

A CRITICAL REVIEW •
kategoria

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1999

JESUS' RESURRECTION

Would a court allow it?



*Why do we care about
historical evidence?*



*The Phantom
Theologian*



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editorial

I recently discovered the writings of John Muir, an early conservationist in America who walked over huge areas of its countryside. He is somewhat of a conservation hero in America, I believe; there are parks named after him, and he is remembered for his successful lobbying to have areas of wilderness protected.

Apart from the intrinsic interest of his writing about his travels, Muir is interesting because of his religion. The edition of his collected works that I have (Canongate Classics, 1996) adds an extra twist because of the strange slant the editorial comments place on that religion.

The introduction, for instance, is at pains to describe Muir as a non-conventional Christian, indeed hardly a Christian at all. Rather, this commentator insists, he was one with the modern, pantheistic, global ecological spirituality. Muir is presented as a nature-mystic in an eastern, New Age sense. The introduction describes his 'conversion experience', in which he saw "a transcendent vision of Nature. Every rock, plant and animal in the landscape was trans-

figured into a divine manifestation, each one a golden thread in the infinite fabric of life... Muir sensed a divine presence behind all things... even today this remains a truly cosmic vision" (p. xiii). This is followed by a quotation (with no reference) in which Muir writes of the world and its beauty in an eternal grand show: "Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming on seas and continents and island, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls".

A lovely passage, but the book which is supposed to describe this 'conversion experience' away from Christianity—*My First Summer in the Sierra*—describes no such thing. On the contrary, in this book Muir constantly gives thanks to God the Father and Creator who not only created such beauty but allowed him to see it. The spiritual presence Muir recognizes is not in the beautiful mountains he loved, but in the God who created them. This book ends "I have crossed the Range of Light, surely the brightest and best of all the Lord has built; and rejoicing in its glory, I gladly, gratefully, hopefully pray I may see

6 | it again” (p. 153).

The quotation given in the introduction to support this claim of Muir’s nature-mysticism is not from *My First Summer in the Sierra* at all. It is a concatenation of two quite separate passages from a later book, *Travels in Alaska*. Moreover, the quoted words are taken from a context in which Muir is not speaking of spirituality or ‘oneness’ at all, but contrasting the narrow vision of a landsman (himself) with the more imaginative view of the world which he gets while on water.

John Muir does not write specifically of his religious views, but he continually thanks a creator God for the beauty of creation. If he did convert to nature-mysticism, there is no evidence of it in the writings of this volume. So why do the editors make such a point of his supposedly pantheistic spirituality? It seems they cannot accept an ecological hero who holds Christian views. Even the incidental evidence of his Christianity in his writings must, it seems, be suppressed and reinterpreted. Maybe an earnest, nature-loving Christian just doesn’t suit the popular view.

Or maybe it’s just that supernaturalism isn’t to be taken seriously at all. I recently saw the movie *The Sixth Sense*, a very nicely crafted film. It deals with the supernatural, and has been very popular, rather to the surprise of one Sydney reviewer. He was clearly bemused that, although the movie included the supernatural, it was still a ‘serious’ movie.

Certainly there have been many trivial movies about the supernatural, but that

was not the reviewer’s point. He seemed to be surprised that the supernatural could be treated seriously at all. Are themes of death and life after death, forgiveness and resolution so trivial? If that’s the case, our society is even more superficial than I thought.

Fortunately, there are still many people who are quite prepared to treat these matters seriously. It is a shame, however, that *The Sixth Sense*—however brilliant a movie—is so popular an answer. If all we have after life is ignorant ghosthood, there’s not much to look forward to, even if there is a cute little boy who can talk to us. Frankly, I’d rather heaven.

One thing about *The Sixth Sense*—it was probably the scariest movie I have ever seen. Fear is a funny thing; why on earth would I pay money to go and be frightened? It’s certainly not fun in real life. A newspaper column about fear caught my eye recently, commenting on a book called *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. The author finished the column, “I don’t want to learn how to feel the fear and do it anyway. That’s easy. I do it every day. I wonder if someone can teach you how to stop feeling the fear? Now that would be a revelation”.

Indeed. Part of my PhD thesis was about the confidence that Reformation doctrine brought to English people. People noticeably lost a certain fear of the world in general, something which has left some historians curious as to the reason. I suggested that the very doctrines of the Reformation, such as the loving Father God who could be known person-

ally and directly, could overcome this kind of fear. It struck me that, ironically, the columnist was quite right; the thing that can teach you how to stop feeling the fear *is* a revelation.

Evidently fearlessness is not the only thing that Christianity can bring. A recent US study published in the journal *Demography* (1999, 36, 273–85) has concluded that going to church can increase your life expectancy by as much as seven years, and life expectancy also increases the more frequently you attend church. On one level it’s hardly surprising: committed Christians are more likely to have supportive networks thanks to the community nature of church, which no doubt contributes to lowering stress. They are also no doubt less likely to abuse drugs or to smoke heavily, and probably generally live a cleaner, healthier life. So it’s not surprising that, as a group, they would live longer. However, given that the public perception is often so negative, it is nice to be able to point out so clearly that, as 1 Timothy says, “godliness has value for *all* things, holding promise for both the *present* life and the life to come”.

Yet more statistics are demonstrating that marriage is another area in which godliness—or at least its moral values—contributes to a good life. A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics report shows that as the percentage of couples cohabiting before marriage has risen, so has the divorce rate. Yet it was strange to see the rather peculiar way this finding was pre-

sented in the newspapers. ‘The moralists’ would like to see people married and would disapprove of living together before marriage, the *Sydney Morning Herald* asserted rather scathingly. This article clearly scoffed at moralists for being so outdated, saving its positive tone for those who “taste the delights of marriage before making it legal”.

However, given that the statistics quoted in the very same article showed that living together before marriage augurs badly for the success of the marriage, one would think that those boring ‘moralists’ had a point. Ah, but who wants to listen to reason when you’re having fun (or even when you’re not)?

History has always been vitally important for Christianity, and this issue of *kategoria* has several articles devoted to history. First, that central historical event of Christianity, the resurrection of Christ. Despite the centuries of scholarship that confirm the historicity of Jesus’s bodily resurrection from the dead, sceptical debate still continues. A statement of the historical case is here presented by Judge Ken Handley of the New South Wales Court of Appeals, who brings his considerable legal experience to bear on the argument, and considers how a court may evaluate the evidence for the resurrection.

But why is it so important to Christianity that Jesus rose from the dead? Is it just a miracle that proves that supernatural power exists? This glib answer may be the reason why so many in our society misunderstand the arguments over the resurrection. It is

far more than just an incidental account of a miracle. Theologian Peter Bolt spells out the implications of the resurrection for the reality of every person's life.

Finally, we look at the nature of history and the importance we place on it. Edwin Judge, who has spent his professional life in the study of ancient history, points out that the concern for accuracy in history is in itself a Christian value, which transformed the whole study of history. Christians have always been concerned for the truth, and for the painstaking work of making sure that their records are accurate. Western society's concern for truthful recording of historical events at all is largely due to the influence of the Bible writers.

From religious history in this world we turn to religious history of a fictional kind—yet one that has affected millions of movie-goers. The *Star Wars* movies might seem trivial entertainment to some, but they have shaped the ideas of a gener-

ation of science-fiction fans. What's more, as director George Lucas has said publicly, these movies deliberately raise questions about God. David Höhne looks at the *Star Wars* mythology and the way in which George Lucas explains his own intentions in its theological implications.

Finally, Greg Clarke looks at a modern history-maker: Jacques Derrida, who is attempting to challenge the biblical understanding of truth and writing in all areas. The man who almost invented postmodernism is now a celebrity in his own right—an odd position for an academic literary critic and philosopher. Will Derrida's vision of meaning shape history yet to come? If he succeeds in converting the majority to his views, we may well be living in a crucial time for humanity's understanding of its own past. ☒

Kirsten Birkett
EDITOR



A lawyer looks at the resurrection

Ken Handley

What do we make of a one-off historical event such as the Resurrection of Christ? Science cannot prove nor disprove the Resurrection, any more than it can prove that Julius Caesar or Napoleon existed, because it depends on the ability to re-examine or repeat. These matters are the province of the historian, not the scientist.

As well as historians, courts sometimes have to decide what occurred beyond the range of living memory. For example, in 1973 our High Court had to decide what happened at Port Moresby in 1886.¹ The tools of trade of the judge in such a case, and of the ancient historian in every case, are historical evidence—what people wrote about the events, the evidence from archaeology, and circumstantial evidence. There is nothing special about this; it's only common sense.

The Christian approach to the evidence for the Resurrection is no different. From the very beginning Christians have appealed to the evidence. Luke 1:2 states that his

narrative is based upon what he was told by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses. John 21:24 states “this is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.” Peter in his sermon in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:32 said: “This Jesus God has raised up of which we are all witnesses.”

The documentary evidence

In trying to work out what happened on the first Easter, we have to rely on the historical documents of the New Testament. But this is not the only evidence available. There is also contemporary material from Roman and Jewish sources. The existence of Jesus, and significant facts about him and the early Church, are confirmed by the Roman authors Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny and the Jewish authors Josephus, Rabbi Eliezer and the Talmud.² Courts consider that corroboration is an important guide to the truth

¹ *Administration of Papua and New Guinea v Daera Guba* (1973) 130 CLR 353.

² Paul W. Barnett, *Is the New Testament History*, Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney, 1986, pp. 30-31.

12 | and if a case is corroborated in important matters from independent sources or the other side, it is likely to be accepted.

It is also significant if you find that there

With one possible and debatable exception, Luke's secular history is accurate.

are incidental details in a person's evidence, which can be checked from independent sources, and are correct. Luke, the author of his Gospel and Acts, placed the life of Jesus and the growth of the early Church in their context in secular history. In the opening chapters of his Gospel he refers to Herod, King of Judea and to the decree of Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled, and similar references appear throughout both books. With one possible and debatable exception, Luke's secular history is accurate.³

The earliest written evidence for the Resurrection we can date with any precision is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, written between AD 52 and 57, 20 years or so after the first Easter. Paul wrote:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in

accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Then last of all he was seen by me also (1 Cor 15:3-8).

This is what he had told the Corinthians when he first met them about AD 50. He got his hearsay information when he went to Jerusalem about five years after the first Easter, and he appeals to the evidence of the eyewitnesses, including himself (Acts 9:26).

This is a remarkable piece of historical evidence written at a very early date, when eye witnesses were still alive. Anzac Day this year has reminded us that there are still survivors of the First World War, 81 years after it ended, who remember what happened. I had first hand experience as a judge of a remarkable parallel. In February 1964, *HMAS Melbourne* sank *HMAS Voyager*. In October 1996, over 32 years later, I sat on the Court which heard the appeal by the Commonwealth from the award of damages by a jury to a Mr McLean who had been a sailor on *Melbourne* and claimed to have suffered post traumatic stress disorder. Our decision is in the official Law Reports.⁴ Survivors gave evidence at the trial and had the clearest recollection of what had hap-

3 F F Bruce *The New Testament Documents* 5th ed InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1992, pp. 81-86.

4 *Commonwealth of Australia v McLean* (1996) 41 NSWLR 389.



pened. Under the *Evidence Act 1995*, Mrs McLean was able to say in court in 1996 what her husband had told her in 1964 shortly after the collision.⁵ Hearsay evidence, such as Luke has incorporated in his Gospel and Paul included in his letter to the Corinthians, is now accepted in court in civil cases if it was fresh in the memory of the original speaker. The 32 years in this case was longer than the interval of 20 years or so to the date of 1 Corinthians.

The gospel authors

We know quite a lot about the gospel authors. Mark was Peter's secretary and records Peter's eyewitness version. Matthew and John were eye witnesses. Luke was a Greek physician who, as he says, set out to write a historical account based on the available written materials and the evidence of

eyewitnesses. He was a companion of Paul in his later journeys and went with him to Rome. He had the opportunity to speak to eyewitnesses when he went to Jerusalem with Paul about AD 57,⁶ and during Paul's two year imprisonment in Palestine which followed, and he may have met Peter and Mark in Rome.

Analysis of the Greek texts has established that Luke and Matthew borrowed some material from Mark, but not from each other or John. There is no evidence that John borrowed from any of the others. Matthew and Luke also borrowed from a written compilation of the sayings of Jesus designated Q, which has not otherwise survived. Mark borrowed from no other gospel and was probably the first, and this is supported by his text. He refers to the high priest and his house without identifying either, just as we might refer to the current prime minister without naming him, but would name the prime minister if we were writing about events twenty years ago.⁷

Dating the gospels

About three years after the first Easter, Stephen was stoned to death by the mob in Jerusalem and persecution broke out which scattered the Church (Acts 7:54-8:1). Until then, the Church had largely been concentrated in Jerusalem where there was easy access to the apostles for

6 Acts 21:15 "we... went up to Jerusalem".

7 Mark 14:53-65. Compare Matthew 26:3, 57-58; John 11:49.

5 *Evidence Act 1995 (NSW) s 64.*



first-hand accounts of the ministry and death of Jesus. The scattering of the Church would have created an immediate need for written material about Jesus. It is likely that both Mark's Gospel (or its predecessor) and Q came into existence about this time.

The Gospels were in circulation when eyewitnesses, sympathetic and hostile, were still alive.

None of the Gospels refer to the Jewish War that broke out in AD 66 and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. John alone refers to the death of Peter (John 21:19), which took place in Rome under Nero some time after AD 60. We therefore have good reason to think that John's Gospel was finished between then and the outbreak of the Jewish War in AD 66.⁸ The Book of Revela-

tion written by him much later refers to the New Jerusalem which may well be an acknowledgment that the old one was in ruins (Revelation 21).

Dating the Gospels between the death of Stephen in AD 36-7 and the outbreak of war in AD 66 provides no reason to doubt their accuracy. The period between the first Easter and the outbreak of the Jewish War was about 32 years, the same as in the *Voyager* case. The Gospels were in circulation when eyewitnesses, sympathetic and hostile, were still alive.

Difference in detail

Courts expect that evidence given by honest and reliable witnesses will agree in substance but differ in detail, and they view with suspicion witnesses who give the same evidence word for word. This always suggests that they have put their heads together to make up their story. The Gospels are four substantially independent accounts of the events which agree in substance, but differ in details, and they pass this test. In addition the Epistles contain a wealth of uncontrived detail about the teachings and death of Jesus, which is consistent with the Gospel accounts.⁹

Do we have authentic records?

Of course we do not have the manuscripts signed by the Gospel writers or Paul's

⁸ Barnett *op cit* pp. 37-38, 65-66.

⁹ Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, Apolos, Leicester, 1997, pp. 39-58.

original letters. You are therefore entitled to ask how good, and how early, are our manuscripts, and how confident we can be that they have not been corrupted by constant recopying. Here again the news is good. The hot, dry climate of the Middle East has preserved papyrus manuscripts from very early in the Christian era. Fragments of the Gospels have been dated to AD 130 to 150.¹⁰ From then on, the volume and variety of manuscript material builds up steadily until we have two complete New Testaments dating from about AD 350—one in the Vatican and one in the British Museum, the latter only discovered in 1844 in a monastery on Mt Sinai.¹¹ There are nearly 5,000 early manuscripts of the New Testament or parts of it in Greek. You may not be impressed by this but you ought to be. This early manuscript material is remarkably consistent. The scribes who copied manuscripts from earlier ones were faithful and accurate. There are



¹⁰ Bruce, *op cit.* p. 17.

¹¹ Bruce, *op cit.*, p. 16; Barnett *Is the New Testament History?*, p. 45.

some variations but none affect any of the central facts of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. We also have early manuscripts in other languages—Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and Latin, which are remarkably consistent both with the Greek material and each other.¹²



It is instructive to compare the wealth of surviving early material for the New Testament with the surviving manuscript material of the classical secular works of Greece and Rome:¹³

- (a) The oldest surviving manuscript of Caesar's Gallic Wars dates from AD 850, 900 years after his death. (From 1999 that takes us back to just after the Norman Conquest in 1066.) There are only ten good early manuscripts. Yet no one doubts the existence of Caesar, or the history recorded in these manuscripts.
- (b) Most of the books of the Roman historians, Livy and Tacitus, have been lost.
- (c) The works of the Greek historian Thucydides (460–400 BC) survive in eight manuscripts, the earliest dating from AD 900, 1,300 years after the originals, and a similar situation applies to the works of Herodotus. These books are the basis of the known history of classical Greece.
- (d) Alexander the Great died in 323 BC. The earliest surviving history of his life was written by Arrian about AD 130, 450 years after Alexander's death. 450

¹² Bruce *ibid.*

¹³ Bruce *op cit* p 16.

years ago, Henry VIII had only been dead for two years. Arrian worked from books written after the death of Alexander by his generals and others which have not survived.¹⁴

The letters of the Church Fathers, Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, written between AD 96 and 110, quote extensively from the New Testament and these quotations are consistent with the direct manuscript material.¹⁵

There is also archaeological evidence which confirms incidental matters mentioned in the Gospels and Acts (although of course it could never establish by itself that Jesus rose from the dead). Matters mentioned in the books which were once disputed are now confirmed. For instance, until recently there was no evidence outside Christian sources that

there was a village called Nazareth at the time of Christ, and sceptical scholars claimed that it was a Christian invention.¹⁶ In

1962 a 4th-century Jewish inscription was discovered in

Israel near Caesarea which provides positive evidence of the existence of Nazareth

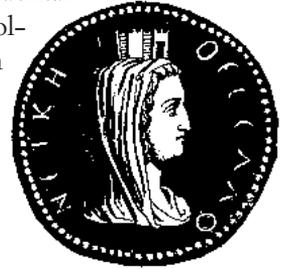


14 Barnett *op cit*, p. 41.

15 Barnett *op cit*, pp. 38-40, Bruce *op cit*, pp. 18-19.

16 Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark* Hodder & Stoughton, 1937, p. 17 refers to sceptics who noted that Nazareth was not mentioned in the Old Testament, Josephus or the Talmud, and it had been said that the name of the sect—the Nazarites or the Nazarenes—had later been wrongly regarded as referring to a place. I am indebted to Bishop Barnett for this reference.

in the time of Jesus.¹⁷ Archaeological work in the Old City of Jerusalem has confirmed much of the detail in the Gospels and Acts about that city.¹⁸ It would have been impossible to get all these incidental facts right if as some scholars and sceptics claim these books were written 100 years or more after the events when the city was in ruins.



Reasons to believe

Most of the pre-AD 350 manuscript material, the results of the analysis of the texts, and the archaeological evidence have only become available in the last 150 years. For most of the Christian era, people have not had the benefit of this evidence and research. From the beginning many have found the historical books of the New Testament self-authenticating. Those who read them with an open mind often became convinced that this was no myth and that these events really happened. No one could have made it up. The diagnosis of the human condition we find in these pages, and the moral teaching of Jesus they record have a freshness and power that can convince those who come with an open mind.

Can the New Testament documents themselves provide a proper evidentiary

17 Barnett, *The Truth about Jesus*, Aquila Press, Sydney, 1994, pp. 31-3; Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1969 (Nazareth p. 36).

18 Barnett, *The Truth about Jesus*, p. 35; Bruce, *op cit*, p. 94.

basis for Christian faith? A famous Australian wrote:

...having read and re-read the... documents to which reference has been made... I see no reason to doubt both their general accuracy and the veracity of those who compiled them. Indeed the more I have read them, the better opinion I have formed of the capacity of those who prepared them and the more convinced I am that they speak of events which actually took place as they are related.¹⁹

This was not a clergyman writing about the New Testament, it was Sir Garfield Barwick, Chief Justice, writing about the official records and reports of 1886 in his judgment in the Port Moresby case in 1973. For nearly 2,000 years Christians have been saying the same thing about the historical books of the New Testament.

Circumstantial evidence

What then about the circumstantial evidence? It is remarkable that we have even heard of Jesus. He was a carpenter who spent most of his life in a village in Palestine on the fringe of the Roman Empire. He was executed by the Jewish and Roman authorities nearly 2,000 years ago. He had no political or military power, occupied no position of influence, and left behind no holy



book. He spent a lot of time training twelve men but one betrayed him. Consider his life's work on the evening of the first Good Friday. He was dead and buried, his disciples had run away, and Peter had been so cowardly as to deny three times to servant women and others in the household of the high priest that he even knew Jesus (Mark 14:66-71). To all appearances his mission had been a failure and the remaining apostles were in no state to carry it on.

However God was about to transform the situation by an act of supernatural power. Jesus's return to life transformed the eleven apostles into men of courage and power. Starting in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost, which falls this year on 23rd May, they proclaimed publicly that

To all appearances his mission had been a failure and the remaining apostles were in no state to carry it on.

Jesus was alive again, that they had seen him in the flesh, spoken to him, and eaten with him. The proclamation was made in the city that had witnessed the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, the trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, and the Crucifixion. Jesus's return from the dead was first proclaimed in the city that had watched him die, about six weeks after the first Easter Sunday. This was not something that emerged at a time and place remote from the scene of the events.

¹⁹ *Administration of Papua and New Guinea v Daera Guba* (1973) 130 CLR 353, 378-9.

How were these claims treated at the time? Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost added 3,000 new believers to the Church. Many did not believe, but the Jewish and Roman authorities took the claims so seriously that they resorted to persecution. They had no other answer. Peter

tures about the Messiah had been fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. Because of all this their claims about his Resurrection had a credibility that claims about anyone else would never have had.

Surveys reveal that more than 75% of Australians believe in God—they do not think the universe created itself. The Resurrection, of course, was an unprecedented event, but no trouble for a God who created the universe and life in all its forms. The apostles certainly thought that they had witnessed the result of a great supernatural event and they were transformed. When Peter and John were arrested in the weeks after Pentecost, they were brought before the Sanhedrin, which had effectively condemned Jesus to death only a few weeks before. There was no cowardice now; Peter told the Sanhedrin that the man they had crucified God had raised from the dead (Acts 4:10), and he and John refused to be silent although they knew they were risking their lives.

There have been many attempts to explain away the disappearance of the body of Jesus. It's been said that the women and the disciples went to the wrong tomb, the disciples stole his body, that Jesus didn't really die but only lost consciousness, or that the whole thing was simply a spiritual experience for the apostles as Jesus came to life in their hearts.

These theories are inconsistent with the evidence and the probabilities. The Roman soldiers were professional executioners. One pierced Jesus's side with a spear and out came blood and water, which is medical evidence of death.

Surveys reveal that more than 75% of Australians believe in God—they do not think the universe created itself.

and John were arrested twice within the first few weeks for preaching the resurrection. Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem about AD 35 and Roman persecution began under Nero after AD 60 and continued intermittently with great savagery for nearly three centuries. The Resurrection may be ignored or ridiculed today, but that was not the reaction at the time.

The claims were taken seriously in Jerusalem because Jesus was well known there for his teaching and his miracles, particularly the raising of Lazarus from the dead at Bethany only a few miles out of town not long before. John records that a great many Jews came there not only for Jesus's sake, but that they might also see Lazarus (John 11:45). When the chief priests and Pharisees had earlier sent officials to arrest Jesus they returned empty-handed with the excuse, "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46). The apostles were also able to show how prophecies in the Jewish scrip-



Because of this Jesus's legs were not broken, but the legs of the two thieves were. His post-Resurrection appearances were not as a desperately sick cripple, but as a man in good health who could walk normally several miles to Emmaus on the first Easter Sunday. The wrong tomb explanation is pathetically weak—the error must have been discovered within a few hours. The 'spiritual experience' theory does not square with the evidence either. The risen Jesus ate a meal and Thomas felt the imprint of the nails in Jesus's hands and of the spear in his side. His appearances lasted for only forty days and then ceased, to be repeated only once more to Paul on the road to Damascus. If the appearances of Jesus to his disciples were spiritual experiences, why did they suddenly cease and never occur again?

We may reject the historical evidence if we like, but what we cannot do is re-write it according to our preconceived ideas. Reputable historians and courts work with the evidence; they don't alter it. The theories of so-called scholars 2,000 years after the events of the first Easter, which are not based on the historical evidence and are inconsistent with it, do not deserve to be taken seriously.

Finally, there is the theory that the disciples stole his body and the whole story is a lie and a fraud. This is the least probable of all. The disciples preached and practised a high standard of personal ethics. They proclaimed the Resurrection openly and fearlessly. Most died for their faith. We know from recent history that fraudulent conspirators are not prepared to suffer in silence to

protect their conspiracy. You may remember how quickly the Watergate conspirators cracked when they faced jail. It would have been a tremendous propaganda victory for the Romans or the Jews to produce a disciple of Jesus who was prepared to say that the whole story was a lie. They never did—there was no second Judas.

The emergence of the Christian Church soon after the first Easter is attested



We may reject the historical evidence if we like, but what we cannot do is re-write it according to our preconceived ideas.

from Jewish and Roman sources, and is itself an important piece of circumstantial evidence. For the first 300 years the Church grew by peaceful means, and in the face of official opposition, through the witness of individual Christians. Its existence and survival is testimony to the conviction with which the apostles and their successors preached the Resurrection, and to the credibility of that preaching.

Circumstantial evidence is considered important because of the way the circumstances can sometimes fit together and point to the same conclusion. For many years the standard direction to juries about circumstantial evidence has been

20 | that given by Chief Baron Pollock to the jury in *Regina v Exall*.²⁰

It has been said that circumstantial evidence is to be considered as a chain... but that is not so, for then, if any one link broke, the chain would fail. It is more like the case of a rope composed of several cords.

The circumstantial evidence about the Resurrection points to only one conclusion, and the combined strength of the evidence is very great.

One strand of the cord might be insufficient to sustain the weight, but three stranded together may be quite of sufficient strength. Thus it may be in circumstantial evidence—there may be a combination of circumstances, no one of which would raise a reasonable conviction, or more than a mere suspicion, but the whole, taken together, may create a strong conclusion of guilt...with as much certainty as human affairs can require or admit of.

In 1875 Lord Chancellor Cairns said in the *Belhaven and Stenton Peerage*²¹ in the House of Lords:

...in dealing with circumstantial

evidence we have to consider the weight which is to be given to the united force of all the circumstances put together. You may have a ray of light so feeble that by itself it will do little to elucidate a dark corner. But on the other hand you may have a number of rays, each of them insufficient but all converging and brought to bear upon the same point and, when united, producing a body of illumination which will clear away the darkness which you are endeavouring to dispel.

The circumstantial evidence about the Resurrection points to only one conclusion, and the combined strength of the evidence is very great. After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down his body, and wrapped it, mummy-style, in strips of linen heavily impregnated, as John records (19:39), with 100 lbs of embalming ointment and buried it in the tomb. When the women brought the news early on the Sunday morning that Jesus's body was missing, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John tells us what happened:

...the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came... and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief... folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple... went in also; and he saw and believed (John 20:4-8).

20 (1866) 4 F&F 922, 929 (176 ER 850, 853).

21 (1875) 1 App. Cas. 278, 279.

The text is powerfully understated. What did John see that made him believe? Clearly the whole mummy had not been removed. If the linen cloths had been unwound and only the body removed, it could have been the work of human hands. So the embalming cloths must have been intact, but with the weight of the ointment stiff with the cold of a Jerusalem Easter they had collapsed on themselves.

Death had not held Jesus nor had the embalming cloths. He had passed through both. John saw and believed. Will you read and believe? ☒

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Christ is risen *So what's the difference?*

Peter Bolt

‘Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!’

Thus say the various liturgical formulae that have been said in Christian churches for centuries and still are being said in countless churches each Sunday. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus is by no means peripheral to Christianity; it is at its core. But, as the saying goes, familiarity often breeds contempt. Are we really saying that a man rose from the grave, i.e. that a dead man, a corpse, came out of the grave? And, if we are saying that, what does that event really mean? It may be amazing, and it certainly is unique, but does it have any real cash-value for life at the end of the twentieth century?

I. Christ is risen! It's a fact

The first thing to establish is whether or not we are talking about fact or fiction. This is surely extremely important. Even though our post-modern world recognizes the power of stories to change our life story, we are able to discern that the difference between a true story and a made-up story is

still a distinction worth making. If I told a story that New Zealand had transposed the sporting rivalry with Australia to the next level by starting a nuclear war with Australia by dropping an atom bomb on the Sydney Sports Ground, there is a huge difference between the implications and the consequences of the story if true, and the story if not. So did Jesus of Nazareth really rise from the grave? That is, is it a fact of history just as much as the fact of history that Captain James Cook landed on the East coast of Australia, beginning the British settlement of this land?

The historical answer must uncover the evidence and then account for that evidence through proposing a theory which best explains that evidence. As the previous article has explained, the evidence is considerable, and the best theory to explain the evidence is that Jesus really did rise from the dead.¹

¹ See Peter Bolt, 'Questing for Jesus', *kategoria*, 1998, 8, pp. 9-31 for an examination of modern attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus.

A common reaction to this evidence is simply to deny the very possibility of a dead man coming to life again. This denial was found in the ancient world just as surely as it is part of the modern world. After all, it has good statistical support on its side: dead people usually stay dead in 100% of the cases known to human beings from all parts of the globe and for all time. But, despite the naturalness of this explanation, it must be said that it is not an explanation; it is a prejudice. It is a well-founded prejudice, but it is still a prejudice, in that it does not attempt to explain the evidence, but simply asserts that the New Testament explanation cannot happen.

Even in the ancient world, there were other options. Were the reported appearances the appearance of a ghost? Luke's



ghost theory does not explain the empty tomb, for ghosts usually left their corpses in the grave. Nor does it adequately account for the rise of the Christian movement.

The hero cult also relied on a theory of ghosts. Here a great hero was worshipped at their grave-site, in the belief that their power continued to have an influence in the world of the living. Occasionally, if the hero had died in battle in a foreign land, the worship would take place at a 'Cenotaph', which is translated 'empty tomb'. There are also reports of some of these heroes appearing in the vicinity of their tombs. Was this what the Gospel writers were trying to say when they spoke of an empty tomb and of appearances from Jesus? No, this does not fit the evidence well at all. Firstly, the 'cenotaphs' at which heroes were sometimes worshipped

As they began to preach the gospel, this incident became a crucial piece of their witness to the resurrection.

Gospel shows that this option was considered from the earliest days, for this was what the first disciples were afraid of (Luke 24:36-43). The risen Jesus anticipated this objection, and demonstrated to them that he was not a ghost, but 'flesh and bones' by inviting them to inspect his body (vv. 39-40) and demonstrating his physicality by eating some fish (vv. 41-43). As they began to preach the gospel, this incident became a crucial piece of their witness to the resurrection (see Acts 10:41). In addition, the

assumed that the hero had died and was buried in a grave elsewhere—it was just that these graves were inaccessible. A body in a grave was essential for the cult, and so the cenotaphs were an attempt to provide this essential item. In other words, the cenotaphs of the hero cult were empty (as a substitute for a body known to be buried elsewhere), whereas Jesus' grave was emptied (in that the body was there but had disappeared). There is also no evidence that any worship was ever offered at Jesus's tomb, and the appearances occurred at some distance from the original tomb (e.g. Emmaus, Galilee) which does not fit the facts of the hero cult.

The Greeks and Romans, as well as the Jews, believed that great men were occasionally translated to heaven, without dying. Amongst the Jews, for example, the disappearance of Enoch (Genesis 5:24) was elaborated in this direction, as was the translation of Elijah (2 Kings 2), and the death of Moses was also discussed by the Jewish historian Josephus in a similar fashion. As time went on, the Romans believed that several of their emperors underwent 'apotheosis'—they were great men who were translated to heaven to become gods. But Jesus didn't avoid death, he truly died. And he was crucified, which removed him from being a candidate for apotheosis, for a crucified man was regarded as under a curse and not assured of even a good place in the afterlife, let alone a place amongst the gods! The accounts of the resurrection in the early preaching, in Paul, the Gospels or anywhere else in the NT have no real trace of

the language used in the various translation stories elsewhere. The closest the gospels come to it is in the transfiguration scene (e.g. Mark 9:21-3), which can be read as Jesus having the option of being translated to heaven, but choosing instead to come down the mountain in order to die before entering into his glory. In addition, apotheosis was of the soul, which left the body in the tomb, but Jesus's tomb was emptied.

The best explanation of the evidence is that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, really did rise again from the dead.

Attempts have also been made to explain the appearances as visions or hallucinations. This does not explain the empty tomb, and proposes that the Christian movement was founded upon a big mistake. But does the theory fit the facts? The appearances were reported at various times of the day and in a variety of situations and to different kinds of people in varying numbers. Do hallucinations occur to groups who all see the same thing? What analogies do we have for different people having the same hallucination as someone else has had in a different place and time?

Although it is an utterly amazing claim, it seems that the best explanation of the evidence is that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, really did rise again from the dead. He is risen, it's a fact. But, so what? What is the significance of Jesus's resurrection both for him and for the world?

**2. Christ is risen!
So everything is his**

On the day of Pentecost in the year AD 30, the city of Jerusalem witnessed a strange event. The disciples of Jesus had been waiting expectantly in the city for a new stage in God’s plan, when the sound of rushing wind, the appearance of tongues of fire, and the sound of the disciples speaking in other languages signalled the arrival of the

The present is his, because he has poured out the Spirit onto all who call upon him for salvation.

Spirit of God (Acts 2). Peter explained this event as being a direct consequence of Jesus’s resurrection. The prophet Joel had promised that the Spirit would be poured out in the last days, so the last days had begun (vv. 16-21), bringing the time of salvation (v. 21). God’s plans had come to their climax when the well-known Jesus, the one crucified by the city of Jerusalem, had been raised from the dead in the divine reversal of the human decision about him (vv. 22-24). The risen Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God from where he then poured out the Holy Spirit (vv. 32-33).

Citing Psalm 16, Peter argued that the resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that death could not hold him, because the promised Messiah was mightier than death (vv. 25-31). This unique event therefore makes clear that God had installed him as

Lord and Christ, as Psalm 110 predicted (vv. 32-36).

As Lord and Christ, everything belongs to Jesus: the past, the future and the present. The past is his, in that the Old Testament is fulfilled in him (note Peter’s citation of Joel and the Psalms). The future is his, in that he is now seated at the right hand of God until God makes his enemies his footstool (vv. 34-35), which suggests that the future will be concerned with making Jesus enemies acknowledge his Lordship whether willingly (through the gospel) or unwillingly (on the final day). The present is his, because he has poured out the Spirit onto all who call upon him for salvation.

This picture of everything belonging to the risen Lord could be expanded further from elsewhere in the New Testament, for, as risen Lord he is the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2). But it also becomes clear, that whatever the Christ has achieved, he has achieved it on behalf of his people.

**3. Christ is risen!
So everything is ours**

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds the Corinthian church of the gospel that he has preached and they have believed. He reminds them that it is a gospel about resurrection, and he lists those who saw the risen Lord, and who would therefore be able to confirm that this event had actually occurred (note especially v. 6, which implicitly says: ‘if you don’t believe me, go and ask them!’). But, although the Corinthians believed that Jesus had risen, it seems that

they had not managed to grasp the fact that this held serious implications for them. Their problem was that some amongst them denied that there was a future resurrection which was yet to occur (v. 12; for the same problem, see 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Timothy 2:18).

If this were so, says Paul, then not even Christ has been raised (v. 13), for the two events must be taken closely together, as he will argue more below (v. 20). This would mean that their preaching and faith were useless (v. 14), that the apostles had made God a liar (v. 15), that there is no provision for sin (v. 17), life is still to be lived firmly under the shadow of death (v. 18), and so Christians are the most pitiful of people (v. 19). This would also destroy the mysterious practice of baptism of the dead (v. 29) and make the apostolic labours a complete waste of time (vv. 30-32). If the dead will not be raised, then a life of hedonism is called for (v. 32): let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Death robs life of all meaning, so make the most of it while it is yours!

But Paul's object is to stress that there *is* a future resurrection. This certain knowledge is grounded upon the fact that Jesus Christ has been raised. Christ has been raised 'the first-fruits of those who have died' (v. 20). The image of the first-fruits suggests that he is the first of many who will rise in the resurrection harvest to come. His resurrection is not a separate event from the end-time resurrection expected by the Jews (cf. Daniel 12:12), but it is the beginning of that resurrection and a beginning that guarantees that the rest of the resurrection har-



vest will most surely occur. It will all occur in its own time as God's plan continues to unfold: Christ first, then those who belong to him will rise from the dead at his return (v.23). Paul calls upon the Corinthians to think sensibly—to think with this future resurrection in mind (v.34), hinting that a failure to live in the light of the future resurrection actually leads to sin. They are to realize that they will have a new body, completely suitable for the age to come, and they will bear the image of the risen Christ (vv.35-49). The change will occur in the twinkling of an eye in the future, and we will be transformed into our deathless state of life (vv.50-53) and death, the last and greatest enemy, will then be done away with (vv.54-57).

This sure future means that the work for the Lord in the present time gains significance and meaning (v.58). Death robs all of life of vitality and purpose. Hebrews (2:14) speaks of the fear of death holding humanity in slavery all the days of their

28 | lives. Our mortality hangs over our heads all our days, so that the only answer seems to be to turn to the desperate attempt to make the most of the brief time we have got through ‘eating, drinking and being merry’. Even our pleasure-seeking is against the backdrop of our grave, ‘for tomorrow we die’. But, because of his resurrection, Jesus gives us back a future. There is more to life than the grave, and so there is more to life. Because of Jesus’s resurrection, the future is ours, which gives us back our lives! Because everything is his, past, present, and future, so too everything is ours. We will live again, so we can live again.

If death is the end, then nothing really matters in life.

4. Christ is risen! So everything matters

If death is the end, then nothing really matters in life. This sad fact of mortal life has been observed by many from the preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, to the philosophers both of the ancient Epicurean and the modern existentialist variety; to the pop group Queen, whose top-selling ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ proclaimed ‘nothing really matters’. For following hard on the ‘Where am I going?’ question comes the ‘Who am I?’ question, and if there is no future, then there is no personal significance.

But when the resurrection of Jesus gives us back our future, the ‘who am I?’ question takes on a whole new perspective. The

restoration of our future brings about the restoration—or perhaps it is better to say the discovery—of our true self.

Paul urged the Colossians (3:14) ‘seek the things that are above...set your minds upon the things above, not on things that are on earth’. In the New Testament the ‘things of the earth’ are not simply the evil things of this world, but they also encompass the things that we regard as part of ordinary life (marriage, family, work, buying and selling). It is possible to pursue such things as if they represent the sum total of reality. This is the error of materialism, which proclaims the material world as the only world, and so life becomes the world of matter and all else doesn’t matter! But the great tragedy is that the logic of materialism reduces human beings to matter as well, and, seeing that we die, we aren’t as lasting as some of the other forms that matter appears in, so we are not as significant either! Because we decay and die, nothing ultimately matters if all we have to set our minds upon are the things of everyday existence, and the only guiding picture of the world is that of materialism. The one with the most toys at the end may win the materialist game, but that equation sends back empty echoes to human beings asking ‘who am I?’.

But it is equally possible to seek “the things above” in a misguided fashion. The Western world is becoming increasingly disillusioned with the materialist view of life and so every day witnesses more options being put forward to get in touch with the spiritual reality of our lives and our world. In the ancient world, in spirituality deriving from Eastern thought, and

amongst this new spirituality all around us at the moment, there can be a tendency to stress the spiritual so much that the earthly realities are deemed to be irrelevant, or even damaging. So, for example, some of the ancient Greek philosophers spoke of the body as the prison-house of the soul, and life became the quest for the subjugation of the body to enable the release of the soul. On this view the passions (emotions) were regarded as evil. Others derided or even forbade marriage, for sex was a concession to bodily passions. Others treated the body harshly through diet or other ascetic practices. A version of these practices seemed to be part of the error that the Colossians were in danger of falling into (see Colossians 2:20-23). Paul urges the Colossians to think of heavenly things, but not in such a way that loses touch with real life in the here and now.

He is urging them to become what they will be. Where is the 'true you'? It has become fairly normal to hear of people



trying 'to find themselves'. When some people search for their "true them" they search inside themselves, perhaps through some kind of therapy, as if the answer will be found through 'the journey within'. It is amazing how many others think that they will find themselves in some foreign land,

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Because [Jesus] did all this for us, Paul explains that we ought to think of ourselves in exactly the same terms, as if those things have actually occurred for us as well.

as if hopping on a plane and breaking away from all your roots, responsibilities and relationships will enable you to discover your true identity by 'the journey away'. But, because of the resurrection of Jesus, our true self is found by 'the journey ahead'.

Jesus died and rose again and was installed at the right hand of God from whence he will come again one day. Because he did all this for us, Paul explains that we ought to think of ourselves in exactly the same terms, as if those things have actually occurred for us as well. When he died, we died. When he rose and ascended to heaven, we did too. The implications of this are that our true life is with the risen Christ in heaven: 'you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Colossians 3:3). We do not yet see who we will be. Whatever we are now, even despite the renovation of life that has begun through Christ in the here and now,

30 | it is but a shadow of the glory that we will be. For 'when Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory' (v. 4). We are under construction, but the final job will only be seen in completed form on the last day. Our 'true us' will be seen then, after we complete the journey which lies ahead and only ends when the Lord returns.

It is this future life that should govern our life in the present. We shouldn't live as if the things of this life are what define who we are. Don't set your mind on the things of this earth, but on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. We should live as if the things to come define who we are. We will be resurrected in glory, sharing the image of the heavenly man. We are not what we will one day be (see also 1 John 3:2), but in the meantime we should live as if we were! And this won't lead to a spirituality that

tries to overcome real life in the body; on the contrary, it makes the life in the body all the more significant. We will be raised bodily, and so all that we do in the body becomes all-important. We are to live in the body now, as if we were living in our resurrected state. So it is little wonder that when Paul goes on to show what seeking the things above actually looks like, he proceeds to address the proper attitudes and behaviour with which we are to approach the many relationships of this world (Colossians 3-4). The resurrection of Jesus gives us back our future, and so bodily life is affirmed as most important. Christ is risen! So everything matters after all. ☒

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Biblical sources of historical method

E. A. Judge

A. Identifying causes—nature or law?

Classical Greek enquiry (*historia*) might be pursued in any field: ‘natural history’, for example, as ‘science’ could still be called at the beginning of this century. It was Thucydides, in the fifth century BC, whose ‘Enquiries’ into the Peloponnesian War decisively cornered the term for what we still call ‘History’ without further qualification. His principles and method are clearly stated:

Where I have not been an eyewitness myself, I have investigated with the utmost accuracy (*akribeia*) attainable every detail...Possibly the public will find my unromantic narrative forbidding, but I shall be satisfied if it is favourably received by readers whose object is exact knowledge of facts which had not only actually occurred, but which are destined approximately to repeat themselves in all human probability.

I have tried to make a permanent contribution to knowledge rather than an ephemeral tour de force.¹

Most historians nowadays do not tackle contemporary affairs. But eyewitness accuracy remains the ideal in the quest for sources. Thucydides’s method will indeed work for us all, as he assumed. But he was blind to the personal character of what the eye sees.² His focus on the state, politics and war is only now being challenged by other ways of seeing history. Its power lay in the principle he implies. There was a predetermined pattern to human affairs, so one could objectively discern it.

This permanency was an expression of the fixity of nature itself. The perfect order of the cosmos was eternal. Within it

1 Thucydides, *Histories*, I 22.2, 4, tr. A. J. Toynbee, *Greek Historical Thought from Homer to the Age of Heraclitus*, Dent, London, 1924, p. 19.

2 G. Crane, *The Blinded Eye: Thucydides and the New Written Word*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 1996.

34 | one could read in the heavens the rhythmic cycles by which what appeared to be ever changing was only forever repeating itself. In Thucydides's day philosophers therefore challenged human law (the *nomos* which presumed to assign to each his fair share). It was only a vain attempt to

This was why the Romans had conquered the Greeks and would continue to rule the world so long as they kept the constitutional balance.

change the course of nature. They would have been shocked at our legislating to manage even the rhythms of evolution. But in the next century Aristotle struck a blow for civilization. There was no conflict between nature and law, for law itself was natural to us. "Man is by nature a political animal".³

The civilization of the state thus also became part of the eternal cycle of events. For Polybius, the great historian of the second century BC, the key to it was to recognize the three forms of its constitution: kingship, aristocracy and democracy.

For he alone who has seen how each form naturally arises and develops will be able to see when, how, and where the growth, perfection, change and end of each are likely to occur again.⁴

Perfect stability had been attained in Polybius's day only by Rome, which combined the perfection of each form in the 'mixed constitution'. This was why the Romans had conquered the Greeks and would continue to rule the world so long as they kept the constitutional balance. Polybius of course was aware that the Romans did not literally have a constitution. They had achieved it all by a kind of natural reason. Constitutional explanations of history have nevertheless dominated it ever since, climaxing in the nineteenth century. The twentieth century has witnessed a more novel analogue in the class struggle.

But Marx did not accept that there is nothing to it all except 'natural history'. He had drunk from the wine-skins of the prophets. Against the state which wanted to worship 'all the host of heaven' (2 Kings 17:6) they declared the word (and law) of the Lord. It enshrined a principle that exalted history above nature, asserting the Creator himself as the source of truth, a reality experienced through lived events.



3 Aristotle, *Politics*, I 1.9, tr. B. Jowett.

4 Polybius, *Histories*, VI 4.12, tr. W. R. Paton.

Yet Judaism lost its distinctive historical drive through objectifying the law.⁵ The preface of Luke's gospel, however, discloses a scholar using technical conventions to resuscitate the sense of encounter with an authority revealed in living experience.

Since many have undertaken to set out an account (*diegesis*) of the affairs (*pragmata*) that have come to fruition amongst us, (2) as they have been handed on to us by those who from the start became eyewitnesses (*autoptai*) and agents (*hyperetai*) of the message (*logos*), (3) it seemed right for me also, Your Excellency, having traced everything accurately (*akribos*) from the beginning, to write it all up in an orderly way, (4) so that you may see the reliability of the messages (*logoi*) on which you have been instructed.⁶

Through the wordy conventions (unrav-elled by L. Alexander) that signal a technical monograph blows a fresh wind.

Eyewitness evidence and accurate research are classically Thucydidean. But the eye-witnesses have now become also 'agents' of the *logos*. In itself *logos* was a conventional enough term for any discourse on a serious topic, but the 'agency' of the eyewitnesses implies something new—a personal commitment to its propagation. Herodotus had spoken of historical records as *logoi* to distinguish them from romances (*mythoi*). Luke (Acts 1:1) refers to his own work as a *logos*. But when Theophilus ("Your Excellency") is said to have been "instructed" in

It points to a narrative of events, historically verified, to which a powerful interpretation is being applied.

the *logoi* we are hearing a word new in this period (*catechesis*) which the gospel teachers were making their own. It points to a narrative of events, historically verified, to which a powerful interpretation is being applied. The earlier reference to affairs that have "come to fruition" is at first sight an ornament of flowery style. But now we realise (from the *catechesis*) that it carries a deeper meaning. These ostensibly bland "affairs" are no mere incidents in the endless cycle of politics and war. They are the fulfilment of what the prophets had foretold about the redemption of Israel. Luke proceeds to spend his first chapter telling how angels ("messengers") announced the birth of the final prophet and of the redeemer himself.

5 A. D. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, p. 23: "even history *a contrario*, prophecy, ceases to count, and only the invariable obedience to the Torah remains meaningful". Momigliano, exiled from Italy in 1939 as Jew, became the sovereign master of the history of historiography, presenting "an overwhelming, yet deeply meditated, learning, that was as breathtaking as the first sight of Mount Everest" (P. R. L. Brown, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1998, 74, p. 414).

6 Luke 1:1-4, tr. E. A. Judge, following the analysis of L. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

36 Thus history is switched from the natural round of recurrence to the outworking of a purposeful law (or plan) that breaks the cycle. Historians today are no longer much interested in recurrence.⁷ But development (the origin and growth of some institution far larger than the interests of the individuals involved) is a characteristic focus. They would do well to reflect on how this shift has arisen.

Even where the text of a speech had been published, the historian considered it a matter of professional elegance to render it in harmony with his own style.

B. Testing for truth—models or documents?

For one of the most conspicuous elements in his history Thucydides had accepted that accuracy was impracticable. Neither he nor his informants could recall exactly

7 The contrast between the cyclical and linear views of history was decisively drawn by Augustine, *City of God* XII 10-22. While they are broadly characteristic of classical and biblical thought respectively, and in principle antithetical, in practice different writers or schools in either tradition may take up positions that seem to us more akin to those of the other. See L. Edelstein, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1967, and G. W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought from Antiquity to the Reformation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979.

the words spoken on famous occasions.

Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said.⁸

In the hands of subsequent historians this necessary accommodation became a platform for the display of the author's own rhetorical talent. Rhetoric was the basic discipline of higher education on the humane side. Even where the text of a speech had been published, the historian considered it a matter of professional elegance to render it in harmony with his own style. This also allowed him to do more credit to the talent of the person he is writing about, who may not have made such an effective job of it.⁹

Since, as Thucydides had stated, situations generally repeat themselves, the historian's narrative, and especially his rhetorical compositions, became the vehicle of ethical modelling for future generations.

What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of

8 Thucydides, *Histories*, I 22.1, tr. C. F. Smith.

9 We can see this from comparing the speech of Claudius Caesar in Tacitus, *Annals* XI 23-25, with the transcript of the original preserved on a bronze tablet, from Lyons, Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 212, tr. A. H. M. Jones, *A History of Rome*, vol. II, no. 23.



every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result.¹⁰

The modern equivalent of the speeches in classical historians is the generalizing summary in which the historian formulates in his own words the considerations he judges would have influenced those he is writing about on the particular occasion. But if we mean to give their own words we must put them in inverted commas.

The origin of this practice also lies in antiquity, but not within the classic histories of national politics. In Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, the documents that protected the right of Jewish commu-

10 Livy, *From the Foundation of Rome*, I Preface 10, tr: B. O. Foster; cf. O. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1961, pp. 82-107.

nities to practise their own life-style are cited verbatim. This is because where matters of law or diplomatic privilege arise the onus is on the stakeholders to produce their own evidence. But in Eusebius, the church historian of the fourth century, we see a different purpose in documentation.

...Nowhere can we find even the bare footsteps of men who have preceded us in the same path, unless it be those slight indications by which they have left to us partial accounts of the times through which they have passed...(4) We have therefore collected from their scattered memoirs all that we think will be useful for the present subject, and have brought together the utterances of the ancient writers themselves...¹¹

But in Eusebius, the church historian of the fourth century, we see a different purpose in documentation.

By calling his enquiry 'Ecclesiastical' Eusebius plainly means to differentiate his *History* from those of Thucydides and his many successors in the classic tradition over the intervening 700 years. Perhaps unconsciously he has assumed as a model the various compilers of 'Philosophical History'.¹²

11 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, I 1.3-4, tr: K. Lake.

12 For example, the extant Diogenes Laertius, who probably wrote in the third century, a generation or two prior to Eusebius.

38 | These writers collected and digested the teachings of the succession of masters in their particular school of philosophy. The point was to define and pass on the doctrinal tradition of the school. The dogmatic interest required them to cite their authorities verbatim. Eusebius similarly set out, for the first time in 250 years, to record the succession to the main episcopal sees and to document the establishment of orthodox theology by ample citations.

The modern tradition of research came only after the Reformation.

It is the concern for dogmatic truth that shifted the historical profession over from ethically exemplary modelling to the presentation of the actual words of its authorities. When we demand of our students that they cite the sources and document them with footnote references we impose on them the respect for authenticity that was required first by the prophetic tradition of the word of God.¹³

This breakthrough in the way historical truth was to be tested was first comprehen-

13 A. D. Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian historiography in the fourth century A.D.', in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, pp. 79-99. Peter Brown, in his obituary cited in fn. 5 above, p. 408, cites Momigliano (from an Italian journal): "No fully self-aware historian of the ancient world... can get away with the refusal to recognize that ancient history only makes sense when it is seen to evolve in such a way as to end naturally in the rise of Christianity".

sively demonstrated in the fourth century, but its establishment as the basis for the modern tradition of research came only after the Reformation. Disputes over the ancestral constitution of the state, and those between Protestant and Catholic over who was the true heir of the Fathers, hammered out the finished form of the documentary principle.¹⁴

C. Reacting to others— objectivity or commitment?

Since the eighteenth century history has again been tempted to join the retreat of man into nature. Positivism objectified events, and providence was depersonalized, leaving only an iron law of progress. But the romantic movement ("historicism") counter-emphasized the observer's function, offering understanding rather than explanation.

The mood of twentieth-century historiography has been called 'ironic'. Historians take refuge in ambiguity. Each condemns the other for personalizing judgement, and tries to shun it. This only pinpoints the fact that historical enquiry is inescapably personal. It is in no essential respect different from any other human relationship. The present has no privilege of understanding. We complain that those closest to us misunderstand us. We do not understand ourselves.

14 Momigliano, *op. cit.*, p. 149, speaks of "the Eusebian form...brought back in full force by the Reformation"; cf. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The origins of the study of the past', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1962, 4, pp. 209-246.

Approval or disapproval is the crux of identity for each of us. We cannot escape personal judgement because we need it most profoundly. It is the same with figures from the past. They plead for a fair judgement. My students defend their honour angrily if they think I traduce it.

Why should the judgement of the past matter to us? No historian that I know has answered or even faced this question adequately.¹⁵ Yet we are all inescapably trapped

in it. If we judge, we condemn ourselves (Matt 7:1). Judging people by their own lights (the romantic, historicist or multi-cultural solution) only takes us half-way. We cannot depersonalize the engagement without injuring the integrity of both parties. The historian is bound to search for a criterion that will be valid for all. But above all we must accept that the last word is yet to be said, and will not lie with us. ☒

15 E. A. Judge, 'On judging the merits of Augustus', *Colloquy* 49, Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 1-80, corrected reprint in E. A. Judge, *Augustus and Roman History*, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1987, pp. 217-298.

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Books
&
Ideas



A long time ago in a cinema far, far away...

David Höhne

*Star Wars Episode I:
The Phantom Menace*
Directed by George Lucas

I remember it well, my tenth birthday. My parents took me to see the new movie that everyone was talking about—*Star Wars*. It is now more than twenty years later and a new generation of ten-year-old boys will go to see *Star Wars* for their birthdays. George Lucas, the creator, is the head of a multi-billion dollar empire, and the *Star Wars* myth has become part of the late twentieth century's fabric of cultural legend and iconography. Since *Star Wars* first appeared, many commentators have interpreted and reinterpreted its meanings and agendas. Now, however, George Lucas himself has spoken on the topic in a recent *TIME* magazine interview.

According to Lucas, *Star Wars* is not significantly religious, although it addresses religious themes. Says Lucas,

I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to



distil them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct—that there is a great mystery out there.¹

As far as Lucas is concerned, all religions are true. Yet he feels the need to challenge young people, as he calls them, to ponder the greater mysteries of existence. When confronted with a charge that he has trivialized religion Lucas responds as follows:

That's why I would hesitate to call the Force God. It's designed primarily to make young people think about the mystery. Not to say, Here's the answer. It's to say, Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What

1. 'Of myth and men', *TIME*, May 3 1999, p. 72.

does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God? Just getting young people to think at that level is what I've been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie.²



Darth Vader), immaculately conceiving him. It seems that Anakin is the chosen one who will bring balance to the Force, according to an ancient Jedi prophecy. This is interesting, because apart from the obvious parallel with Christianity it would imply that although the Force is volitional, it lacks the power of self-determination.

This is certainly a big difference between the Force and the God of the Bible who creates and determines all things. In the book of Revelation we read:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11).

The Bible tells us that God created and governs everything by the power of his will. This means that everything is dependent upon God to exist and also that God exists independently of everything else. This does not seem to be the case with the Force, which is intertwined with the destiny of the universe and individuals within it.

Then there is that problem of the dark side of the Force. Yoda, the de facto leader of the Jedi council, tells us in *Episode 1* that while the dark side is hard to see, the path there is quite simple. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate and hate leads to suffer-

The first question to ask is, What is the difference between God and the force?

This seems an appropriately post-modern approach—encourage much questioning without taking any responsibility for answers. So I thought in reviewing the movie we could enter into the great dialogue and ask some of these questions while we ponder the great mystery.

God or the Force?

The first question to ask is, what is the difference between God and the Force? We learn a lot more about the Force in *Episode 1*. The Force is still an energy field that surrounds us and binds us together. It is still an ally for the Jedi to use in his defence. Yet now we find out that the Force has a will of its own. It produces a 'vergency' around young Anakin Skywalker (later

2. Ibid., p. 73.

ing. This is basically what the dark side is all about. We can further adduce that the dark side is a lust for power, an all-consuming greed. Apparently, the Sith lords, who follow the dark path, can only exist in pairs—there are always two, no more and no less. A master and an apprentice, says Yoda. This is because (other *Star Wars* mythology tells us) the Sith lords were so consumed with the lust for power that they almost destroyed themselves. As a result there can only ever be two who live in constant tension. Thus you may recall that Darth Vader wanted Luke to join him and together destroy the emperor who was Vader's master.

Finally, we also notice that the dark side is associated with everything industrial and mechanical. Consequently the enemy armies in *Episode 1* are all robots, and the evil Darth Sidious is able to hide himself under the noses of the Jedi council on the city planet of Coruscant. This is the planet at the centre of the galaxy that is home to the Republic's senate and is entirely covered by a city.³

If Lucas wishes us to wonder 'If there is a God,' yet keep this God separate from the Force, he certainly doesn't make it easy. God is conspicuously absent in the Lucas universe, whereas the Force is all-pervasive. The only other significant determinant in Lucas's world is destiny, which no one seems to be able to escape—except, of course, when Luke doesn't give

in to the dark side like his dad seems to think he must, but that's another story. The Force is the only thing that provides some kind of metaphysical unity, although it is not clear what the exact relationship between animate life and the Force is. Symbiosis is a buzz word in the *Phantom Menace*, or "symbiont" relationships, as the Jedi prefer to call them. This seems to

If God were like the Force he would be dependent upon the creation rather than the other way around.

be the link between life and the Force, which means if God were like the Force he would be dependent upon the creation rather than the other way around as we read in Psalm 104:

When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. (v. 30).

As we mentioned before, the Bible tells us that life is dependent upon God for its



3. Readers of Asimov's *Foundation* series will note the similarity. Aficionados will also recall that Yoda hid from the Emperor on the planet Dagobah which was renowned for the number of life forms that it could sustain.

perpetuation, but life in this universe is not somehow part of the divine as *Star Wars* seems to suggest.

Lucas is doing far more than just asking, ‘Is there a God?’. In the very way that the *Star Wars* universe functions, he has ruled out the biblical God as an answer.

The best we could hope to discover in our search was a kind of pantheistic presence in the universe—like some kind of universal soul.

How do we experience God?

Let us turn to Lucas’s other questions: What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? This leads us to an interesting development in the plot. In *The Phantom Menace* we are introduced to ‘midiclorines’. These are nanoscopic-sized creatures that exist in our cells with their own DNA. The midiclorines are the link between us and the Force. That is, they speak to us—subconsciously of course—and help us to know the will of the Force.



Hence the need to ignore our thoughts and trust our feelings. It is only when we focus on the moment and ignore the conscious self that we understand the living Force. Qui-Gon (Liam Neeson) is at pains to point this out to his young padawan apprentice, Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), throughout the movie.

As it turns out, the higher your midiclorine count, the more powerful you are likely to be in the ways of the Force. Yoda, the Jedi master, has a count of 200, but young Anakin’s goes right off the scale, since he was spontaneously conceived by the midiclorines. If this sounds a little fantastic, it seems that there is grain of reality in it all. A friend of mine studying microbiology explained to me that human cells contain what are known as mitochondria. This is a tiny bacterium, with its own DNA, that exists in our cells. According to biologists, these mitochondria are the reason why life on earth was able to evolve beyond the level of single cell organisms.

It is here that fact and fantasy diverge, but it does raise some interesting questions. If God were like the Force, he would be completely dependent upon the life of the creation, so the best we could hope to discover in our search was a kind of pantheistic presence in the universe—like some kind of universal soul. This idea is prevalent in many of the Eastern religions, but also has characteristics in later Platonic thought right down to recent times with Spinoza, Whitehead and 20th century theologians like Jürgen Moltmann. Even the more popular agnostics like Paul Davies confess to a suspicion that God is somehow a product of

the universe, and it seems that Lucas is no exception. In contrast to this, the Bible tells us that God communicates with us through his son—the man Jesus Christ. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being... (1:1-3)

The implications of this are that Jesus perfectly represents and reveals God to us. If you want to know God, all you have to do is know Jesus. This may not seem as direct a link as midichlorines whispering to your subconscious, but it is a lot easier to understand; and the objectivity of God revealing himself through Jesus makes it a lot more reliable than getting that certain feeling.

The answers to the questions of what God is like in Lucas's world are not only antithetical to the Bible, they are considerably less attractive. Once again, Lucas may think he is only raising questions, but the kinds of answers available exclude a God who communicates objectively and reliably with us.

How do we relate to God?

Perhaps the most important question then is, how do we relate to God? If God were like the Force we would have the benefits of midichlorines to help us, but without these there seems little alternative. It might also make us wonder why some people



have more midichlorines than others—notably the Jedi. You could say that since the Jedi work for peace and justice throughout the galaxy, that this is the Force's way of ensuring that there is good in the universe. Otherwise it seems a little unfair that some have more access to God than others, and no hope of changing the situation. Even then, if the Force is working for good through the Jedi there is always that nagging problem that the Jedi in question may turn to the dark side which the Force is powerless to halt. So if God were like the Force he would again be dependent upon life to correct the situation—such as when Luke redeems his father in the end of *Return of the Jedi*.

There is always that nagging problem that the Jedi in question may turn to the dark side which the Force is powerless to halt.

How does God relate to us?

So far what we have gleaned about the mysteries of existence in our *Star Wars* universe is that there could be some kind of

universal soul—the Force. The Force, which has a will of its own, is yet unable to act upon that will. Therefore, the future of the universe and the Force—since they are co-dependent—is determined by the



The God of the Bible has a far more just approach to evil.

actions of individuals as history unfolds. So it takes the intrepid Luke Skywalker to save the galaxy (and by association the Force itself) from the clutches of evil (evil being the dark side of the Force in conjunction with the Sith lords.).

Here is where the Force idea is the scariest. Consider what is suggested about ultimate justice in these movies. If we go back to the beginning of the story, Anakin Skywalker will grow up to become Darth Vader the villain, who is “more machine than man, twisted and evil”. Darth Vader will help Lord Sidious hunt down and destroy the Jedi, and bring about the evil empire that thrives on the “lust for power and fear of those who wield it”. Yet at the end of his life, Vader saves his son from the clutches of the Emperor—hardly more than one might expect from a father—and as a result he is allowed to go to Jedi heaven with Yoda and Obiwan, who Vader has previously killed.

If God were like the Force, there would be no justice in the universe. One good deed of questionable valour can negate a lifetime of evil. Simply because Vader saved his son—just after, mind you, he had lost a fight in

which he had been trying to kill his son—all his previous murders and tortures are forgotten. More significantly perhaps, the rebels have been wasting their time fighting the empire, since it seems that anybody with the Force can end up in Jedi heaven in the end. The one exception seems to be Darth Sidious, who must rank along with Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin and child molesters as the truly unredeemable.

The God of the Bible has a far more just approach to evil. In the book of Acts we read:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30–31).

This means that God has set a day when all the evil in the world will be brought before Jesus, the judge. Jesus is the perfect judge since he never did anything at all wrong himself. In this way the universe is guaranteed justice by the one who made it. Considering the amount of evil that exists in this world at the end of the twentieth century, if there was no reckoning for those

who do evil there would be little point in doing good at all.

Of course, it could be argued that the *Star Wars* alternative is a better option since they all lived happily ever after. As long as people do even one good act, all the evil they do can be overlooked and they will go on to the afterlife. Yet when a father saves his son from evil, it is an act that falls firmly within the ‘least that he could do’ category, especially since he has previously been either trying to kill him or to enslave him to evil.

If this is all it takes to overlook a lifetime of evil, then our actions and our lives are truly meaningless. The afterlife is simply just another state of existence that everyone is drawn into. That is, of course, if they are Jedi knights—there is no indication that anybody else will have this future, especially since it is only the Jedi who have an active relationship with the living Force.

The Bible tells us that God takes our lives seriously by calling us to account for our actions. Yet at the same time, God is able to offer mercy and forgiveness to even the perpetrators of the worst evil. In the gospel we hear that

...now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him

as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26).

These verses tell us that God has made a way for justice to be done in the universe and, incredibly, for the doers of evil to be declared to be in the right. This happens because Jesus the Son of God is sacrificed to make recompense for evil. In fact God is prepared to offer him as a substitute in the place of evil-doers. In this way justice is done because there *is* a punishment for evil. The incredible part of the gospel is that anyone who trusts in Jesus will be declared to be in the right or justified. They will be treated as though they had never done evil.

This is the greatest difference between the God of the Bible and the Force. The Force is unable to do anything about evil, and the result is that evil doesn’t matter. In the Bible we learn that God *does* care about evil, and is able to do away with it in a way that also offers mercy and forgiveness for those who do it.

I’ve seen *The Phantom Menace* three times now, and I can say that I enjoyed it all the more each time. There are more monsters, more space ships and more special effects than ever before. The Jedi knights can

actually use their light sabres instead of just waving them around, and the heroine has elaborate but not silly haircuts.

However, when I consider some of the questions that Lucas wants to raise, I must say that I'm glad it's just a movie. I'm also glad that Lucas hesitates to call the Force God. If the questions about the mystery of the divine lead us anywhere near the answers of *Star Wars*, then the universe is a dangerous and frightening place with no

justice and no order. A God who is dependent upon life for self-determination is a hapless and purposeless deity, who can only be saved by Hollywood's need for a happy ending. ☒

David Höhne has degrees in Arts and Theology and now works in ministry.

Following Derrida to God knows where

Greg Clarke

The question facing most readers of Jacques Derrida's opaque French philosophizing is how to work out whether or not you are in fact reading a translation. His language is such that it seems foreign, whatever tongues you know. He makes up words and metaphors to describe his concepts: 'différance', 'aporia', 'the trace of the Other', 'the specter'. He is interested in stretching and kneading and twisting language in order to get at new ideas and new ways to express them. He delights in taking an obscure subject and bringing it under an enormous, intense spotlight, hence his dedication of chapters of his books to the analysis of minor artists or thinkers whom he feels have been neglected, or single passages of Plato which can be tangled and untangled until they appear to have lost their purpose (the activity known as 'deconstructing').

Such facts make it necessary to explain

why tickets to a public lecture that Derrida gave in Sydney recently were sold out, rock concert-style, well before the event. Why have people swarmed around this man whose philosophy at best holds understanding at arm's length and at worst is labelled intellectual charlatanism? I can think of at least three reasons.

First, he is famous and in the twentieth century there is nothing more attractive than fame. Not many philosophers can make the claim to fame while they are still alive, but there have been a few such superstar figures on the cultural horizon in recent times. A. J. Ayer, the British logical positivist, was one such figure. He was just as at home at the private parties of New York fashion designers as he was in the professorial common room. He was recently described as "fun to watch, always performing, entertaining enough, yet curiously hard to pin down" exhibiting "the seductive charm of elusive-

ness—a now-you-see-me-now-you-don't quality" (*Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1999, p. 3).

This description applies just as easily to Derrida, except that the latter seems to have an earnest introspectiveness that was lacking in the Ayer head. Derrida is disarmingly suave, and in a laid-back way so that he never veers into smarminess. He wears his scepticism about all metaphysics lightly, such that you can hardly believe that this man is accused of dismantling the fundamentals of Western thinking. And with his shock of white hair, his striking suits and "I've been skiing" complexion (he is an Algerian Jew), he grabs the eye while the ear and brain are struggling to catch up.

Derrida has become emblematic of intellectual freedom.

This same reasoning about public appeal could take me to a Michael Bolton concert or a political campaign launch—it simply is a thrill to be in a motivated crowd, regardless of the star. But there is more to attract millennial Sydney-siders to a Derrida gig. Derrida has become emblematic of intellectual freedom. Through his work—more accurately, through reports of his work by others, for it is truly brain-straining to read—Derrida has promoted resistance to established ways of thinking about the world and acting in it. He has claimed that the West has leant heavily on ideas of opposition, such as right/wrong and true/false,

and must rethink all of its commitments. In fact, the most honest position is to be uncommitted, to continue to 'play' with the meaning of such ideas without ever settling into a dogma.

This kind of view has *always* been popular. Assaulted by institutions who abuse the individual for the sake of the 'larger good'—which usually means the softening of the nests of an elite few—most people are pleased to challenge their authority. Resisting the powers-that-be is a perennial human activity. In the same vein, Derrida didn't appear out of the blue as a late 20th century phenomenon. His thinking sprang out of the questioning of metaphysics which took place through philosophers such as Hume, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Kierkegaard. He has been fortunate to arrive on the scene when such anti-establishment thinking is at the crest of the wave of public sympathy, especially intellectual sympathy. Nor is it particularly costly to be a freedom-fighter in Sydney at present; it isn't as if Derrida had to nail his theses to the front door of the Town Hall. They invited him on to centre-stage and set up a web broadcast on his behalf.

If by reputation and nothing else, Derrida captures the liberal mood of the times. The third reason I find for his popularity is, then, quite ironic. It is this: people are still looking for a spiritual leader. What Derrida offers is the philosopher's version of a faith which can be followed. Derrida diagnoses the world's problems (Western rationality, authoritarian politics, narrow understandings of ethics) and offers salvation (through

the power of deconstruction and the community of resistance), with himself as the reluctant Messiah figure (*Life of Brian* keeps springing to mind). He doesn't require a great commitment from his followers, except that they remain broadly true to the path of *différance*, that is, that they keep deferring judgement and don't get too dogmatic about anything. "I was struck by the enveloping awareness that we are all students," wrote one attendant in a Sydney journal, "including the Big Guy up on stage." (*eXpress*, Vol.3. No. 4, 1999, p.25). His humility, compassion and gentle style of teaching are very attractive. Derrida is not of the nasty Nietzschean nihilist type; one of his Sydney hosts described his work as "deconstruction in its affirmative form". It is not all that surprising that he has a large group of disciples and hangers-on.

In recent times, Derrida has shown great interest in religion, in particular Judaism and Christianity. A Jew himself, Derrida has written on Old Testament stories, on Christ's death and on the Book of Revelation. In Sydney, he mentioned the Gospels; in Melbourne, he spoke on forgiveness. He is deeply interested in the kind of ethics that might emerge from a world with no theological grounding. Some of Derrida's commentators believe that he is creating a new kind of religion, one which has a truer grasp of humanity's place in the universe than the old religions. This line of argument usually claims that deconstruction dismantles the sins of the religious past and opens the way for whatever better future might arise, without ever knowing anything about that future. To expand this

idea, it is worth quoting at length from John Caputo's book, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Indiana University Press, 1997):

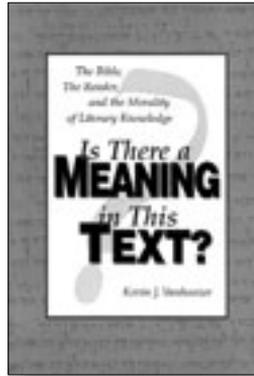
He is deeply interested in the kind of ethics that might emerge from a world with no theological grounding.

Deconstruction regularly, rhythmically repeats this religiousness, sans the concrete, historical religions; it repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious. It repeats the passion for the messianic promise and messianic expectation, sans the concrete messianisms of the positive religions that wage endless war and spill the blood of the other, and that, anointing themselves God's chosen people, are consummately dangerous to everyone else who is not so chosen; it ceaselessly repeats the *viens*, the apocalyptic call for the impossible, but without calling for the apocalypse that would consume its enemies in fire and damnation...it repeats the movements of faith, of expecting what we cannot know but only believe—of the blindness of faith in the impossible, but without the dogmas of the positive religious faiths (p. xxi).

Derrida has given us a difficult truth: we

ought always to be willing to re-examine our formulations of the world, be suspicious of claims to authority, and ready to address our prejudices. He gives subtle, eloquent and mind-bendingly complex examples of such investigations.

Derrida ought also to have given back to Christians some of the intellectual confidence that he once drained, for we can resonate with his difficult truth. Some Christian thinkers are beginning to realize



Derrida would have justice without judgement, no actual Second Coming, no certainties about the future (however abstract), no completed work of redemption through the Cross and Resurrection, just a vague yearning for the Messiah.

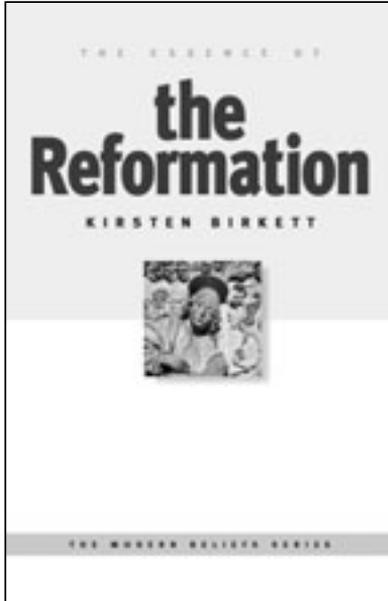
this. At the end of his book on philosophical hermeneutics, *Is There A Meaning In This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Zondervan, 1998), where he looks in detail at Derrida's work, Kevin Vanhoozer summarizes the Christian way of reading/thinking/philosophizing as "a hermeneutics of humility and conviction".

By holding these two virtues together—the epistemic humility Derrida preaches and the conviction that befits the gospel of salvation—we can avoid both a dogmatism which will never reconsider its position, as well as a scepticism which denies that God has communicated with us and made it possible for us to communicate with each other.

Yet whilst Derrida may have aided Christians somewhat in their approach to reading, he has also encouraged the denial of key aspects of the Christian faith as outlined by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. Derrida would have justice without judgement, no actual Second Coming, no certainties about the future (however abstract), no completed work of redemption through the Cross and Resurrection, just a vague yearning for the Messiah. Very Jewish. Very rabbinical in its meandering approach to meaning. Very undemanding in the realm of personal morality, and yet obsessed with social ethics. Very stimulating (the intellectual's favourite word). Very attractive. But of very limited sustenance to the hungry, needy pilgrim soul. ☒

Greg Clarke is currently undertaking a PhD in English literature.

OTHER BOOKS FROM MATTHIAS MEDIA...



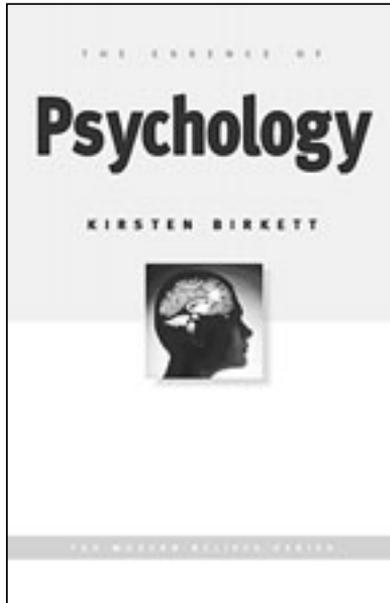
As the new millennium dawns, the psychologist has replaced the clergyman as the dispenser of wisdom and peace in our confused and troubled world. When we are depressed or anxious or our marriages are in trouble, it is to psychology that we routinely turn for insight and therapy. It is hard to believe that psychology hardly existed a century ago, and that its prominent place in modern life has only come about in the last generation.

In this short book, Dr Kirsten Birkett offers a concise and readable summary of the essence of psychology—what it is, how it came about, and how it relates to the Christian worldview of the Bible. Dr Birkett examines the various kinds of psychological therapies, and how these are based on different views of how the mind works. She also scrutinizes the deeper assumptions of psychology, and asks how a Christian view of humanity and the mind relates to mental illness.

This penetrating analysis of the insights and claims of psychology makes for fascinating reading. It will be of particular benefit to those who struggle with their own mental health, as well as those who support them.

The Essence of the Reformation and *The Essence of Psychology* are the first two titles in a new series from Matthias Media.

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The Reformation was one of the most tumultuous periods of history, within the church and within society at large. The battles fought then are still affecting our thinking today.

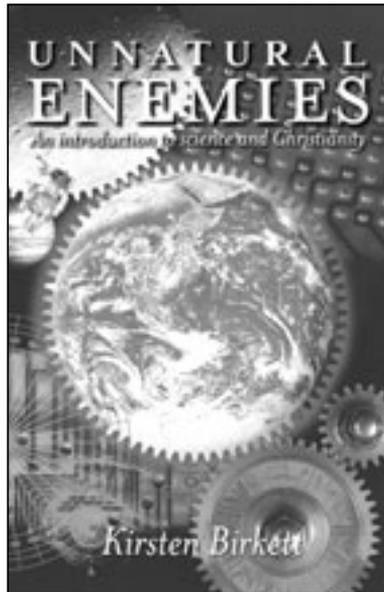
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If you have always wanted to know more about names like Luther, Calvin, Cranmer and Ridley, this short introduction is the ideal place to start.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY



Unnatural Enemies

“History records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed, if not annihilated; scotched if not slain.” So argued Thomas Huxley, one of the nineteenth century’s great champions of science against Christian belief.

Was he right? Are science and Christianity destined to be bitter enemies? Is it possible to be a Christian and a good scientist?

In this compellingly readable introduction to the subject, Kirsten Birkett looks at both science and Christianity, clearly explaining what both are about, and dispelling many common confusions and misunderstandings. She argues that while there are no necessary grounds for the two to be at war, there is still reason to think that the conflict might continue.

For all interested in science—Christian or non-Christian, professional, student or lay—Dr Birkett’s perspective as both a Christian and an historian of science sheds new light on these perennial questions.

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