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- Did Christ rise again?
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The Proof of the Resurrection

Adapted from a Christian Apology

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THE PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION

“IF Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain.” These words of St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 14) show that the Apostles boldly appealed to the resurrection as a fact conclusively proved. It had been foretold by the prophets and by Christ Himself. The records of the event are plain and abundant. The objections are not very hard to answer.

The Records

All the Evangelists and St. Paul record the fact of the resurrection, and various appearances of the risen Saviour. The women visiting the tomb in the early morning saw the first apparition. Magdalene saw the Lord, and Peter and John saw only an empty supulcher. Cephas was the first Apostle to whom Christ appeared (Luke xxiv. 34); then He was seen by the twelve, to whom He showed His wounds, that they might be fully convinced that His body was real and not a phantom (*Ibid.* 36; John xx. 19 *seq.*). After that, He appeared to five hundred disciples at once, many of whom, doubtless, were still living when St. Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

Then, again, He was seen by James and the Apostles; and doubting Thomas had his unbelief dissipated by palpable proof. The appearance to the disciples on the Lake of Genesareth, on which Matthew, Mark and John agree, is the only one mentioned by Matthew, who, in accordance

with his scope and plan, represents it as the one predicted by our Lord. Luke, on the contrary, confines his notice to the appearances in Jerusalem. He tells us that Jesus led His disciples out as far as Bethany and that, on the Mount of Olives, "it came to pass whilst He blessed them, He departed from them, and was carried up into heaven." And in the Acts, he tells us that Jesus conversed with His disciples for forty days after His resurrection, before He was raised up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

A special apparition was subsequently vouchsafed to persecuting Saul before the gates of Damascus—an apparition which St. Paul declares to be equal to those granted to the other Apostles (1 Cor. xv. 8-11). Both the Acts and the Epistles teach the resurrection of Christ's body in clear set terms, and imply it whenever the question of the resurrection is mooted (Acts ii. 31; xxiv. 15; xxxvi. 8, 23. Rom. viii. 10. Phil. iii. 10. 2 Cor. iv. 14; v. 1).

Discrepancies

There was, then, no lack of conviction as to the fact in the disciples. Nor is the evidence shaken by apparent discrepancies in the Gospel narratives. Obscurity in minute details cannot overthrow a huge fact. And if the plea be set up that the testimony in the Gospels is not unexceptionable, because their evidence is "theatrical scene-painting," the one Pauline Epistle, which is universally allowed to be genuine, is sufficient to dispel all doubt, and to set the perfect veracity of the Gospels in a clear light. Thus the certainty of this great fact is not impaired by discrepancies in the narratives.

The discrepancies to which we refer are not merely the rolling away of the stone, the number of the angels, the journeyings to and fro of the women—these present but slight difficulty—but chiefly the appearances. Matthew and Mark seem to be unaware of any appearances outside Galilee, while Luke, John and Paul know of none outside Jerusalem. One Evangelist seems to leave the impression that Christ either ascended into heaven from Galilee or not at all. Mark, it is true, mentions the order Jesus had given to the Apostles to betake themselves to Galilee, where they would see Him; but, in the concluding part of his Gospel, the genuineness of which is sometimes questioned, he tells the story not of the Galilean appearance but of others. Luke's narrative reads as if Christ had ascended into heaven on Easter day. Finally, at the end of John's Gospel the appearance in Galilee is amalgamated with those in Jerusalem, and the Ascension is passed over in silence.

In this, as, indeed, in other matters, it is easier to ask than to answer questions. The editors of the *Wolfenbüttler Fragments* long ago detected these "contradictions," as they were pleased to name them, and they poured out torrents of bitter irony, in which they hoped to drown all defense of the Gospels. Many apologists frankly concede that any attempt at perfect reconciliation is quite hopeless (Steinmayer, Gebhardt, Beyschlag, and others. See Steude, l. c. p, 209). The difficulties in the way are, indeed, great; but they are not insurmountable except for those who hold to the theory of verbal inspiration, and, perhaps, for those also who look upon the Gospels as nothing but "Tradition fixed by writing."

Once we grasp the position taken up by the Evangelists,

viz., that each wrote with a set literary purpose, the key for opening the difficulty is at hand. Matthew's omission to mention appearances out of Galilee is quite intelligible from the scope and arrangements of his Gospel. The command to repair to Galilee seems, at first blush, to imply that there were to be no appearances in Jerusalem. But, in Biblical usage, such phrases are not really exclusive. That this particular command was not, may be gathered from Mark's account, even if we suppose that the conclusion of his Gospel, as we have it, is a somewhat modified version of the original. Luke, it is true, seems to crowd all the appearances into one day; but, since he mentions the command given to the disciples to stay in the city until they were endowed with power from on high, it is clear that the other events had not escaped his notice. Some of them he records, by way of supplement, in the Acts.

The fourth Gospel, again, presupposes the Synoptists. The plan and scope of John's Gospel did not call for any mention of the Ascension. But chapters xiv-xvii abundantly prove that it was known to him. For he here records Christ's promise to send the Paraclete from the Father; he also speaks of Christ's return to the Father, to the glory He had before the foundation of the world.

Difficulties

And now a further difficulty presents itself. Is it not strange, it will be asked, that the disciples failed to recognize Christ when He appeared? Mary saw but knew Him not, and mistook His voice for the gardener's. The disciples going to Emmaus thought they were walking and conversing

with a stranger. At the Lake of Genesareth none recognized Him. Is not this strange? and how shall we explain it? In truth we cannot offer a better explanation than that given by St. Luke: "But their eyes were held that they should not know Him" (Luke xxiv. 16). And this explanation is quite sufficient. The risen Saviour had it in His power to appear or not, to make Himself known or not, as it pleased Him. This effect He might bring about by objective or subjective means, that is, either by appearing in "another shape" (Mark xvi. 12), or by working on the minds of the Apostles, or, most probably, by combining both methods. Mary recognized her beloved master by the endearing name "Miriam," and the disciples in Emmaus by the breaking of bread; the recognition in both cases being effected by a familiar act which brought back to their minds their former life and conversation with Him.

It is singular, no doubt, that, in the apparition on the lake, the disciple whom Jesus loved, should first recognize Him. But is it not also very natural? Would not the fire that glowed in the pure heart of the virgin Apostle, burst into flame, as He who had come to cast fire on earth (Luke xii. 41), drew nigh? We should certainly infer so from the words of the disciples at Emmaus: "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures? (Luke xxiv. 32.)

In other apparitions they recognized Him at once. The fact that at one time, they thought they saw a spirit (Luke xxiv. 37), presents no difficulty. On the contrary, it harmonizes with the natural feelings of men (Matt. xiv. 26) as well as with the disturbed state of mind in which the disciples must have been since the terrible night of the

passion. It was so difficult for them, as it would be for every one, to realize that He who had died on the cross, was now living. For this reason He convinced them by every token of reality; He ate and drank with them, though as St. Augustine thinks, He did so after the manner of the angels.

Corroboration

As was remarked long ago, the doubts and suspicions, the coldness, reserve and almost skeptical spirit of the disciples have proved a veritable boon for faith, by enhancing the value of their evidence. The Fathers even make bold to praise Thomas for his unbelief, as if it had rendered more useful service than the belief of the others.

The Evangelists lay considerable emphasis on the fact that the disciples were incredulous and dull of understanding. St. Luke thrice gives expression to this thought: "And they understood none of those things, and this word was hid from them, and they understood not the things that were said" (Luke xviii. 34). St. John also urges it: "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John xx. 9). Again, when the sons of Zebedee asked to sit one on the right hand, and the other on the left in the kingdom of God, their desires were based on the supposition that the Messianic Kingdom would be established without the intervention of death and resurrection. Only by the resurrection and Christ's repeated appearances did they come gradually to learn the truth. The news brought by the women they set down as "idle tales" (Luke xxiv. 11): "O foolish, and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have

spoken" (*Ibid.* 24), said Our Lord to the two disciples. Even when Jesus showed them His wounds, "They yet believed not, and wondered for joy" (*Ibid.* 41). St. Thomas would not be satisfied without a palpable proof (John xx. 25); and when it was vouchsafed to him, he exclaimed: "My Lord, and my God" (*Ibid.* 28). And St. Peter says: "Him, God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses pre-ordained by God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him, after He rose again from the dead" (Acts x. 41).

An Objection Answered

But, some one will say, is not this way of presenting the facts part and parcel of a system of deception?

No! The disciples as sole witnesses feeling that exception might be taken to their testimony, deemed it necessary to place it above suspicion. And what means more suitable for such a purpose than to show in all its force and intensity their own stubborn unbelief? This, they felt, was the only way to gain credence. This, we fully allow, is the reason why the Evangelists never weary of insisting how dull and hard of belief the disciples were.

Surely it was a matter of vital importance that their testimony concerning the resurrection should be unimpeachable. How could they otherwise put forward the fact as the chief motive of belief? But that they gave an untruthful report of events, we strenuously deny. The intention and design attributed to them in the objection under consideration is in itself perfectly legitimate, and quite compatible with the truth of their records. What should:

we have said if the Evangelists had pictured the disciples as eager and ready to believe from the first, and as perfectly instructed in all that concerned the Messiah and His Kingdom? What, again, would have been the comments of those who hold, that a consciousness of His messianic calling only gradually dawned and grew upon Jesus, and that He went up to Jerusalem, resolved to conquer or to die, seeing that His kingdom must be established then or never? This contrast, besides revealing the naturalness of the narrative and the unnaturalness of the other, shows that the Evangelists were bent upon giving a vivid description of their former dullness and unbelief, in order to erase all doubt as to the truth of the facts, from the minds of all readers, especially of those far removed in time and place from the scene in which the facts were enacted. Hence the third and fourth Gospels and St. Paul go further in this respect than the others.

Psychological Proof

The foregoing events have brought us by easy steps to our second argument, which is made up of *psychological* considerations founded on the Gospel narrative. It may be stated as follows: Firstly, the behavior of the disciples both before, during and after the passion, is utterly unintelligible if they fully understood the work of redemption. Secondly, their firm faith, unshaken conviction, and undaunted courage culminating in heroic martyrdom, are altogether meaningless if they were not absolutely certain of the fact of the resurrection. One of the disciples had betrayed his master; the others had run away. This dis-

ciple that loved Him most, and the bravest one who had drawn his sword in His behalf, were able to summon up just enough courage to follow Him from afar. And what was the issue in the case of the latter? He denied his master three times! On the way to Calvary Jesus met some sympathizing women of Jerusalem, but no disciples. At the foot of His cross there stood Mary His mother, but only one disciple. An hour or so after all was over, St. Luke reminds us that "all His acquaintances and the women that had followed Him from Galilee, stood afar off beholding these things." The disciples, we are quite aware, were exposed to dangers from which the women were free; still their fears were great above measure.

Now we ask, did these same disciples incur less danger and risk when they went forth to preach that He Whom the Jews had crucified, was risen and living? And what do the apostles say? "We ought to obey God rather than men"; and they rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer insult, for the sake of the name of Jesus. How can we explain the changed feelings without the certain fact of the resurrection? Will it be said that the descent of the Holy Ghost would account for the change? How, then, should they believe in the descent of the Holy Ghost, except they knew that Christ had risen from the dead, and had ascended into heaven, and had sent down the Spirit, the Paraclete? St. Peter unites the two as inseparably connected: "This Jesus hath God raised again, whereof all we are witnesses. Being exalted therefore by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath poured forth this which you see and hear" (Acts ii. 32-33).

Corroboration

Again, had the fact of the resurrection been uncertain, the Apostles would not have remained together in Jerusalem at all; they would have dispersed and returned each one to his own home and calling. The Synoptists mention the prophecy of Zacharias (xiii. 7) concerning our Lord. "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed" (Matt. xxvi. 31). It was, then, most natural for them to return to their homes. Thomas, we are told (John xi. 16), was resolved to go and die with Him. What course of action would he be likely to take after our Lord's death? What motive could the Apostles have had for assembling in Jerusalem but the certainty that Christ had risen? None whatever. Without it, their faith, their energy, their belief in a future resurrection would be the veriest psychological riddle.

But if they had had incontrovertible evidence that Christ was risen, their reason for going into Galilee and returning to Jerusalem is clear beyond the reach of doubt. They were carrying out the instructions their master had given them. It was natural that, to prepare themselves for their great mission, they should repair to the district where their master had chiefly exercised His ministry; and it was equally natural that they should return to Jerusalem to be endowed with power from on high to build up the New Israel on the ruins of the old sanctuary.

If, on the other hand, we suppose that Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem, against His will, that His career ended ignominiously, and that He never rose again, how could such men, as we know His disciples to have been, have dared

to resume Jesus' work in the way they did? This, as Weizsäcker rightly thinks, is the most wonderful and at the same time the most inexplicable event in the whole transaction. "It is impossible that such unbounded faith should have welled forth from a bottomless ocean of grief." And be it noted, this firm faith, this unflinching courage sprang into being all at once, almost immediately after our Lord's death. No scheming, or deliberation, or reflection was possible. This great result was suddenly effected by a power from without which seized the disciples and carried them onward. Whence came it?

The Trance Theory

To the negative critical school, in whose eyes the resurrection, like everything supernatural, is *a priori* impossible, it is too great a tax on our credulity to ask us to believe that the disciples stole the body, and then spread the report that He had risen. So a theory had to be devised. Christ died not really, but only apparently, He was in a trance. This has been the favorite theory since the days of Schleiermacher, and it has found a recent advocate in Hase. Thus, he thinks, Jesus proved Himself to be the self-healing physician.

Let us, then, for argument's sake, fling overboard the realistic Gospel narrative; let us then suppose that a body thus tortured and mangled had enough physical strength to revive—what a picture of a risen Christ! Strauss imagines, on what ground we cannot say, that a half-dead Christ would have inspired His followers with enthusiasm. And would the enthusiasm awakened by a body half-dead, and

on the brink of the grave, have permanently endured? This trance-theory, it must be confessed, is but a poor crutch for a lame theory, which runs its head against the clearest proofs from history and psychology.

The Vision Theory

The *Vision Theory*, perhaps, is psychologically more probable. Belief in the Messiah, it says, was so intensely strong, that, in several, though not necessarily all the Apostles, it issued in visions. Religious enthusiasm, we are assured, passes like an electric current from one body to another. One man, fully convinced, could instill belief into tens, yea, hundreds of thousands. Why, this very fact itself is mentioned in Scripture. St. Paul's belief in a resurrection certainly took its rise in a vision.

But, firstly, would the Jews have looked for this realization of their Messianic ideal in one whom the Jewish Synagogue and people had caused to be crucified? Would not their ideal have forced them to look elsewhere for its realization? Nor, again, was St. Paul's a vision in the sense of our opponents. The Saviour appeared to him in His glorified body. St. Paul invariably contrasts Christ's resurrection with His death, and consequently is speaking of His bodily resurrection. Furthermore, he puts the vision that he saw on exactly the same footing as the apparitions vouchsafed to the older Apostles and disciples (1 Cor. xv. 1, 7). Of the appearances made to the women he makes no mention, because they lay outside the scope of his epistle, which was to show that his authority was equal to that of the other apostles, whose authority Jewish emissaries were trying to set up against his own. The supposition that

Peter and James had visions and communicated them to the rest, is itself the baseless fabric of a vision.

But St. Paul, it is urged, knew nothing about an empty tomb. Well, even so; will this invalidate the testimony of others who had seen the tomb? But St. Paul says in so many words: Christ died, and was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The certain knowledge he had acquired from other sources is not ruled out of court by an appeal to the Scriptures; far from ousting, it does but confirm the fact which is taken as granted. Could St. Paul have spoken in such clear decisive tones, had the reality of the resurrection been weighted with uncertainty? So thoroughly is he persuaded of its truth, that he puts his vision on a level with the intercourse which those had had with our Lord who knew Him in the flesh (1 Cor. ix. 1).

The Vision-theory may be a convenient escape-ladder; but on what proof does it rest? Is it just and fair to the books of the New Testament? The behavior of the disciples on the third day is quite unaccountable by any vision, subjective or objective. For such a vision all objective and subjective conditions were wanting. This theory, as even Weizsäcker acknowledges, leaves much unexplained. The fact remains that St. Paul and the other Apostles *thought and were convinced* that they had seen the Lord; but *how* this came about is, like the first beginnings of all inner religious life, wrapped up in mystery and swathed in some "creative force." Between vision and reality the Apostles were well able to distinguish. Their faith in Christ's second coming would not have stood so firm, unless supported by the resurrection.

Conclusion

Between a real resurrection and deception, there is no alternative. And deception in this case, would be tantamount to fraud. Upon the fact of the resurrection the Apostles built their faith and hope, and that of their disciples. If Christ be not risen, neither shall we rise. For nineteen hundred years this has been the watchword of faith. Without the resurrection Christ's work is unfinished; His life comes to an unnatural ending; and His Church is without foundation or corner-stone. "A dead man counts for naught. . . . Only the living can work and influence men.

"Let us therefore use our eyes and judge justly. Day by day Christ is leading innumerable souls, both Greek and barbarians, to believe His teaching and to put it in practice. In the face then of these moral changes which Christ continues to work, how can there be a doubt that He is risen, yea is life itself." Christ, say the critical school, "to have gained the faith of His hearers, must have been possessed of great force of soul; His appearance must have been wonderfully impressive and awe-inspiring; He must have been penetrated with a deep sense of His Messianic calling." This conclusion we may fittingly apply to the Apostles and the Church who preached the doctrine of the resurrection. Christianity cannot be founded on the quicksands of deception, fraud, or error. "For to imagine that the greatest blessing ever conferred on the world had its origin in superstition is a flagrant outrage to common sense."

