significantly outpaced them in apologetic significance.

Philosopher and apologist, Gary Habermas, has devoted the majority of his professional studies to the resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁰ In 2005 he published a study of the previous thirty years of critical Jesus resurrection scholarship.⁴¹ Scholarly general consensus finds surprising amounts of historically accurate data in the NT, especially 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. Habermas estimates that a 3:1 ratio of these scholars conclude in favor of the view that Jesus was actually raised from the dead either bodily or in some sort of spiritual body. That is, most scholars seemed compelled to admit that some type of resurrection happened to Jesus rather than just a personal experience to the disciples. Habermas note this proves nothing regarding the resurrection, and “spiritual resurrections” are not orthodox. But the trend displays a remarkable recent change of scholarly attitude toward the historical resurrection.⁴² Historical data regarding the following issues drive this change in attitude.

First, approximately seventy-five percent of critical scholars favor arguments for the empty tomb. Second, most scholars affirm that women must have initially witnessed the risen Jesus since they were not generally accepted witnesses in crucial matters. With very few exceptions scholars hold that Jesus followers believed they had seen the risen Jesus. Habermas believes this near unanimous scholarly consensus on the disciples’ belief in Jesus post-mortem appearances is the most important development in recent resurrection studies.⁴³

N. T. Wright takes the matter a step further. He boldly challenges resurrection scholars that anything less than a historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus simply cannot account for the evidence. After a detailed study of the first two centuries of Jewish and pagan thought on the resurrection, he is especially concerned to refute the commonly held error that the first Christians did not believe in bodily resurrection.⁴⁴ He concludes:

those who held the remarkably complex but remarkably consistent early Christian view gave as their reason that Jesus of Nazareth had himself been raised from the

dead. And we have now seen what they meant by this: that on the third day after his execution by the Romans, his tomb was empty, and he was found to be alive, appearing on various occasions and in various places both to his followers and to some who, up to that point, had not been his followers or had not believed, convincing them that he was neither a ghost nor a hallucination but that he was truly and bodily raised from the dead. This belief about Jesus provides a historically complete, thorough and satisfying reason for the rise and development of the belief that he was Israel's Messiah and the world's true lord. It explains the early Christian conviction that the long-awaited new age had been inaugurated, opening new tasks and possibilities. Above all it explains the belief that the hope for the world in general and for Jesus' followers in particular consisted not in going on and on forever, not in an endless cycle of death and rebirth as in Stoicism, not in a blessed disembodied immortal existence, but in a newly embodied life, a transformed physicality. And we have now seen that the central stories upon which this belief was based, though they have been skillfully shaped and edited by the four evangelists, retain simple and very early features, features which resist the idea that they were made up decades later, but which serve very well to explain the developments from Paul onwards.⁴⁵

Wright notes that neither an empty tomb nor the appearances alone would account for the above. By itself an empty tomb would be puzzling or tragic. And if the tomb was still occupied, any appearances could only be considered visions or hallucinations.⁴⁶ All that is required to demonstrate that the tomb-plus-appearances combination is not a necessary condition for the rise of early Christian belief is the possibility that some other circumstance, or combination of circumstances, was equally capable of generating this belief.⁴⁷ But Wright concludes that no such counter-theory succeeds, whether a misplaced tomb or mistaking someone else for a resurrected Jesus or the swoon theory.⁴⁸

Second Resurrection Apologetics Case

As we have seen, Christian apologists in the last two hundred years have faced the unique challenge of opponents arising even from within the Church. The historical resurrection of Jesus has not only been attacked by non-Christians, but also by theologians and biblical scholars. In our second apologetics case, we examine a debate with just such a scenario. Bart Ehrman, contending

against the resurrection, is not only a NT scholar but also one who claims to have been an evangelical believer. Arguing for the historical, bodily resurrection is philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig. The debate was held at College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, on March 28, 2006. What follows is a brief synopsis of the major points.⁴⁹

Craig begins the debate by simply laying out his argument. He contends four historical facts must be explained: Jesus' burial, his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the disciples' resurrection belief. Craig states that the best explanation for these four facts is Jesus' resurrection from the dead.⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that ever since Origen, different apologists may choose different historical facts which demand explanation. But they all come from the same small pool, with the three main ones being empty tomb, appearances, and changed lives. In this debate, Craig is on solid ground in light of recent resurrection studies with his four historical data.

Ehrman opens with two main points, one seemingly historical and the other philosophical. First, he says the Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses, but were written 30-60 years after the events, and are unreliable because they were changed during their oral transmission as evidenced by discrepancies.⁵¹ Ehrman espouses here a view akin to what Wright describes as the "no access" view of the resurrection because there are no true eyewitness accounts.⁵² Even if one assumes Ehrman's view that the Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses, Wright contends that the "very strong historical probability is that when Matthew, Luke and John describe the risen Jesus, they are writing down very early oral tradition, representing three different ways in which the original astonished participants told the stories."⁵³ Ehrman posits the resurrection stories result from corrupted oral transmissions twisted over time by Christians zealous to win converts. Unlike Craig who presented relatively uncontroversial scholarly consensus, Ehrman has staked his claim on a view not held by the majority of contemporary scholars in the field.

Ehrman's second point is philosophical:

Historians can only establish what probably happened in the past, and by definition a miracle is the least probable occurrence. And so, by the very nature of the canons of historical research, we can't claim historically that a miracle probably happened. By definition, it probably didn't. And history can only establish what probably did ... It's simply that the canons of historical research do not allow for

the possibility of establishing as probable the least probable of all occurrences. For that reason, Bill's four pieces of evidence are completely irrelevant. There cannot be historical probability for an event that defies probability, even if the event did happen.⁵⁴

Wright describes this view as the "no analogy" position as made famous by Ernst Troeltsch.⁵⁵ Since the contemporary historian has never experienced a resurrection, he is disallowed from writing about one in the past.

In Craig's first rebuttal he remarks that Ehrman's second point is just Hume's old discredited argument against miracles, then he launches into a detailed explanation of the probability calculus to show the error.⁵⁶ One might quibble with Craig whether Ehrman's second point is precisely Humean. Hume's famous assault on miracles remains controversial because he seems to argue for weighing the evidence while also seeming to render them impossible since no testimony is adequate to establish them.⁵⁷ Ehrman might respond to Craig's charge that he is simply abiding by contemporary historical Jesus *methodology* as Powell described earlier: "if (as a Christian) you want to believe Jesus was born to a virgin, that's fine, but (as a historian) you must recognize that this is not verifiable—at least, not in accord with any criteria that are normally employed for historical research."⁵⁸ My nitpicking with Craig aside, his point is essentially on target. No matter how one rules out the possibility of miracles, one has still ruled them out—and has done so arbitrarily. Ehrman's maneuver looks like a smoke screen behind which he avoids responding to the historical data at issue.

Craig's point with the probability calculus, though likely hard for his audience to follow, is simple at its core. Judging the probability of an event includes more than just weighing specific evidence, it includes the background knowledge we bring to the table. Background knowledge is everything we know or assume about the world prior to examining any evidence in light of a hypothesis.⁵⁹ Background knowledge, such as whether God does miracles and we can know them, affects probability that our hypothesis will explain the evidence. What makes probability calculations controversial is finding agreement on the background knowledge, and how prior and posterior probabilities should be understood.⁶⁰

So, Craig rightly notes that the resurrection's probability on the background knowledge of a naturalist is very low:

But here, I think, [Ehrman's] confused. What, after all, is the resurrection hypothesis? It's the hypothesis that Jesus rose supernaturally from the dead. It is not the hypothesis that Jesus rose naturally from the dead. That Jesus rose naturally from the dead is fantastically improbable. But I see no reason whatsoever to think that it is improbable that God raised Jesus from the dead. In order to show that that hypothesis is improbable, you'd have to show that God's existence is improbable. But Dr. Ehrman says that the historian cannot say anything about God. Therefore, he cannot say that God's existence is improbable. But if he can't say that, neither can he say that the resurrection of Jesus is improbable. So Dr. Ehrman's position is literally self-refuting.⁶¹

Craig then responds to Ehrman's first point. Ehrman may not feel the Gospels are as historically reliable as he would like. But the question is whether they establish Craig's four facts. Ehrman's claim of inconsistencies between the Gospels is not relevant unless he can show them to be irresolvable, lie at the heart of the narrative rather than in details, and that it's impossible that any one of the Gospels get the facts correct. Craig notes:

the Gospels all agree that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified in Jerusalem by Roman authority during the Passover feast, having been arrested and convicted on charges of blasphemy by the Jewish Sanhedrin and then slandered before the Roman Governor Pilate on charges of treason. He died within several hours and was buried Friday afternoon by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb, which was sealed with a stone. Certain women followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, who is always named, having observed his interment, visited his tomb early Sunday morning, only to find it empty. Thereafter, Jesus appeared alive from the dead to his disciples, including Peter, who then became proclaimers of the message of his resurrection.⁶²

Craig then notes that N. T. Wright's study of the resurrection narratives concludes the historical probability of the empty tomb and appearances being so high as to be virtually certain, comparable to the death of Augustus or the fall of Jerusalem. Craig contends then that the debate is not really about these established historical facts but the best explanation for them.

In my view, Craig has effectively exposed Ehrman's strategy of refusing to account for the facts. Ehrman is philosophically ham-fisted and out of sync

with current historical Jesus studies on the issue of the canonical Gospels' reliability. Moreover, Craig could have effectively utilized the research of Habermas that, in light of the historical evidence, resurrection scholars today *do* find that something "resurrection-like" occurred by a 3:1 margin.

In his first rejoinder, Ehrman tacitly concedes an important point to Craig. Because the majority of NT scholars agree about Craig's four points doesn't mean they are correct. Here Ehrman simply states the obvious, but this obscures that *Ehrman is the one out of sync with NT scholarship*. But to add seeming weight to his point, Ehrman then tries to undermine these scholars. He claims the majority of them believe in the NT. This astonishing "rebuttal," then, claims the majority of NT scholars agree with Craig's four points—which seem to infer the resurrection—because they are biased like Craig due to believing NT scripture. But then Ehrman remarkably claims the majority of critical historical Jesus scholars disagree with Craig that a historian can demonstrate the resurrection.⁶³

Several things stand out here. First, Craig was not trying to prove the resurrection. His claim was that the resurrection explains the facts better than the naturalistic alternatives. Second, Ehrman has just sought to undermine these same scholars by insinuating they are biased because they believe in the NT. Why then do they now not believe in the NT regarding the resurrection? Third, the research of Habermas demonstrates that the majority of critical scholars in recent years *do* tend to hold to some kind of resurrection (even if of the unorthodox spiritual body variety).

Ehrman finally addresses the post-mortem appearances by claiming the ancients did not necessarily believe such appearances entailed resurrected bodies. He claims Craig is a post-Enlightenment thinker who just assumes this reanimation of the body.⁶⁴ Surely this is an odd claim to say the least. "Enlightenment thinkers" don't believe in bodily resurrections, but ancient Jews and Christians clearly did. Most importantly, Ehrman has not dealt with the evidence for the empty tomb—at all.

Craig concludes the debate on a personal note by calling attention to "the experiential approach:"

You see, if Christ is really risen from the dead as the evidence indicates, then that means that Jesus is not just some ancient figure in history or a picture on a stained glass window. It means that he is alive today and can be known experientially.

For me, Christianity ceased to be just a religion or a code to live by when I gave my life to Christ and experienced a spiritual rebirth in my own life. God became a living reality to me. The light went on where before there was only darkness, and God became an experiential reality, along with an overwhelming joy and peace and meaning that He imparted to my life. And I would simply say to you that if you're looking for that sort of meaning, purpose in life, then look not only at the historical evidence, but also pick up the New Testament and begin to read it and ask yourself whether or not this could be the truth. I believe that it can change your life in the same way that it has changed mine.⁶⁵

Ehrman's concluding remarks lay out his naturalistic hypothesis. He states that the first disciples in their disappointment over Jesus' death, turned to the scriptures. They found texts that made sense to them that the Messiah would die and be vindicated or exalted. The reasoning of the disciples worked like this:

if Jesus is exalted, he is no longer dead, and so Christians started circulating the story of his resurrection. It wasn't three days later they started circulating the story; it might have been a year later, maybe two years. Five years later they didn't know when the stories had started. Nobody could go to the tomb to check; the body had decomposed. Believers who knew he had been raised from the dead started having visions of him. Others told stories about these visions of him, including Paul. Stories of these visions circulated. Some of them were actual visions like Paul, others of them were stories of visions like the five hundred group of people who saw him. On the basis of these stories, narratives were constructed and circulated and eventually we got the Gospels of the New Testament written 30, 40, 50, 60 years later.⁶⁶

Ehrman utilizes creative reasoning to arrive at his theory. Early disciples, though discouraged by their Messiah's death, read into scriptural texts that the prophets predicted this. Those same passages allude to the servant's exaltation. Agreement develops in the community over these texts and they are shared widely. Over time exaltation themes evolve into-raised-to-spiritual-life ("spiritual" resurrection) themes, especially as the stories are told and retold—and altered by Christians zealous to win converts. Since Jesus' body has decomposed, no one can return to the tomb to disconfirm

a resurrection. (Which is it: did they believe in a “spiritual” or a bodily resurrection? And what of the Jewish practice of collecting the bones into ossuaries after decomposition of the body?) The stories of “resurrection” nurture visions among the disciples which cement the risen Jesus theme in the developing oral traditions. After several decades, the traditions form the backbone of the written canonical Gospels. The evidence adduced by Ehrman for all of this consists of alleged inconsistencies in the Gospels coupled with historical methodological naturalism.

A PERSONAL DEFENSE OF THE RESURRECTION

Lessons learned from resurrection scholarship can be put to use in the service of personal apologetics. So I now turn to the way I practice personal defense of the resurrection. Even when unbelievers I speak with have not read Bart Ehrman type books, they likely are influenced by these kinds of ideas. And since the resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith, I want to proclaim and defend its truth against such ideas.

In setting the context for this, I need to address how I share and defend the Gospel. When meeting with unbelieving individuals, my goal is to present the Gospel. Unless those who hear me then receive Christ the Lord, they will raise objections to the Gospel. At that point I become a personal apologist *because personal apologetics is the flip side of personal evangelism*. When someone says “no” to the gospel, I want to address whatever ideas and opinions they hold between them and Christ (2 Cor 10:5). I want the unbeliever to reconsider.

When addressing a large group I essentially do all the talking. My apologetic monologue targets the “typical” listener in the audience. I try to select a one-size-fits-all talk to reach the most people. But in contrast to this mass approach, I view personal evangelism/apologetics as a dialogue in a specific context with a particular unbeliever. The gospel does not change, but how I share and explain it will differ according to the individual context. I have learned that stock approaches to apologetics in these situations are not the most helpful. For instance, conversation points with a twenty year old holding to postmodern spirituality will likely not be on target with a fifty year old scientist.

With individuals I ask questions and listen so I can diagnose the roots of unbelief in heart and mind. I want to understand what particular issues stand

as barriers between them and Christ. Then I can ask the right questions and discuss the concerns relevant to them. Perhaps the right questions may help my unbelieving friends reflect deeply for the first time on what they believe. More than likely they have never been asked what matters most and what they think of Jesus.⁶⁷

Though never trying to force any particular chronology to the conversation, I do keep in mind gospel issues which ideally should be discussed. Typically I raise these as questions which reflect the structure of all worldviews: “Where did I come from? What’s wrong? What’s the solution? Where am I going?” With this type conversation I am able to keep biblical/gospel answers on the table while having them articulate and defend theirs. I seek clarity on important issues where we differ. On important agreements I ask which worldview explains things best. I respectfully ask the unbeliever to sort out inconsistencies in his worldview I have detected. And I utilize the very best relevant knowledge I can bring to bear in confirmation of the gospel.

So how do I present and defend the resurrection in these personal situations? The resurrection necessarily should come up because, as we have seen, there is no gospel without it. Issues pertaining to science often come up in discussing “where did I come from?” Philosophical and, of course, theological issues surface in discussing “what’s wrong?” But the historical Jesus and his resurrection come to the fore when focused on “what’s the solution?” and “where am I going?” And in the case of Jesus and his resurrection, this *must* come up and be discussed if we are having a true gospel conversation. *Unlike any other apologetic issue or strategy, the historical Jesus and his resurrection are non-negotiable issues necessary to be discussed in full-orbed gospel discussions.*

The natural introduction for discussion of the resurrection is the subject of Jesus of Nazareth. I relish asking unbelievers what they think of Jesus. They *need* to think about him. If they say they are not interested, I ask why since he is the most influential person in history. I point out that he’s not like anyone else. Have you read the Gospels? Did you know they are the earliest and most reliable sources we have regarding him? *What is the significance of his life?* Because I believe the gospel is God’s power for salvation, as simply and as clearly as I can I lay out the purpose of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

I think it vital to ask: where are we going when we die? After my unbelieving friend answers (e.g., reincarnation), I ask them how they know. I point out that Jesus of Nazareth is the only person who ever died and came back

to life bodily—never to die again. Of course that claim seems incredible to them, but it should! When they ask me how I know, I then share some of the basic resurrection scholarship (empty tomb, post-mortem appearances, and changed lives of the disciples). Since these facts are widely accepted by critical scholars today, I ask my friend how they account for these details. If they propose a counter-theory, I try to show them why for a very long time that theory has been discredited, even by non-believers. I am willing to go into the details as deeply as they want (or as I can!). In the end, I point out that no rejections of Jesus and his resurrection, including the rejections of scholars like Ehrman, are based on scientific, historical, archaeological, or manuscript evidence. All rejections are philosophically (e.g., miracles cannot happen) or theologically based (e.g., Jesus cannot be the savior of the world).

Before our time together is over, I again invite them to read the Gospels and offer to give them a Bible if they don't have one. If possible, I suggest relevant books for them to read, and ask if we can get together again to discuss these things. I encourage them to ask God to show them the truth about Jesus. God as a person can be known, but they must call on him.

My prayer and expectation is that even after our conversation is over, the Holy Spirit will bring Jesus and his resurrection to their mind. In the end, I entrust that person to the Lord, resting in the thought that *the gospel never fails: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*. When unbelievers reject Christ, the gospel has not failed. Likewise, even if unbelievers reject Jesus and the truth of his resurrection, the evidence God has graciously provided has not failed either.

A CONCLUDING PERSONAL WORD ON THE RESURRECTION

My becoming a follower of Jesus Christ in June of 1973 was not my doing. While reading the Gospels so I could say they were nonsense, the risen Jesus revealed himself to me. My life was completely turned around. I suddenly *knew* I believed in him and in his book, the Bible. But I had no way to defend what, or better, him whom I knew. I could only tell others: “read the Gospels for yourself and see!” Friends and family expressed concern that I was letting religion ruin my life. In the midst of that wild and glorious first week, I made a confession to God: “Lord, you seem more real to me than my next breath, but if I ever find out you are not, then I will stop living the Christian life.” Of

course the prayer was strange and naïve. But little could I know that for the next four decades, I would have ample opportunity to see if my faith in Jesus was based on fantasy, or if it could stand up to rigorous rational scrutiny.

Later I would learn that, just like all true Christians, my sense of genuinely knowing the resurrected Jesus issued from the gracious certifying work of the Spirit. But I am one of those believers who want not only to know *that* Jesus and the Bible are true, but also why. So it was with great joy that before long I began reading books about the evidence for the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. Resurrection studies had not blossomed then as today, but books that demonstrated the inability of counter-theories to account for the resurrection data deeply resonated with my soul. The more I read, the more I became convinced that belief in Jesus not only could but should be rationally defended.

Over the coming decades I realized how incredibly blessed I was to be living during the time which birthed a Golden Era in Christian apologetics. Less than 100 years ago orthodox Christianity had lost her major intellectual institutions to liberalism and secularism. Evolutionary naturalism was widely rumored to be proven true by modern science. Philosophy viewed itself as science's official executioner of all things superstitious, especially religion. And theology itself would herald the news that God is dead.

But God in his mercy has not left himself without witness. Science itself led the way in the rebirth of apologetics. While philosophers and theologians debated whether God-talk was even possible, discoveries by astronomers and physicists led again to discussions of creation *ex nihilo*. Discovery of the fine-tuning of the universe revealed a fundamental teleology beyond the wildest imaginations of Aristotle or Paley. Even recalcitrant biology would be dragged into that discussion with the discovery of DNA. Analytic philosophy, just a half century ago was virtually synonymous with atheism, but has now become the home for robust Christian work in philosophy of religion, ethics, epistemology and much more in the service of apologetics and theology. And speaking of theology, orthodox systematic and biblical theologians now produce major scholarly works widely read and respected. No one just decades ago could have imagined the depth of the apologetics landscape today.⁶⁸

And in my mind, nothing is more significant in apologetics today than the maturing of Jesus' resurrection studies—because nothing is more central

to the gospel. Of course, if even the power of the gospel can be rejected, we should not be surprised if our defense of its central truth, the resurrection, is rejected. "It will always be possible for ingenious historians to propose yet more variations on the theme of how the early Christian belief could have arisen, and taken the shape it did, without either an empty tomb or appearances of Jesus."⁶⁹ But for me, after these forty years of knowing the Lord, and having seen how *irrational* I would be to deny what I know of his resurrection evidence, *I can no longer even conceive how to doubt he is risen*. Were it possible for me to walk away from him, it would not be due to doubt. He is risen indeed!

¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 211. At the end of the session Barth graciously and publicly apologized for the way he had referred to *Christianity Today*.

² N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 32-551.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵ Cf. William Lane Craig's well-known distinction between knowing and showing in *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) 31-36, and William L. Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 20, 49.

⁶ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 19.

⁷ Origen. *Contra Celsum* (trans., Henry Chadwick; New York: Cambridge, 1953), xxviii.

⁸ On the misconceived but widespread pagan ridicule of early Christianity, see Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), and esp. 54-78 for the charges of cannibalism and immorality. On Celsus as conservative intellectual seeking to preserve the Roman social order from the errors of Christianity see Robert Louis Wilkins, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 94-125.

⁹ Wright, *Resurrection*, 10. See also 685, fn 2.

¹⁰ Without excusing Origen's theological errors, he can rightly be viewed as a product of his early unsettled time. For a critical but aptly appreciative view of Origen, see Michael Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 69-90.

¹¹ Origenes, *Contra Celsum: libri VIII* (trans., Marcovich Marislov; Leiden: Brill, 2001), xiv. This edition is used for all subsequent Greek quotations which will be cited in parentheses after Chadwick's translation.

¹² Origen, xiii (xiv). Chadwick rightly argues that the only early Christian apologetic comparable to *Contra Celsum* is Augustine's *City of God*.

¹³ Origen, 4 (Pref., 3).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 (Pref., 5).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 (Pref., 6).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112 (2:60).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110 (2:56).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110-11 (2:56).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 113 (2:61).

²¹ *Ibid.* See also (2:62) for Origen's further comments why alleging only imaginary appearances may be considered even more miraculous than a real resurrection.

²² Origen, 112 (2:59).

²³ *Ibid.*, 94 (2:33).

- 24 Origen cites Phlegon, a 2nd century freedman who wrote wildly sensational stories. For discussion and text see William Hansen, *Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels* (Exeter Studies in History; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997). Origen also cites Phlegon as a historical source in (2:14, 33).
- 25 Chadwick notes that the term Origen uses here, *katalēptikē phantasia* is a critical term in Stoic epistemology. The notion involves direct apprehension of something such that there can be no doubt of its truth. This idea is in distinct contrast to the skepticism of the Academy in the period after Arcesilaus. Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., 39 (1:42). See discussion on this by Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 35.
- 27 Origen, 111 (2:57). See also (2:58) for more treatment from the angle of OT resuscitations.
- 28 Indeed, Origen speculates that Jesus' resurrection may have been given only to the Jews because they were already prepared for these kinds of miracles, but Jesus' resurrection shows he is greater than all those who preceded him. Origen, 111 (2:57).
- 29 Ibid., 111 (2:56).
- 30 Celsus also presents a theological/philosophical argument against the resurrection. Why didn't Jesus confirm his resurrection by appearing to everyone, or at least to those who had put him to death? Origen takes this challenge very seriously and goes to some lengths to present his response in Origen, 114-15 (2:63). He contends that profound answers for this can be found in 1 Cor 15 wherein Jesus makes postmortem appearances only selectively and periodically. Origen begins by noting that on many important occasions Jesus only revealed his truths to a select few. He provides as examples the Transfiguration and the explanation of the parables only to the disciples. In the OT, theophanies were not granted to all or even constantly to those who did experience them. Origen also theorizes that it may even be due to God's mercy that the enemies of Jesus did not encounter him after the resurrection. Origen, 114-17 (2:63-2:67).
- 31 William L. Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002). Craig's massive study examines the resurrection debate through the centuries with special focus on the Deist Controversy.
- 32 See Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (2nd edition; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013).
- 33 Idem, "Historical Jesus Studies Today: An Update," *The Bible and Interpretation*, [cited Dec 2014] online: <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2014/06/pow388006.shtml>. In this piece Powell refers to NT scholars such as Craig Keener as apologists because Keener defends the miracles of Jesus. "The work of apologists is considered sporadically—almost everyone will admit that the apologists sometimes make good points worthy of consideration, but their unwillingness to consider counter-arguments excludes them from settings where the bulk of academic conversation occurs."
- 34 Mark Allan Powell, "'Things That Matter': Historical Jesus Studies in the New Millennium," *SBL Forum*, [cited Dec 2014]. Online: <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=333>.
- 35 Ibid. In Powell's piece written in the second decade of the 21st century (fn. 33 above), he notes that the apocryphal Gospels, with perhaps the exception of Thomas, are losing their influence in favor of the canonical Gospels.
- 36 Ibid. He notes even a cautious acceptance of John's Gospel.
- 37 Craig Keener, "Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? No, Jesus Studies Matter: A response to 'The Jesus We'll Never Know,'" *Christianity Today* 54:4 (April 2010): 27.
- 38 N. T. Wright, "Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? No, Jesus Studies Matter: A response to 'The Jesus We'll Never Know,'" *Christianity Today* 54:4 (April 2010): 27.
- 39 Scot McKnight, "The Jesus We'll Never Know: Why scholarly attempts to discover the 'real' Jesus have failed. And why that's a good thing," *Christianity Today* 54:4 (April 2010): 22.
- 40 Gary Habermas, "The Core Resurrection Data: The Minimal Facts Approach," in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick* (ed. William Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher; Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 387.
- 41 An edited version of this article was published as Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3:2 (2005): 135-153. The more complete article which is cited hereafter is Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying?" [cited Nov. 2014] online: http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/J_Study_Historical_Jesus_3-2_2005/J_Study_Historical_Jesus_3-2_2005.htm. Over a five year period he examined more than 1400 relevant scholarly publications.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.

- 44 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Dialogue on Christ's Resurrection," *Christianity Today* 12 (April 12, 1968): 5-12, who notes that most theologians of the 20th century have held to some type of vision theory of the resurrection. See also Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (ed. Terry L. Miethe; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 62.
- 45 Wright, *Resurrection*, 681-82.
- 46 Ibid., 686-93. Wright's explanations in this section are presented in as fine a form as any apologist could. Cf. Pannenberg's agreement on the necessity of both empty tomb and post-mortem appearances as necessary for the early Christians' belief. See his response to the Flew-Habermas debate, Habermas and Flew, 130-31. Interestingly, Habermas does not necessarily include the empty tomb in his defense since only about seventy-five percent of contemporary scholarship agrees on its historicity. See Habermas, "Core Resurrection, 403 fn. 25.
- 47 Wright, *Resurrection*, 694. See also 706.
- 48 Ibid., 709. Wright notes that the swoon theory keeps reviving itself with about as much conviction as a battered Jesus emerging from the tomb would have done. Ibid., fn. 70. See also 717. Ironically, in the 19th century, the heyday of naturalistic counter-theories for the resurrection, it was liberal theologians themselves who decimated each other's attempts to construct de-supernaturalized counter proposals. Strauss effectively demolished the swoon theory of Venturini and Paulus. But Paulus, Schleiermacher and Keim paid Strauss back in kind by dismantling his hallucination theory. Pfeleiderer criticized the legend/myth theory. And early in the 20th century, Schweitzer dismissed the original fraud theory of Reimarus. Thus the majority view of liberal scholarship for the last hundred years has tended to disregard naturalistic explanations for the resurrection. Habermas and Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* 21.
- 49 William L. Craig and Bart D. Ehrman, "Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus? William L. Craig vs. Bart D. Ehrman" [cited Dec 2014]. online: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/is-there-historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-craig-ehrman#ixzz3ME1k4Uvf>.
- 50 Craig, "Historical Evidence."
- 51 Ehrman, "Historical Evidence."
- 52 Wright, *Resurrection*, 15-16.
- 53 Ibid., 611.
- 54 Ehrman, "Historical Evidence."
- 55 Wright, *Resurrection*, 16-18.
- 56 Craig, "Historical Evidence."
- 57 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (3rd edition; ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge; Oxford: Oxford University Press), Sec. X. Craig cites an example of an atheist philosopher who believes Hume got this all wrong: John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For an excellent Christian critique of Hume see R. Douglas Geivett "The Evidential Value of Miracles," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 178-96.
- 58 See fn. 33 above.
- 59 Barry Gower, *Scientific Method: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 174.
- 60 What constitutes evidence and what constitutes background knowledge? Do we change our background beliefs due to evidential surprises and thus change our hypothesis? See D. H. Mellor, *Probability: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005), esp. chap. 7. Craig could, however, make his point simpler for his listeners. Craig spent a good bit of time discussing the probability calculus using illustrated slides like the following.

$$\frac{\Pr(R/B \ \& \ E)}{\Pr(R/B) \times \Pr(E/B \ \& \ R) + \Pr(\text{not-}R/B) \times \Pr(E/B \ \& \ \text{not-}R)} = \frac{\Pr(R/B) \times \Pr(E/B \ \& \ R)}{\Pr(R/B) \times \Pr(E/B \ \& \ R) + \Pr(\text{not-}R/B) \times \Pr(E/B \ \& \ \text{not-}R)}$$

And though not as complex as it may appear, I suspect he lost many in his audience regarding the important point he wanted to make. In fact, in the Q&A after the debate Craig notes that he wasn't interested in calculating the resurrection's probability: "Richard Swinburne, who's a professor at Oxford University, has written a book on incarnation and resurrection in which he actually uses the probability calculus that I have just given. He comes up with an estimate of 0.97 for the resurrection of Jesus in terms of its probability, and you can look at his book for that. I myself don't use the probability calculus in arguing for resurrection of Jesus. The reason I brought it up is because of the response to the Humean sort of argument that Dr.

Ehrman was offering, which I think is completely misconceived because he tries to say that the resurrection is improbable simply because of the improbability of the resurrection on the background information alone." Craig, "Historical Evidence."

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ At this point Ehrman tosses in the following remark unbecoming for a scholarly debate: "'Bill might find that surprising, but that would be because of the context he works in – a conservative, evangelical seminary. In that environment, what he's propounding is what everyone believes.'" Ehrman, "Historical Evidence."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Craig, "Historical Evidence."

⁶⁶ Ehrman, "Historical Evidence."

⁶⁷ The distinction between mass (characterized by a monologue) and personal (a dialogue) evangelism/apologetics can be seen throughout the Gospels and the Acts in sermons vs. conversations. On the contextual application of truth in personal settings see the difference in the way Jesus speaks with Nicodemus as opposed to the Samaritan woman (John 3-4) or Paul in various Jewish settings vs. pagan in the Acts.

⁶⁸ I recently participated in a doctoral study in progress which is critically examining how many atheists have become Christians in this generation. After examination of their atheist experience and the reasons for their conversions, the researcher is discovering a considerable movement from atheism to Christian faith driven by exposure to the powerful truths of apologetics.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Resurrection*, 694. Wright himself believes all counter explanations are insufficient. See his fuller remarks, 706.