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Emma L. Louie

*Liberty University*, [ellouie@liberty.edu](mailto:ellouie@liberty.edu)

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THE DISINGENUOUSNESS OF THE JESUS LEGEND IN POPULAR MEDIA

By Emma L. Louie

“Mom, is Jesus like Santa Clause?” Perplexed by her fifteen-year-old daughter’s question, Sarah a young Christian did not know how to answer as she thoughtfully placed the popular Christmas Blu-ray movie in the shopping cart along side the diet sodas and popcorn. Zoe repeated the question with the persistence of adolescent curiosity. When Sarah did not respond for the second time, Zoe added, “Well, Santa Clause isn’t real.” Just what was an appropriate response to Zoe’s question, in an age when much of what teenagers and young adults know about Jesus comes from sources other than the Christian church. The fact that Jesus rose physically from the dead is not merely a challenging concept for the novice Christian to address with clarity.<sup>1</sup> It is also, a major source of contention among today’s theologians, a controversy, which has ensued since historical times (1 Cor 15: 12-19 [KJV])<sup>2</sup>. This essay will seek to develop a plausible response to Zoe’s question by investigating the reality of the resurrection of the historical Jesus, referred to as, the Resurrection. In doing so, this essay will examine the legend claim and present an *a posteriori* critique of the Resurrection, and demonstrate credible witness to the resurrection of Jesus, which supports the historicity of the miracle-claim and thus invalidates the legend theory and provide an appropriately response to the persona that Jesus is like Santa Clause as portrayed in popular media.

THE LEGEND THEORY

“The basic reason for modern antisupernaturalism is simple: miracles are incredible.”<sup>3</sup> For it is such ideology, which has encouraged scholars to generate numerous explanations for the rejection of the Resurrection. The legend theory is such a denial. The legend theory, also known as the myth theory asserts that much of the biblical accounts of the acts performed by Jesus have been exaggerated and perpetuated by the disciples and Christian supporters down through history. Even though, the legend theory accepts that Jesus was in fact a historical figure and did perform some of the acts that Scripture asserts, it denies that Jesus performed acts of miracles, including the Resurrection.<sup>4</sup> The theory alleges that followers of Jesus embellished the numerous incredible miraculous events in order to make Christianity appear more favorable to non-believers.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the legend theory includes a variety of beliefs; such as portions form the hallucination and conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, its primary supposition accuse early Christians of replacing actuals facts about the life and deeds of Jesus, the Christ, with legendary accounts, which are not necessarily deliberate lies but, nevertheless, still inaccurate descriptions of the stated miraculous events that took place during the life of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2007) 15.

<sup>2</sup> Unless noted, all scripture is taken from *The Holy Bible*, The Zondervan KJV Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Miracles & the Modern Mind,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History*. ed. Geivett, R. Douglas and Gary R. Habermas, 73-85 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997) 73.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth R. Samples, *7 Truths That Changed the World: Discovering Christianity’s Most Dangerous Idea* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 2012) 32-34.

<sup>5</sup> Samples, 33-34.

Ironically, David F. Strauss, a German theologian from the 19th century, initially proposed the legend theory. Influenced by the post-Enlightenment rationalism that dominated this era, Strauss attempted to rationalize with the prevailing idealism, which conflicted with the miracles that were described in the Bible. This ultimately led Strauss reject the biblical version of the miracle working Jesus and allowed for the conception of a less divine version of the Messiah, which denied all miracle claims.<sup>6</sup> This ideology by Strauss grew in popularity parallel to the rise of naturalism and materialism, which clearly denounced the reality of anything supernatural.

Furthermore, scholars such as Bruno Bauer, Arhtur Drews, and G. A. Wells have argued that the Jesus tradition is virtually fiction or rather a legend.<sup>7</sup> While Rudolf Bultmann and Burton Mack suggest that, there is enough evidence to reasonably conclude that an actual historical person named Jesus existed; however, the historical information surrounding his existence is unreliable.<sup>8</sup> Scholars, Robert Funk and J. D. Crossan agree to the historical Jesus but argue he is not the celebrated Jesus of the Gospels.<sup>9</sup> While theologian, Gary R. Habermas affirms that Jesus of Nazareth died and was seen after his death,<sup>10</sup> along with N. T. Wright and John Meier who agrees that the Jesus who can be recovered through responsible historical investigation is generally represented in the portrait of Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>11</sup>

The legend theory, based on the hypothesis that the resurrection of Jesus is simply an untruth that has been enhanced and embellished down through the centuries by the disciples, early Christians and the church is continuously propagated by the Jesus Seminar in present times.<sup>12</sup> The organization members and supporters deny that the historical Jesus of Nazareth even existed.<sup>13</sup> This view unmistakably and fundamentally separates any supernatural association of the resurrection of Jesus as a miracle. Accordingly, the legend theory emphasizes that there is no Jesus of history as told in the Scriptures, nor is there a Jesus of faith and therefore, the Resurrection is an imaginary event created as a sensation story by Jesus followers.<sup>14</sup>

## THE RESURRECTION

In defending the Resurrection against the legend theory, it is imperative that the evidence be surveyed, which includes a review the primary and secondary sources. Especially, since the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the central theme of the New Testament writers and the foundation of Christianity according to Habermas.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Licona upholds that the historiography or chronicles “*about* history and *of* history” must be examine with select primary and secondary

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<sup>6</sup> Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Apollos: InterVarity Press, 2010), 313.

<sup>7</sup> Eddy and Boyd, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003) 3-51.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 25-26.

<sup>12</sup> Habermas and Licona, 23-36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Miracles. Vol. 2, The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 603-644.

<sup>15</sup> Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 26.

sources.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the historicity of the Resurrection has led to the use of the hermeneutical and methodological practices by historians to investigate the miracle-claim.<sup>17</sup> Which, then can account for “both the philosophy and the method” that is required for such inquiry into the proof of a resurrected Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of the method of investigation though, evangelical theologians literally accept the Resurrection, while various liberal theologians and naturalistic theories discard the reality of this event in history.<sup>19</sup> This, includes such theories as the swoon theory, hallucination theory and stolen body theory.<sup>20</sup> With the understanding that “historicity cannot grant resurrection in its full theological sense”, nevertheless, it does allow for the investigation of the miracle-claim as an event in history.<sup>21</sup> Which can lead to proof that the Resurrection did occur and Jesus is not a legend constructed by early Christians.

Nonetheless, the deliberate and destructive denial of the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus endures. Furthermore, out of all the naturalistic theories that deny the Resurrection, this essayist finds the myth or legend theory to be the most dangerous, because of the fairytale like covert images portrayed Jesus of Nazareth in the media as a work of fiction, which embodies the question asked by Zoe, “Mom, is Jesus like Santa Clause?”

#### THE RESURRECTION AS A MIRACLE CLAIM

For transparency, let us address specifically what the Resurrection as a miracle-claim means? An assertion, originally made by the earliest Christians, who avowed that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, not in a “heavenly and exalted status”, but as a bodily physical person that was once dead and then became alive again.<sup>22</sup> For, Jesus was personally brought back from the state of death in his corporal earthly body in the Resurrection.<sup>23</sup> This constitutes a miracle-claim, because it establishes an event in history that does not have an adequate known explanation governed by natural laws.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Inwagen, affirms that two criteria must be met in order to establish the claim for a miracle: 1) an event that took place in history that cannot be explained by any known natural laws and 2) an event that is spiritual in nature as an act of God.<sup>25</sup> The resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, is not explained by any natural laws and it is divine in nature.<sup>26</sup> Even if according to Licona, the divine source of the claim is not a subject for proof, the historicity of the miracle claim does allow for an investigation in search of such a miraculous event.<sup>27</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>16</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection*, 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Gary R. Gromacki, “The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* 6, no.1 (Spring 2002): 63.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Licona, 198.

<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 28.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ and Gerald O’Collins SJ, (*The Resurrection*. eds. Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Marcel Sarot, “The Ultimate Miracle? the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus.” *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-9.

<sup>25</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Possibility of Resurrection and Other Essays in Christian Apologetics* (Westview Press: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1998) 89-90.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection*, 129-134.

with consideration for biases, limitations and techniques, it is possible to investigate the Resurrection as a miracle-claim.

### HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE RESURRECTION

The claim that Jesus was raised from the dead occurs in the worldview and language of the second Temple of Judaism.<sup>28</sup> This is an important concept, because it is critical to understand the culture, political and ruling authority during the time of the New Testament events. The reality that the disciples, as Orthodox Jews, were not expecting the resurrection at all and viewed Jesus death as final is chronicled and accentuated by the fact that James, as the brother of Jesus Christ, is thought to have not believed in Jesus until after the resurrection, according to John 7:5.

Additionally, the Romans firmly ruled over and punished the lower class, slaves, soldiers, the aggressively rebellious and individuals accused of treason with a brutal death by crucifixion,<sup>29</sup> which was also common knowledge among the population. The disciples during Jesus' time would have been acutely aware of the dangerous environment in which the Resurrection occurred, as well as, the general atmosphere surrounding Christianity from the ruling class.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, it would not have been an easy undertaking or one to be taken unconscientiously, for followers of Jesus to misrepresent the circumstances surrounding his death, burial and resurrection.<sup>31</sup>

### MODERN DAY CONDITIONS OF THE RESURRECTION

The atmosphere has definitely changed in modern times from the worldview and language of the second-Temple of Judaism. Nevertheless, adversaries still disparagingly spread the denial of the Resurrection. Starting with the radically skeptical 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher David Hume, who argued in his two- part essay *Of Miracles* that belief in reports of a miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus is always irrational.<sup>32</sup> On closer inspection, however, it becomes obvious that the principal arguments put forth by Hume in *Of Miracles* are actually unreasonable and, ultimately, unsound.<sup>33</sup>

According to Habermas, the resurrection of Jesus is still the most thought-provoking theological topic in North America among the major scholars.<sup>34</sup> Liberal theologians and naturalist have publicize many conceivable explanations to deny the miracle-claim of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Kirsopp Lake advocates that Jesus' dead body was placed in the wrong tomb.<sup>35</sup> Duncan Derrett favored the notion that Jesus fainted on the cross.<sup>36</sup> David F. Strauss popularized the hallucination and legend theories.<sup>37</sup> Robert Funk, Otto Pfiidere and others also,

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<sup>28</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 30-31.

<sup>29</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection*, 300-303.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, 399-448.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Hendrik van der Breggen, "The Seeds of Their Own Destruction: David Hume's Fatally Flawed Arguments Against Miracle Reports," *Christian Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3, no. 2 (2005): 135.

<sup>35</sup> Gromacki, 71-72.

<sup>36</sup> Licona, 313.

<sup>37</sup> Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 102-103.

though that legends and myths explained much of the evidence that survived down through the centuries regarding the Resurrection, along with many other explanations such as the vision theory, spirit theory, and stolen body theory.<sup>38</sup>

Conversely, since biblical times, that has been exactly the assertion from the opponents of the miracle-claim for the Resurrection. That the disciples of Jesus did not truthfully and accurately report the experiences and circumstances associated with the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah and intentionally spread false information to create a glorified appearance of Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, recent social media, the Internet and filmmaking have most often disguised the circumstances of the Resurrection in popular culture as a fictional story. For example, “in July of 2000, network television news anchor Peter Jennings produced a program entitled *The Search for Jesus*” with four of the seven New Testament scholars from the Jesus Seminar; an assembly that denies a majority of the historical Christian accounts of the Resurrection.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, a legend, especially since it includes a range of different beliefs, which incorporates parts of the hallucination and stolen body theories is a most vicious surreptitious attack on the Resurrection.<sup>41</sup> Thereby signifying, intentionally or inadvertently that the fundamental cornerstone of the Christian faith reduces to that of a legend, which makes the legend theory conceivably the most disingenuous and treacherous attack of all the naturalistic theories against the Resurrection.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, publicizing the legend theory as harmless fairytales that harbor ill intent under the disguise of seemingly anodyne narratives that entertain and take advantage of popular media. However, the legend theory directly confronts the credibility of the disciples and thus challenges the most reliable source of evidence for the miracle claim the Resurrection. By deliberately asserting that original disciples, early Christians and the church, deliberately offered untrustworthy witness to the resurrection of Jesus; thereby, calling into question the eyewitness accounts as evidence, for support of the historicity of the miracle-claim.

## DEFENSE OF THE RESURRECTION

What evidence is there to defend against the legend theory, which affirms that the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is basically a myth and did not take place according to Christian belief? According to Craig, the first step in defending the resurrection of Jesus is to “show that there is some good reason to think that Christianity is true by determining the fact of the historical events that took place as delivered in the Gospels”.<sup>43</sup> Habermas concurs that an acceptable investigations of the Resurrection will consider all the available data possible for review.<sup>44</sup> According to Licona, such inquiries are not outside the “purview of historians acting within their professional capacity, since the subjects of inquiry would not be...*human*?”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gromacki, 72-81.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 70-81.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>41</sup> Stanly E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan* (Clements Publishing, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith 3<sup>rd</sup>* (Crossway Books: Good News Publishers, 2008) 24-30.

<sup>44</sup> Habermas, 137-150.

<sup>45</sup> Michael R. Licona, “Historians and Miracle Claims,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 12 (2014): 113.

### Christian Sources

Evidence that establish the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus is generally cauterized among scholars as subjective or objective evidence. The subjective evidence is the kind that is known through human experience, such as personal testimonies of an event.<sup>46</sup> The objective evidence is historically verifiable based on primary sources, established by the model of the courtroom and not the model of the scientific method.<sup>47</sup> For it is not possible to prove anything in history by directly experiencing the event when it happen, but it is possible by persuasion to provide reasonable evidence that an event did take place in history.

Without question, canonical Gospels of the New Testament and the Letters of Paul are the most reliable eyewitness document recording the events that took place during Jesus' life, death and resurrection. According to Licona, "Paul and the oral traditions embedded thought-out the New Testament provide the most promising support"<sup>48</sup> of the Resurrection. Additionally, Clement of Rome and Polycarp knew one or more of the apostles, who makes there letters valuable as well.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, evidence can convince that after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus there was:

- 1) Notable changes in the disciples of Jesus Christ. For they maintained until the end that Jesus was resurrected in body. No evidence has surface that disputes this miracle-claim, even with all of them dying as martyr except possibly John.
- 2) The tomb was empty and the grave clothes were discarded. For the Jesus' corpse was never found by the Romans. According to Craig:
  - a. Jesus' burial supports the historical consistency of the empty tomb
  - b. Testimony by Paul in 1 Corinthians supports the truth of the empty tomb
  - c. Mark's gospel collaborates the story within seven years of the Resurrection
  - d. The story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary status
  - e. The disciple would not have been able to preach the Resurrection in Jerusalem if the tomb was not empty<sup>50</sup>
- 3) Women testified to seeing Jesus first after the Resurrection, which defied Jewish customs of the time, because women were not allowed to witness any major legal events.<sup>51</sup>
- 4) Numerous and varied appearances of the resurrected Jesus, which lasted for forty days from scripture.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 15:7.....James
  - b. Acts 1:4-9.....Disciples
  - c. John 20:11-18.....Mary Magdalene
  - d. John 21:1-22.....Some Apostles
  - e. Luke 24:13-15.....Two Disciples

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Licona, 275.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>50</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*: 270-279.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

- f. Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5.....Peter
  - g. Luke 24:44-52.....Disciples
  - h. Matthew 28:1-10.....Additional Females
- 5) Fifty-day interval between the Resurrection and the Pentecost (Acts 2) in Jerusalem, because according to Luke 24 and Acts 1 the disciples waited on the Holy Spirit.
  - 6) Neither Jewish leaders nor the Romans disproved the tomb was not empty even with an attempt in Matthews 28:11-15.
  - 7) The uniqueness of the events surrounding the bodily Resurrection. Not even the disciples expected Jesus to rise from the dead, even though he had predicted in their presence on numerous occasions that he would in the gospel of Mark. For, in Mark 9:32 and Luke 24, he is detailed in his description.
  - 8) The conversation of two skeptics (James and Saul of Tarsus) found in the gospels of John and Mark, as well as the book of Acts.
  - 9) The ethical personality of the eyewitnesses from the New Testament provides exemplary insight into the beliefs of the disciples. For mercy, love, truth, honesty, hope, faithfulness, kindness, longsuffering, charity and numerous terms are available to describe the human qualities associated with good moral character. An attitude and reputation that is preached, taught and expected constantly by the disciples with Jesus as the Master Teacher modeling the integrity that is expected from his disciples, followers and all Christians.
  - 10) The early oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, as noted by Habermas avows that the creed that was practiced.<sup>52</sup>
  - 11) The fact that Jesus spoke of his crucifixion and resurrection in his claim as the God in John and that he would return from the dead in Matthews, is fulfilled with the Resurrection.

#### Non-Christian Sources

While source documents are certainly not all equal, it is still worth mentioning some non-Christian sources. For they are numerous, even if secondary sources that mention Jesus cannot testify to the eyewitness aspect of his activities, they can testify to his existence. These non-Christian documents include “Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Mara bar Serapion, Thallus, Lucian, Celsus, as well as Rabbinic sources, the Apostolic Fathers including Clement of Rome, Polycarp and the Letter to Barnabas”.<sup>53</sup> Other noncanonocal Christian literatiure include the gospels of Thomas, Peter, Judas, as well as, the Revelation dialogues and pseudo-Mark.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, as compared to these thousands of historical writings that document the existence of Jesus much fewer document other noted historical figures. For example, approximately 150 years after the miracle-claim of the Resurrection 42 authors mention Jesus in their writings. During the same time period, only nine secular authors mentions Tiberius Caesar; only five sources report the conquests of Julius Caesar. However, no historian denies the

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<sup>52</sup> Habermas, 374-377.

<sup>53</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection*, 235-257.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-275.



existence of the Caesars.<sup>55</sup> Nor is the life of the Caesars abridged to a legend or fairytale in the media. Teenagers and young adults do not appear to be wondering is Julius Caesar like Santa Clause.

### THE DISINGENUOUSNESS OF POPULAR MEDIA

“In America we live a Jesus-haunted culture that is biblically illiterate.”<sup>56</sup> While, some theologians may think that the legend theory has collapsed with the event of modern archaeology, early non-Christian accounts, early Christian accounts, early New Testament manuscripts and the historical impact of Christianity, however, it appears to only have undergone metamorphoses. It is important that we look at the religion of culture. “Why would a poorly researched but readable thriller like *The Da Vinci Code*, which claims to reveal startling new truths about Jesus and his life create such a sensation in our culture.”<sup>57</sup>

Whether deliberate or unintentional, popular media, movies like the *The Passion of the Christ* illuminates an uncompromising, interpretive dramatization of the last 12 hours of Jesus life on earth. Undaunted with callousness and questioning God's supreme love for humanity, the film can be interpreted differently by different individuals, especially, since *The Passion of the Christ* did not simply portray a single Gospel narrative onto the screen. Nevertheless, this fused a composite of the Passion narratives from the four Gospels into an intertwined non-Scriptural translation, along with the imaginative inspiration of the moviemakers.

This type of creative work, definitely exposes large numbers of individuals to Jesus. Theologians and scholars argue for both the pros and cons of box-office Christian movies targeting the secular audiences for profit. However, does such secular popular media represent the Jesus of the New Testament? With the constant increase of Christian movies in the media, this is becoming a fundamental source of information for teenagers and young adults. As many young people are being introduced to the resurrected Jesus for the first time through the presence of popular media. Henceforth, many of these individuals watching the images on the big screen do not have the knowledge to distinguish fact from fiction, thus, failing to recognize the historical Jesus of the New Testament.

In this subtle expression, Jesus is not overtly proven a myth or legend. For it is not demonstrated that the Gospel accounts were highly embellished and inaccurately plagiarized and broadcasted by the early disciples, Christians and church. Therefore, recognizing that there is other, non-Biblical accounts that mention Jesus and thus establishes his historicity.<sup>58</sup> However, when the life of Jesus is portrayed with the same expertness as a film produced about Saint Nicholas, aka, Santa Clause, it takes advantage of the belief system already embedded in the teenagers and young adults construct. Thus, revealing the disingenuousness of the media's role in fostering the legend theory. Since individuals are now encouraged to draw an analogy between Jesus and the myth or legend surrounding fairytale characters like Santa Clause. Thus, sparking Zoe's question, “Is Jesus like Santa Clause?”

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<sup>55</sup> Habermas and Licona, 127.

<sup>56</sup> Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done With Jesus? Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History—Why We Can Trust the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006): 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, tn: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1-5.

## REFLECTION

This essay presented an *a posteriori* critique of the Resurrection, in an effort to demonstrate credible witness to the resurrection of Jesus, which supports the historicity of the miracle-claim, thus invalidating the legend theory and providing an appropriate response to the perception that Jesus is like Santa Clause as publicized in popular media. Which challenged my Christian faith, because I struggled to express what I believed God had placed in my heart about the disingenuousness of the portrayal of Jesus Christ in popular media, even the inaccurate depiction of Jesus narratives by well meaning Christians. I further struggled with the adverse effect that this dishonest portrayal of Jesus appears to have on teenagers and young adults, especially since popular media is their primary source of knowledge about Jesus in today's culture. Additionally, I wondered:

- 1) How to ensure to the best of my ability that I investigated and interrupted the research as unbiased as possible, regardless of my hope for a desired outcome?
- 2) How do I present this essay in a rational manner while investigating the miracle claim?
- 3) "The basic reason for modern antisupernaturalism is simple: miracles are incredible."<sup>59</sup> So, how do I write with clarity in hopes of expressing the relevance of the miracle claim of the Resurrection for today's culture?
- 4) How do I alert the consciousness of those who may read this essay to concerns over the presence of the legend theory in popular media about Jesus Christ?
- 5) How do theologians, church leaders and parents recognize and address the fact that popular media is introducing and building constructs of Jesus in the minds of teenagers and young adults?

Those concerns challenged me as I researched, organized and wrote about a topic precious to me, in an effort to tell teenagers and young adults that Jesus is real. Not a legend, certainly not fabricated from someone's imagination and definitely not at man's discretion to re-define according to his personal agenda. Understanding the fact that Jesus rose physically from the dead is a challenging concept for Christians to address with clarity.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the central theme of the New Testament writers and the foundation of Christianity according to Habermas.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, it is important that parents, scholars and church leaders attempt to address the concerns that arise because of this fairytale like aurora that popular media is surrounding the cornerstone of Christianity in, with its extremely covert approach. Even though, this is a major source of contention among today's theologians and a controversy that has ensued since historical times (1 Cor 15: 12-19 [KJV]). However, because of the access and influence of popular media on teenagers and young adults, I sincerely believe that an area that more focuses on all of Christendom is needed.

Furthermore, the significance to the Christian faith in general, involves a need for concentrated attention to the fact that teenagers and young adults are asking questions, such as,

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<sup>59</sup> Geisler, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Eddy and Boyd, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Habermas and Licona, 26.

“Mom, is Jesus like Santa Clause?” This essay offers a plausible response to that question and application for other such questions that challenge the reality of the resurrection of the historical Jesus as represented in the *Holy Bible*. Additionally, this essay highlights a very subtle and what I think to be most precarious practice, which is allowing fictional movies to tell teenagers and young adults, who Jesus is and what His role is in the history, present day and future of man.

The most difficult part of writing this essay was conducting the research. I am thankful to Gary R. Habermas, Craig S. Keener, Michael R. Licona and other scholars and theologians, who provided a foundation to build ideas around and process interpretation. Knowing that in America we live in a Jesus-haunted culture that is biblically illiterate,<sup>62</sup> conveyed insight about the eagerness of popular culture to embrace fictional movies that reveal a fictional Jesus. It also explained, “Why a poorly researched but readable thriller like *The Da Vinci Code*, which claims to reveal startling new truths about Jesus and his life can create such a sensation in our culture.”<sup>63</sup> Which help to establish that the dishonesty of the legend theory must be a concern for Christians.

This makes the disingenuousness of the legend theory relevant to the church and church leaders, which were my favorite thing about writing this essay though to think of Jesus as a legend, a hero and all the other ideology that surrounds a fairytale figure may at first glance appear harmless. It is not. It is a most perilous construct, because most individuals realize that legendary characters of fairytales are not real. However, Jesus is real as proven by trustworthy sources from history.

This essay confirmed that there is well defined, logical and credible evidence that supports the resurrection of Jesus according to the biblical accounts as recorded in the Gospels; therefore, an accurate image of Jesus must be publicized. Especially, in light of the disingenuousness of the legend theory that is reflected in the fictional portrayal of Jesus in popular media, which fails to supports the accurate miracle claim of historicity of Jesus.

Finally, I learned that consideration for a more accurate rendering of Jesus by popular media is important for teenagers and young adults in an effort to disconnect them from the legend theory that is implicitly effected through popular media. Parents, church leaders and theologians must encourage popular media to portray the historical biblical Jesus as found in the Gospels. Furthermore, perhaps, popular media could provide an obvious provision that identifies the fictional narrative’s divergence from Scriptural accounts. If not, then include a statement, which contains “... no intention of reflecting the accurateness of Jesus” as part of the advertisement disclosure. Especially, since the miracle claim of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the central theme of the New Testament writers and the foundation of Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This essay investigated the legend theory from an *a posteriori* perspective of the Resurrection, to determine whether credible witness is offered to the resurrection of Jesus, which supports the historicity of the miracle-claim. While there is an overt attack through social media by John Dominic Crossan, cofounder of the Jesus Seminar and other naturalistic scholars<sup>65</sup> no support was found to demonstrate that the disciples and others embellished the circumstances

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<sup>62</sup> Witherington III, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Habermas and Licona, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Habermas and Licona, 23.

surround the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, the news media is “all abuzz with questions” and network after network are running specials that address questions about the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>66</sup> However, within the scope of apologetics, the bodily resurrection of Jesus was defended as a real event that took place in history based on the method and techniques of the historian. Therefore, just as conclusions are made in the judicial system, based on the available sources of information, it must be confirmed that the primary and secondary sources testifying to the miracle-claim were credible and their proficiencies confirms the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ as a miracle-claim in history.

For it is important that scholars, church leaders, theologians and Christians address the uncertainty of belief as teenagers and young adults contemplates Christianity.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, to answer Zoe’s question, prompted by her experiences with popular media, especially, fictional movies about myths, legends and fairytales. “No, Jesus is not like Santa Clause. He is not a legend.” The Resurrection is the fundamental belief of Christianity; the belief that Jesus arose physically in body from the dead after crucifixion, as a *posteriori* claim that is based on analysis from known facts and past events as demonstrated in this essay.

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<sup>66</sup> Witherington III, 2.

<sup>67</sup> David J. Bartholomew, *Uncertain Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 3-7.

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