

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Resurrection of Christ:  
A Bayesian Analysis of Explanatory Hypotheses

Submitted to Dr. Ronnie Campbell  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

THES 689 – D01

Master Thesis

by

Nicola Jérôme Liebi

December 20, 2019

**THESIS APPROVAL SHEET**

RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

---

**GRADE**

---

**THESIS MENTOR**

---

**READER**

---

*Deo Optimo Maximo*

Copyright © 2019 by Nicola J. Liebi  
All Rights Reserved

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Ronnie Campbell and Dr. Leo Percer, for their support on this project. They have provided crucial comments and insights that helped strengthen the arguments in this thesis.

Furthermore, I wish to express my thanks to Johannes Nussbaum, Dr. Peter Trüb, Philip Zurbuchen and Luca Liebi for their valuable and encouraging remarks, especially related to mathematical aspects of the methodology and the historical implementation thereof.

Moreover, I would like to extend my gratitude to Sarah Zurbuchen for proofreading earlier versions of this manuscript. Over the years and even more so during the past few months, Sarah and her husband Andreas have become examples to me in the way they live for Christ. I am grateful for their friendship and prayers.

Lastly, I could not accomplish this task without the encouragement and support of my loving wife and true help meet, Lydia Joy.

## **Abstract**

The goal of this thesis is to determine under which circumstances a supernatural hypothesis should be preferred over the most probable natural hypothesis to explain a set of historical facts. The supernatural hypotheses include the objective vision hypothesis and the resurrection hypothesis, while the subjective vision hypothesis is taken to be the most probable natural hypothesis. Each of them can be found in the recent literature on the Resurrection and is still advocated by major proponents. The facts by which these three hypotheses are judged are agreed upon by most scholars. They include (1) Jesus' death by crucifixion, (2) the disciples' claim that Jesus was raised and appeared to them alive after his death, and (3) the transformative experience of Paul. This thesis argues that, unless it is extremely improbable that God exists and that He would raise Jesus from the dead, the best historical explanation for the set of historical facts herein considered is that Jesus appeared alive in bodily form after being crucified.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1 –Bayes’ Theorem and Historical Research</b> .....	3
Theism, Jesus’ Resurrection, and Bayes’ Theorem .....	3
Objections and Caveats.....	10
Refined Methodology .....	18
<b>Chapter 2 - Historical Evidence Pertaining to the Easter Events</b> .....	23
Defining Historical Facts .....	23
Sifting Through the Evidence .....	27
The Facts.....	32
<b>Chapter 3 - Evaluation of the Hypotheses</b> .....	62
Subjective Vision Hypothesis.....	64
Objective Visions Hypothesis.....	82
Resurrection Hypothesis .....	92
<b>Chapter 4 – Discussion of Results</b> .....	102
Overview.....	102
Independence Assumption .....	104
Implications.....	107
Further Reflections.....	111
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	114
<b>Appendix</b> .....	115
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	116

## Introduction

This thesis explores under which circumstances a supernatural hypothesis that seeks to explain three major historical facts concerning the Easter events should be preferred over the most probable natural hypothesis, the subjective vision hypothesis. The argument of this thesis is that, if it is a priori sufficiently likely that God exists and that He would raise Jesus from the dead, then the bodily Resurrection of Christ is superior to the most likely alternative natural explanation that these experiences resulted from subjective visions of some sorts. Or, expressed in more probabilistic terms, if the prior probability of the Resurrection is more than “extremely improbable”,<sup>1</sup> then the resurrection hypothesis is the most probable hypothesis and should, therefore, be preferred over the most likely natural hypothesis.

The thesis unfolds in the following way. In *chapter 1*, different approaches for examining explanatory hypotheses for the Easter events are described and compared. More specifically, reasons are given for why a Bayesian approach should be preferred over an inference to the best explanation approach. In addition, objections against the Bayesian approach are considered and the methodology is laid out in more detail. Perhaps the central advantage of the approach lies in its ability to adequately capture worldview issues and how they affect the probability judgement of the hypotheses. For those hypotheses that involve supernatural elements such as God’s existence and the likelihood of raising Jesus from the dead, the probability is expressed as a variable. This will later allow us to say under which circumstances such a hypothesis becomes more likely than the most probable alternative natural hypothesis.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the numerical values, see *table 2*. canon of probabilities in the appendix.

*Chapter 2* focuses on the historical facts pertaining to the Easter events. It starts with a definition of the term historical “fact.” The chapter proceeds with a description of how such historical facts can be identified. Even though more facts concerning Jesus’ death and Resurrection could be identified, they include for the purposes of the present investigation: (1) Jesus’ death by crucifixion, (2) the appearances of the risen Christ to various individuals after his death, and (3) the change brought about in Saul of Tarsus, a former persecutor of the Christian church, such that he started to proclaim the gospel as a result of what he believed to be a personal encounter with Jesus. These three facts are accepted by a large majority of scholars in this field.<sup>2</sup>

Then, in *chapter 3*, three explanatory hypotheses for the aforementioned historical facts are discussed. They include: (1) subjective vision hypothesis (SVH), (2) objective vision hypothesis (OVH), and (3) resurrection hypothesis (RH). For each of them, a probability estimate is formed for how likely these facts are to be expected. Moreover, for the natural hypothesis the prior probability is estimated, whereas in the case of those hypotheses that involve a supernatural element, the prior probability is expressed as a variable and thus not estimated, as the goal of the approach is to find out how high that probability needs to be such that any of the supernatural hypotheses is rendered more probable than the most probable natural one.

Finally, the results of the probability estimates are displayed and summarized in *chapter 4*. In this chapter the minimal value for the prior probability of the supernatural hypotheses is computed and the relationship of the factors that affect this prior probability is displayed graphically. This allows us to show under which circumstances a supernatural hypothesis should be preferred over the SVH.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 9–10.

## Chapter 1 – Bayes’ Theorem in Historical Research

### Theism, Jesus’ Resurrection, and Bayes’ Theorem

When evaluating various hypotheses that account for a set of historical data, historians commonly examine and compare these hypotheses based on their explanatory character. This is referred to as explanationism. A classical explanationist approach is the inference to the best explanation (IBE). Bird defines IBE as a view according to which a hypothesis is accepted because it provides a better explanation than the rival hypotheses.<sup>3</sup>

IBE is applied by various scholars for comparing various hypotheses such as the hallucination, fraud or RH concerning the Easter events. McCullagh suggests that historians should judge the explanatory fitness of an explanation based on the (1) plausibility, (2) explanatory scope, (3) explanatory power, (4) disconfirmation by other beliefs and (5) ad hocness.<sup>4</sup>

One problem of the RH when employing an IBE approach to the case of the Resurrection concerns the plausibility and ad hocness of the hypothesis. Licona captures the issue in stating that an atheist historian would find that the Resurrection is implausible; while a theist may think that it is plausible, since God can intervene in history.<sup>5</sup> If atheism is presupposed, then RH becomes more ad hoc because it adds the supposition that God exists. Moreover, if someone

---

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Bird, *Inference to the Best Explanation, Bayesianism, and Knowledge*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2018), 98, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198746904.001.0001/oso-9780198746904-chapter-7>.

<sup>4</sup> C. Behan McCullagh, *The Logic of History: Putting Postmodernism in Perspective* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 51–52.

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 153.

believes that the arguments for God's existence are not convincing, the RH appears less plausible to that person.

But on the IBE, it is unclear how arguments from (negative) natural theology<sup>6</sup> should be factored into such an investigation. Licona thinks that on the basis of, for instance, teleological arguments for God's existence, a historian would be epistemically justified in embracing a theistic worldview and consequently in arriving at a supernatural explanation such as the RH.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, he suggests that historians should neutralize the horizon (i.e. the influence of worldview on the historian's judgement) and start from a neutral position by neither presupposing nor excluding theism.<sup>8</sup> Craig disagrees with the latter and argues that the plausibility of the RH should be judged in context of arguments of natural theology.<sup>9</sup>

What is even more troubling, however, is that the plausibility and ad hocness ultimately appear to decide which hypothesis is favored by a historian. Swinburne suspects that "most people who think that the total evidence is against the traditional account [i.e. Jesus' Resurrection] do so, I believe, because they think the background evidence makes a Resurrection very improbable."<sup>10</sup> For instance, even though McCullagh agrees that the RH fares better in terms of explanatory power and scope, he holds that it is less plausible and more ad hoc than

---

<sup>6</sup> The term (negative) natural theology highlights that arguments against God's existence (i.e. negative natural theology) also need to be taken into account and not only arguments for God's existence (i.e. natural theology), as Cavin and Colombetti argue. See Robert G. Cavin and Carlos A. Colombetti, "Swinburne on the Resurrection: Negative versus Christian Ramified Natural Theology," *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 2 (2013): 253–263.

<sup>7</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 157 and 160.

<sup>9</sup> William L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 397.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

alternative explanations and therefore dismisses it.<sup>11</sup> But the plausibility and ad hocness of an explanation depends on the historian's presuppositions and worldview. A supernatural explanation does not require an additional element, namely God, and does, therefore, not become ad hoc because it is already part of a theist's framework, as Craig notes.<sup>12</sup> One of the reasons why theistic and atheistic historians come to different conclusions concerning Jesus' Resurrection despite following a similar methodology by applying McCullagh's criteria is because the IBE itself does not provide sufficient guidance as to how arguments from (negative) natural theology are to be taken into account and weighed against each other when comparing the hypotheses. In fact, this may be the main reason for why scholars continue to differ on which hypothesis regarding the Easter events provides the better explanation. The historical investigation of Jesus' Resurrection can be advanced, if a method is provided that accounts for how arguments for and against God's existence influence the historian's judgement of the plausibility and ad hocness of a hypothesis. Such a method could enable the historian to determine under which worldview and presuppositions a hypothesis fares better or worse than competing hypotheses.

Bayes' theorem provides the guidance that the IBE lacks in this respect, when it comes to how these factors are to be accounted for when comparing the hypotheses. To see the difference between the two approaches, we shall introduce the following distinction. Lipton distinguishes between the "loveliest" and the "likeliest" explanation.

The loveliest explanation is the one that provides the most understanding.<sup>13</sup> IBE belongs to this

---

<sup>11</sup> C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 398.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004), 59.

category, since it is explanationist by its very nature (particularly due to the aspects explanatory power and scope). Although McCullagh's criteria allow historians to consider the plausibility of a hypothesis and to thereby take into account the probability of an explanation to some degree, the approach does not clarify how these factors should then be weighed. Consequently, it is not purely probabilistic.

The Bayesian view, on the other hand, clearly belongs to the second category (i.e. to those approaches that seek the likeliest explanation). This approach views evidence somewhat differently than explanationism. Day and Radick explain that on this account "evidence . . . is what renders hypotheses more or less probable . . ." <sup>14</sup> The view is based on Bayes' theorem and can be expressed as follows:

$$P(h | e, k) = \frac{P(e|h, k) \cdot P(h|k)}{P(e|k)}$$

The term on the left-hand side (lhs) is the posterior probability of a hypothesis  $h$  given the evidence  $e$  and the background information  $k$ . On the right-hand side (rhs) we have the probability of the evidence given the hypothesis and the background information ( $P(e|h, k)$ ), <sup>15</sup> the prior probability of the hypothesis given the background information ( $P(h|k)$ ), <sup>16</sup> and the

---

<sup>14</sup> Mark Day and Gregory Radick, "Historiographic Evidence and Confirmation," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 91.

<sup>15</sup> The term denotes the likelihood of encountering a certain piece of evidence  $e$  under the hypothesis  $h$  and when taking into account background knowledge  $k$ . In *chapter 2*, evidence is defined as actual data which is interpreted. For historical purposes, Tucker defines a hypothesis as "any historiographic proposition about past events." Swinburne's definition of background knowledge is helpful. He defines it as a sort of knowledge that can be taken for granted before considering any new evidence. Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), loc. 1835; Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

<sup>16</sup> This is the likelihood of a hypothesis given background knowledge but fully apart from specific evidence. In other words, it is the likelihood of a hypothesis before examining a specific piece of evidence.

probability of the evidence given the background information ( $P(e|k)$ ).<sup>17</sup> This equation expresses that in order to compute or estimate the term on the lhs, the probability of the evidence under the circumstance of a particular hypothesis is needed.

The plausibility of the RH depends on whether God exists or not. The likelihood of God's existence can be expressed in terms of a probability. On a Bayesian model, this probability can be factored into the prior probability of Jesus' Resurrection. Swinburne uses the following procedure. He computes the posterior probability of the incarnation  $P(c | f, k)$  based on a prior probability  $P(c|k)$ , the latter of those is dependent on the probability of God's existence  $P(t|k)$ :<sup>18</sup>

$$P(c|f, k) = \frac{P(f|c, k) \cdot P(c|k)}{P(f|k)}, \quad \text{where } P(c|k) = P(c|t, k) \cdot P(t|k)$$

In Swinburne's case, there is a dependency between the probability of the incarnation and God's existence. The same, however, can also be applied to the Resurrection, because one causal explanation for someone being raised from the dead is that such an extraordinary event is caused by a supernatural agent (viz. God). It can be expressed as  $P(h_R|k) = P(h_R | t, k) \cdot P(t|k)$ , where  $h_R$  denotes the RH. This shows that Bayes' theorem allows historians to account for the probability of God's existence, while, at the same time, also taking into account the degree to which the evidence renders the hypothesis probable. One advantage of this approach is that we can account for the probability of God's existence, when assessing different explanations for the

---

<sup>17</sup> This is the probability of the evidence given background knowledge while not assuming a certain hypothesis.

<sup>18</sup> The variable  $c$  refers to the incarnation of Jesus,  $t$  denotes theism,  $f$  indicates the strength of evidence for a historical aspect of Jesus' life and  $k$  stands for background knowledge. See Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 213.

data. If historians apply Bayes' theorem to the Resurrection, they need to be clear about what value they assign to  $P(t|k)$ . This clearly shows how the worldview affects the posterior probabilities. If the probability of God's existence is believed to be higher, then the probability of the RH increases.

This approach also provides guidance as to what degree the worldview (particularly the estimated probability of God's existence) influences the probability judgement concerning the hypotheses that are considered. It seems reasonable to assume that historians should avail themselves of all sources of knowledge. But this would mean that if someone believes that there are sound arguments for God's existence and  $P(t|k)$  is therefore not too low, then this should enter the equation. Thus, far from neutralizing the historian's horizon by attempting to assign some value to  $P(t|k)$ , to which everyone would agree, if there is even any such value,<sup>19</sup> it should rather be clarified what assumption historians are making as they examine and weigh the evidence. In this way, the subjectivity is not only accounted for but can also be kept in check.

Scholars offer a variety of alternative hypotheses. But this requires a way by which these hypotheses can be compared. As Gauch writes, "Projects on the Resurrection would be more meaningful, if they were more directly comparable."<sup>20</sup> Bayes' theorem can be applied to multiple hypotheses, thereby allowing for such a comparison. The hypotheses can be compared in terms of their likelihood, since a probability  $P(h_i | e, k)$  can be computed for each hypothesis  $h_i$ . Moreover, once the probability of each hypothesis is computed, the historian can either opt for

---

<sup>19</sup> Some other difficult issues associated with neutralizing the horizon in this respect are: (1) which value of  $P(t|k)$  would represent a "neutral view" and (2) who gets to assign that value (e.g. historians, philosophers, theologians?).

<sup>20</sup> Hugh G. Gauch Jr., "Natural Theology's Case for Jesus's Resurrection: Methodological and Statistical Considerations," *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 2 (2011): 350.

(1) the most probable one or (2) one that exceeds a certain threshold value (e.g. 0.5), depending on the chosen strategy.

But the hypotheses can not only be selected and compared based on the posterior probabilities. While  $P(e|k)$  does not depend on a particular hypothesis, the two multipliers  $P(e|h_i, k)$  and  $P(h_i|k)$  depend on the hypotheses that are considered. For the relevant set of hypotheses, those values can also be compared with each other. Historians can, therefore, ask whether a certain set of evidence is more probable given hypothesis  $h_1$  or  $h_2$ . Thus, if estimates are provided for each of those values, it becomes more transparent why a certain hypothesis is preferred.

## Objections and Caveats

There are several reasons for employing Bayes' theorem to historical questions. Nonetheless, scholars also raise objections and point to difficulties associated with this approach. It can be argued that the Bayes' theorem requires statistical probabilities. Since the Resurrection is a unique event, the probability of the RH is either zero or difficult to estimate. In any case, an argument for the RH that makes use of the BT fails. It should be noted though that even if this reasoning were correct, this would not prevent historians from applying a Bayesian approach but rather from embracing the RH. However, this line of argumentation is problematic for other reasons.

This kind of objection stems from a failure to distinguish between different kinds of probabilities. There are physical, statistical and epistemic probabilities. According to Swinburne's definition, the physical probability measures the degree with which an event is predetermined by previous events, the statistical probability refers to proportion in either an actual (e.g. votes in an election) or hypothetical class (e.g. coin tosses) and the epistemic probability as the measure by which one proposition is made more probable by another.<sup>21</sup>

Consider the first form of this objection: The probability of the RH is lower than that of other hypotheses. Ehrman, for instance, reasons that since historians can only say what probably happened and miracles are the least probable events, lots of alternative explanations are more probable than the RH.<sup>22</sup> Besides the fact that Ehrman might be presupposing a naturalistic worldview, it appears that he is thinking in terms of statistical probabilities. But if historians

---

<sup>21</sup> Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 204–205.

<sup>22</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 175–176.

would merely think in those terms, it would mean that a unique event such as Columbus' discovery of the Caribbean islands should be neglected over alternative explanations that are more common or likely in statistical terms. This is absurd. Consequently, the statistical probability of a Resurrection should not be compared with the probabilities of alternative hypotheses. Moreover, the likelihood of the Resurrection should also not be thought of in terms of physical probabilities. Since the Resurrection is a unique and supernatural event, one that is not predetermined by prior natural causes, the likelihood of its occurrence can also not simply be thought of in terms of physical probability. When the Resurrection is considered, the third kind of probability, the epistemic probability should, therefore, be considered instead.

According to the second form of the objection, the probability of the Resurrection need not be low, but is difficult to estimate. After discussing the BT, Licona states that historians cannot employ statistical-inference arguments because the Resurrection is a unique event.<sup>23</sup> He is clear that this does not imply that the Resurrection is improbable, but he thinks that we do not possess the kind of knowledge that is needed to estimate this value.<sup>24</sup> This objection only applies if statistical probabilities are considered. But to go back to the previous example of Columbus' discovery, it should be noted that historians need not necessarily think in terms of statistical probabilities (especially when unique or first-time events are examined). Instead, the probability of Columbus' landing given the available evidence needs to be considered. In other words, historians can ask to what degree does the evidence render the probability of Columbus' landing more likely. This is the epistemic probability. Consequently, once the distinction is applied to the Resurrection, theists need not provide statistics in order to demonstrate that Resurrections are a

---

<sup>23</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 119.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

rather common phenomenon (because epistemic rather than statistical probabilities are relevant) to be able to employ the BT. For these reasons, unless otherwise noted, the probabilities that enter the BT should be thought of as epistemic probabilities.

Another frequent critique of the Bayesian approach argues that it is difficult to quantify the prior probability, according to Tucker.<sup>25</sup> Applied to the Resurrection of Jesus, this critique suggests that it is difficult to estimate, for instance, how high the prior probability of a resurrection is, given the background information. This problem could theoretically be overcome by focusing on the ratios between the probability of the evidence given various hypotheses and the background knowledge ( $P(e|h_i, k)$ ). McGrew and McGrew solely compute the Bayes factors  $(\frac{P(F_i|R)}{P(F_i|\sim R)})$  for several historical facts  $f_i$  surrounding the Resurrection. In their view, these Bayes factors are so top-heavy that they can even overcome a prior probability  $P(R)$  of  $10^{-40}$ .<sup>26</sup> In other words, they argue that the evidence for the Resurrection is so strong that it can overcome a very low prior probability. If this is the case, then the prior probability does not need to be quantified and the analysis can focus on estimating the likelihood of the evidence.

Non-Christians who examine the evidence for the Resurrection in such a way would, of course, disagree that the evidence is so extraordinarily strong that the prior probability can be completely neglected. In fact, as noted above, the prior probability can be a major factor that decides which hypothesis is accepted, precisely because not all think that the evidence for the

---

<sup>25</sup> Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past*, loc. 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy McGrew and Lydia McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009), 630, accessed January 28, 2019, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444308334.ch11>.

Resurrection is so overwhelmingly high as the McGrews suggest.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the prior probability of the Resurrection should be considered. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that it needs to be estimated under all circumstances. It is correct that in case the probability of the evidence is not sufficiently strong and if one follows an approach similar to Swinburne in *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (who only considers the probability of one hypothesis in isolation), then the prior probability must be estimated. In this case, Licona's objection that "the prior probability of God's raising Jesus from the dead is very difficult to get a handle on" remains.<sup>28</sup> There is, however, an alternative approach whereby computing or estimating the prior probability of the Resurrection can be avoided.

To avoid the critique of neglecting the prior probability altogether or positing a prior probability for the Resurrection that is higher than a skeptic would allow, it is possible to compute the threshold value of  $P(R)$  that renders the RH more probable than the best alternative hypothesis.<sup>29</sup> This has several advantages. First, since the prior probability is dependent on other values (recall that the prior probability of the Resurrection depends on the probability of God's existence), the exact, objective value of that probability or an estimate thereof based, for instance, on arguments from (negative) natural theology need not be provided. In other words, it is acknowledged that each person may assess this probability differently. This, then, leads to the second advantage. Anyone, irrespective of her worldview, can check whether she would assign a higher prior probability to the RH or not. Thereby it becomes evident how a historian's horizon

---

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Robert G. Cavin and Carlos A. Colombetti, "The Explanatory Paucity of the Resurrection Theory," unpublished manuscript under editorial review.

<sup>28</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 116.

<sup>29</sup> The approach is explained in more detail under the heading "Refined Methodology."

ultimately affects their probability judgement of the hypothesis itself. Someone with a stronger inclination towards theism may think that the prior probability is higher than the threshold value, whereas a reader more inclined towards atheism thinks the prior probability ends up being lower than the threshold. This explains why some accept the RH as more probable, while others do not.

The next objection is not necessarily an objection against the application of Bayes' theorem per se. But it affects whether a hypothesis can be rationally held at all using this approach. In its original form, it seeks to establish that, when Bayes' theorem is applied to the RH, it will not yield a sufficiently high probability such that one would be rationally justified to believe in the truth of the hypothesis. This reflects a point of disagreement in the discussion of Martin and Davis concerning the probability of the Resurrection.<sup>30</sup> Martin supposes that the posterior probability of the RH,  $P(R | E, T)$ , needs to be larger than 0.5 to be rational.<sup>31</sup> Even though Martin applies it primarily to the RH, it would obviously also apply to other perhaps natural hypotheses that are less probable than 0.5. With respect to the Resurrection, Martin reasons that if the prior probability is low (Martin works with 10% and 1%), the historical evidence would have to be very strong to yield a posterior that is greater than 0.5.<sup>32</sup> Davis, on the other hand, maintains that it is rational to accept the most probable hypothesis, even if its

---

<sup>30</sup> The preceding discussion includes the following journal articles in which Martin represents the atheistic and Davis the Christian or theistic side of the debate: Michael Martin, "Why the Resurrection Is Initially Improbable," *Philo* 1, no. 1 (1998): 63–73; Stephen T. Davis, "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational? A Response to Michael Martin," *Philo* 2, no. 1 (1999): 51–61; Michael Martin, "Reply to Davis," *Philo* 2, no. 1 (1999): 62–76; Stephen T. Davis, "The Rationality of Resurrection for Christians: A Rejoinder," *Philo* 3, no. 1 (2000): 41–51; Michael Martin, "Christianity and the Rationality of the Resurrection," *Philo* 3, no. 1 (2000): 52–62.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Martin, "The Resurrection as Initially Improbable," in *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*, ed. Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005), 45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 and 50.

probability is lower than 0.5, as long as that hypothesis is not highly improbable.<sup>33</sup> This disagreement requires a qualification as to how the posterior probabilities are compared and evaluated.

In this study, we are concerned with finding the most probable explanatory hypothesis concerning the Easter events, not necessarily one that is more probable than 0.5, for several reasons. First, as Tucker notes, the history of science shows that a hypothesis need not necessarily have a high posterior probability in order to be accepted, given that the alternative hypotheses have a lower probability.<sup>34</sup> Second, particularly in historical studies, it seems questionable whether historians have to end up with hypotheses that are more probable than 0.5 in order to be epistemically justified in holding the belief that the hypothesis is true. If this were the case, historians may have to remain agnostic about many other past events. Third, the barrier also seems artificial. If the probability is 0.4999, it is not rational to believe in the hypothesis. But as soon as it is only slightly increased by a tiny amount of 0.0001, that person is suddenly rationally justified in holding that belief. Fourth, the probabilities of multiple hypotheses need to be compared in any case, even if they are more probable than 0.5. If one hypothesis is far more probable than another (say 0.99 vs. 0.51), it seems *ceteris paribus* more rational to opt for the more likely explanation. Consequently, it is reasonable to compare the probabilities of the hypotheses, while limiting the pool of candidate hypotheses to those that are not too improbable. But they need not necessarily be more probable than 0.5 to be embraced.

---

<sup>33</sup> Stephen T. Davis, "The Rationality of Christian Belief in Resurrection: A Reply to Michael Martin," *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 2 (2003): 515.

<sup>34</sup> Aviezer Tucker, "The Reverend Bayes vs. Jesus Christ," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 55, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 137.

According to another sort of objection, some probabilities are suspected to “dwindle.” Plantinga considers the probability of a historical argument for a conjunction of Christian claims: (1) God reveals Himself or something about Himself, (2) Jesus taught something similar to what is claimed in the Gospels (Plantinga refers to this as  $G$ ), (3) Jesus’ Resurrection, (4) God endorsed Jesus’ teachings by raising him from the dead, (5) the Christian teaching of Christianity beyond what Jesus taught is true, and (6) the church teaches  $G$ .<sup>35</sup> When Plantinga attempts to estimate the probability of the conjunction of these propositions  $P(G|k)$ , he ends up with a rather low probability of at least 0.35.<sup>36</sup> Plantinga sees this as a result of the “principle of dwindling probabilities” (PDP). The more propositions are added, the higher the decrease in  $P(G|k)$  because the relevant probabilities need to be multiplied with each other.<sup>37</sup>

In response to the objection, it should first be noted that the objection need not necessarily apply to the RH. In fact, the Resurrection is merely one of the six propositions that Plantinga discusses. This reduces the number of propositions that need to be multiplied with one another and does not necessarily diminish the probability of the RH to the same degree as  $P(G|k)$ . Moreover, Plantinga attempts to answer a different kind of question. He seeks to find the probability of  $G$  given background knowledge  $k$  only. However, when the BT is applied to the Resurrection, by way of computing  $P(h|e, k)$ , the evidence for both the Resurrection  $P(e | h, k)$  and arguments from (negative) natural theology  $P(t|k)$  can be taken into account. The fact that the conditional probability of the hypothesis given the evidence is computed has an

---

<sup>35</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 274–277.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

important implication. As soon as Bayesian updating is allowed for, the probability of a hypothesis can increase by adding more evidence. McGrew and McGrew explain it this way:

Once one allows for updating on new evidence, all bets are off, as a new set of coherent probabilities will be generated every time one updates, and the initial estimate of the probability of theism on some minimal background evidence will constitute no upper bound on the probability of either theism or Christianity after all updates have taken place and all pertinent evidence is taken into account.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, it is possible that the probability of the Resurrection increases, if more evidence is found that renders the hypothesis more probable.

---

<sup>38</sup> McGrew and McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles," 648.

## Refined Methodology

In the previous discussion, various ways are explored by which approaches using Bayes' theorem result in more transparency with respect to the historian's worldview and a better comparability. In addition, the objections that are considered provide guidance as to what extent the methodology needs to be adjusted due to difficulties involved in applying such an approach. It is now time to clarify and specify how the Resurrection of Jesus is examined in this thesis.

Bayes' theorem, as already introduced earlier, serves as a starting point to compute the probability  $P(h_i|e, k)$  of each hypothesis  $h_i$  that is part of our set of relevant hypotheses for the Resurrection.

$$P(h_i | e, k) = \frac{P(e|h_i, k) \cdot P(h_i|k)}{P(e|k)}$$

The next step is to specify how evidence is considered. Theoretically it is, of course, possible that hundreds of pieces of evidence are discussed. But since scholars do not agree on such a large number of items, it is reasonable to consider only strong evidence that is granted by a large majority of scholars. This approach resembles the "minimal facts approach" of Habermas and Licona, in which they make a case for the Resurrection based on those facts that are well evidenced and accepted almost universally amongst scholars.<sup>39</sup> The exact pieces of evidence are identified and discussed in *chapter 2*. Since we include multiple pieces of evidence,  $e$  is therefore replaced by the conjunction of the pieces of evidence  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n$ :

$$P(h_i | e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n, k) = \frac{P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n|h_i, k) \cdot P(h_i|k)}{P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n|k)}$$

---

<sup>39</sup> Gary R. Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), loc. 243.

Swinburne considers only one hypothesis, namely the incarnation (even though that entails, but is not limited to, the Resurrection in his case).<sup>40</sup> Apart from this, however, he follows an approach very similar to the one just laid out by taking the strength of the pieces of evidence  $f_i$  together and estimating them together as  $P(f_1, f_2, f_3|c, k)$  and  $P(f_1, f_2, f_3|k)$ .<sup>41</sup> But to improve the comparability of how the individual pieces of evidence affect the probability of the various hypotheses, the individual probabilities  $P(e_i|h_i)$  are needed. With these probabilities it is possible to compare the likelihood of specific pieces of evidence  $e_i$  given hypothesis  $h_i$ .

One way to compute these probabilities individually, lies in computing the Bayes factors  $\frac{P(F_i|R)}{P(F_i|\sim R)}$ . This is an approach taken by McGrew and McGrew. They argue that  $\frac{P(R|F_1, \dots, F_n)}{P(\sim R|F_1, \dots, F_n)}$ , where  $P(R|F_1, \dots, F_n)$  denoting the probability of the Resurrection given multiple facts is much more probable than the negation of the hypothesis  $P(\sim R|F_1, \dots, F_n)$  given the same facts:<sup>42</sup>

$$\frac{P(R|F_1, \dots, F_n)}{P(\sim R|F_1, \dots, F_n)} = \frac{P(R)}{P(\sim R)} \cdot \frac{P(F_1|R)}{P(F_1|\sim R)} \cdot \dots \cdot \frac{P(F_n|R)}{P(F_n|\sim R)}$$

There is an important underlying assumption behind this approach, namely that the probabilities of pieces of evidence combined are independent of each other. The McGrews note that it is permissible to work under this assumption, if the RH is rendered probable by the facts when considered in isolation, and if the independence assumption does not lead to an overestimation of the case in favor of this hypothesis.<sup>43</sup> For the present case, whether this

---

<sup>40</sup> Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 170.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>42</sup> McGrew and McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles," 595 and 618.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

assumption is fulfilled needs to be considered for each hypothesis in turn at a later point (in *chapter 4*).

The aforementioned approach is helpful, if only one hypothesis is considered. But in our case, we wish to compare multiple hypotheses. Assuming, for instance, that three pieces of evidence are considered, eight values must be estimated using this approach for each hypothesis. If we wish to estimate less probabilities and to thereby decrease the likelihood that some of those are under- or overestimated, another approach can be taken, namely one in which the suggestions from Swinburne and the McGrews are combined. Thus, independence is assumed between the conditional probabilities for the pieces of evidence. It can be expressed as follows:

$$P(h_i | e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n, k) = \frac{P(e_1 | h_i, k) \cdot P(e_2 | h_i, k) \cdot \dots \cdot P(e_n | h_i, k) \cdot P(h_i | k)}{P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n | k)}$$

The total number of variables that need to be estimated, if all three pieces of evidence are considered is reduced from eight to five. Yet, there is still some difficulty involved in estimating  $P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n | k)$ . But it can be overcome as soon as multiple hypotheses are considered and compared. To do so, the primary question pursued here needs to be reconsidered: Under which circumstances is the Resurrection of Jesus rendered more probable than the alternative hypotheses? Since  $P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n | k)$  is not dependent on any hypothesis, its value does not affect which hypothesis is the most probable one. By identifying which two hypotheses  $h_R$  (i.e. resurrection) and  $h_j$  (i.e. the most probable alternative hypothesis) yield the largest numerator, the problem can be expressed using the following inequality:

$$\begin{aligned} & \frac{P(e_1 | h_R, k) \cdot P(e_2 | h_R, k) \cdot \dots \cdot P(e_n | h_R, k) \cdot P(h_R | k)}{P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n | k)} \\ & \geq \frac{P(e_1 | h_j, k) \cdot P(e_2 | h_j, k) \cdot \dots \cdot P(e_n | h_j, k) \cdot P(h_j | k)}{P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n | k)} \end{aligned}$$

The terms  $P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n|k)$  drop out by multiplying both sides of the equation by  $P(e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n|k)$ . By solving for  $P(h_R|k)$ , the minimum prior probability of the Resurrection  $P_{min}(h_R|k)$  is computed such that the RH is rendered more probable than the most likely alternative hypothesis  $h_j$ :

$$P_{min}(h_R|k) = \frac{P(e_1 | h_j, k) \cdot P(e_2 | h_j, k) \cdot \dots \cdot P(e_n | h_j, k) \cdot P(h_j | k)}{P(e_1 | h_R, k) \cdot P(e_2 | h_R, k) \cdot \dots \cdot P(e_n | h_R, k)}$$

To find out for which  $P_{min}(h_R|k)$  the Resurrection hypothesis is more probable than the most likely alternative hypothesis, only four factors need to be estimated that are associated with  $h_j$  and three factors associated with  $h_R$ , given three pieces of evidence. In sum, this is one factor less than in the case of the McGrews.<sup>44</sup>

This approach allows for making a clear statement concerning the prior probability of the Resurrection. If the prior probability of a Resurrection, which, as discussed previously, is dependent on the probability of theism, is equal to or exceeds that value, then the RH (or any other alternative supernatural hypothesis such as the OVH) is superior.

In determining the actual value of  $P(h_R|k)$ , both theological and philosophical considerations are involved because it depends on the probability of God's existence and the likelihood that God would supernaturally raise Jesus from the dead. This is not part of the historical investigation with which this study is concerned. Theologians and philosophers need to argue for and inform the historians of which actual value assigned to  $P(h_R|k)$  is reasonable. Ultimately, everyone who ponders whether Jesus was raised from the dead needs to consider these questions for himself.

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

It should be noticed, nonetheless, that the historical investigation affects  $P_{min}(h_R|k)$  and therefore which hypothesis should be preferred. Firstly,  $P_{min}(h_R|k)$  is lower, if the total evidence is more probable under the resurrection hypothesis  $h_R$  compared to the hypothesis  $h_j$ . Secondly, a lower prior probability of the competing hypothesis  $h_j$  shifts  $P_{min}(h_R|k)$  downwards. In other words, the lower these values are, the lower the burden of proof for those who claim that Jesus was raised from the dead and the higher the burden of proof for those who claim the contrary. The historical investigation is therefore essential for deciding which hypothesis is the most probable one, since evidence is what renders a hypothesis more or less probable. But what constitutes evidence for or against Jesus' Resurrection is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2 - Historical Evidence Pertaining to the Easter Events

### Defining Historical Facts

In this chapter, several facts surrounding the events of Jesus' crucifixion and Resurrection are identified. In the subsequent chapter, the hypotheses will then be judged based on how well they explain these facts. Many of the items denoted as "facts" in this chapter resemble the "minimal facts," originally identified by Habermas. According to Habermas, the term designates events that are (1) more than adequately evidenced, usually by multiple lines of arguments, and (2) agreed upon by a high percentage (above 90%) of scholars in that field.<sup>45</sup> Although this approach is adopted, a greater emphasis is given to the first criterion (due to the reasons discussed below). Moreover, historical facts can be distinguished (as first- and second-order facts) depending on the degree of evidence by which they are supported. But before addressing how these facts are identified, several arguments against the approach need to be addressed.

One objection addresses the terminology entailed by this approach. The use of the term "fact" is criticized by Carrier. He argues that facts should clearly be distinguished from theories. He defines facts as "actual tangible artifacts (such as extant manuscripts and archaeological finds) and straightforward generalizations therefrom."<sup>46</sup> Understandably, he then disagrees that it is a fact that the first Christians found the tomb empty.<sup>47</sup> While the question whether the empty tomb is a historical fact can be left aside at this point, it should be noted that the term "fact" is

---

<sup>45</sup> Gary R. Habermas, "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus: The Role of Methodology as a Crucial Component in Establishing Historicity," *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2012): 16–17.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes' Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), loc. 388.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

normally not defined in such a sense by historians. It is also usually not used to refer to manuscripts and evidence. Moreover, a fact need not necessarily derive from “straightforward generalization.”

As Howell and Prevenier acknowledge, the “status of any ‘fact’ available to the historian is always insecure.”<sup>48</sup> There may thus always be some uncertainty associated with the truthfulness of a proposition about the past. In the view of Howell and Prevenier, the historian’s task lies in constructing an interpretation about past events based on information that seems to have fact-like status.<sup>49</sup> Defined in this way, facts are linked to the information contained in the evidence and they are items on which a historical interpretation is based. Tosh clarifies that historical facts are based on “inferences whose validity is widely accepted by expert opinion.”<sup>50</sup> Whether some information or proposition obtains fact-like status depends on the validity of the inferences. Carrier is correct in pointing out that facts need to be distinguished from theories. But facts should also be distinguished from evidences (such as primary sources and other artifacts). They represent a third category. In the remainder of this paper, the term “fact” shall, therefore, refer to well-evidenced propositions<sup>51</sup> about the past, whereas the term “evidence” refers to the actual data from which the facts are derived.

A more direct objection against the minimal facts approach is, according to Loftus, that it represents a consensus approach. In his view, more evangelicals are interested in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 84.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 154.

<sup>51</sup> “Well-evidenced propositions” are statements that are based on valid and widely accepted inferences.

Resurrection and it is, therefore, not surprising that many scholars accept these facts.<sup>52</sup> Loftus is right in that the consensus depends on the structure of the scholars and this can shift over time. A consensus approach does not guarantee certainty of the conclusions. Interestingly, however, the skeptical scholar Carrier argues *that* consensus should be sought among experts.<sup>53</sup> Licona agrees that consensus opinion can play an important role in determining the objectivity of the conclusions, if it derives from a group of scholars who have studied the relevant subject sufficiently.<sup>54</sup> But even though consensus plays some role in the minimal facts approach, Habermas remarks that he “always held that the first [viz. the facts need to be well-evidenced] is by far the most crucial, especially since this initial requirement is the one that actually establishes the historicity of the event.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, the main reason why something is considered a fact can be found in the strength of the evidence and not primarily in its widespread acceptance.

The minimal facts approach is sometimes also criticized for not taking into consideration whether the New Testament is generally reliable. Loftus, on the one hand, accuses Habermas, Licona and Craig for isolating claims of Jesus’ Resurrection from the question concerning the reliability of Scripture.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, in his discussion of Craig’s “four established facts” concerning the Resurrection, Gundry points out that widespread agreement amongst scholars with respect to these facts do not “erase the facts . . . that what we have are reports and that reports are spongier than whatever hard facts may underlie them.” If Scripture is less reliable,

---

<sup>52</sup> John W. Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*, rev. and exp. ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), 416.

<sup>53</sup> Carrier, *Proving History*.

<sup>54</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 64–65.

<sup>55</sup> Habermas, “The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection,” 16.

<sup>56</sup> Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist*, 415.

then perhaps the facts and conclusions should be subject to greater suspicion. McGrew, on the other hand, also criticizes the minimal facts approach, but for the opposite reason. In her case, it is *because* she thinks that the Gospels are reliable and, therefore, the case for the Resurrection should be strengthened by relying more on the accounts of the Gospels.<sup>57</sup>

In response to these objections, it should be noted that one of the reasons why the case is based on the minimal facts is precisely because scholars disagree to what extent the scriptural passages about Jesus' life are reliable. Moreover, even if it were possible to establish the reliability of a document, that would not be enough to establish the historicity of the events it describes, especially the miracle reports. As Habermas points out, "just because a work is generally trustworthy, it does not always follow that everything in it (and especially the supernatural) is true."<sup>58</sup> This means that each event in Jesus' life needs to be examined separately. The minimal facts approach does precisely that. Moreover, biblical inerrancy is not presupposed. Instead, the sources are evaluated, and the evidence is weighed. Thus, contrary to Loftus' claim, the reliability of the documents can thereby also be accounted for.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Lydia McGrew, "Minimal Facts vs. Maximal Data," *What's Wrong with the World*, February 21, 2015, accessed June 18, 2019, [http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2015/02/minimal\\_facts\\_are\\_not\\_enough.html](http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2015/02/minimal_facts_are_not_enough.html).

<sup>58</sup> Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 99, accessed June 17, 2019, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5397364>.

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that based on this approach, one relies primarily on the Pauline epistles, most of which are regarded as authentic by critical scholars. The material contained in the Gospels is given less weight. But by focusing on the "best material," the results derived from that material do not become less credible because later sources are omitted or given less consideration.

## Sifting Through the Evidence

Since it is reasonable to identify a list of facts pertaining to the Easter events, it should now be explored how these facts can be identified. The crux of the issue is when and why a proposition about the past is well-evidenced. According to Howell and Prevenier there are three preliminary requirements that need to be met, before a source is used as evidence: (1) the source should be comprehensible, (2) its setting (i.e. place and time) can be identified, and (3) it must be authentic (e.g. no forgery).<sup>60</sup> The test for authenticity is commonly referred to as *external criticism* and is, as Tosh states, concerned with whether “the author, the place and the date of writing [are] what they purport to be.”<sup>61</sup> For a document to be authentic, historians not only need to be able to trace it back to the author, but it should also be consistent with known facts and other primary evidence.<sup>62</sup>

But even if a document is authentic that does not automatically render its content accurate.<sup>63</sup> A document also needs to be reliable. Determining the reliability is part of what constitutes *internal criticism*. Furay and Salevouris suggest that it should be checked whether the author is in a good position to observe a particular event (e.g. eyewitness) and whether the report is not too far removed from the actual event (such that the memory could play tricks on the witness).<sup>64</sup> Howell and Prevenier remark that some parts of a document can derive from

---

<sup>60</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 124.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Historians commonly distinguish sources as follows: (1) accurate and genuine, (2) inaccurate, (3) inauthentic (i.e. pseudo-originals), (4) pastiches, and (5) copies or pseudo-copies. See Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 57.

<sup>64</sup> Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*, 3rd ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2010), 145.

eyewitnesses, whereas others can be second-, third-, or fourth-hand and, therefore, the parts of the text can vary in terms of quality.<sup>65</sup> But besides the way an author hears about an event, there are additional factors that influence his reliability.

According to Tosh, the reliability of a document is strongly affected by the intentions and prejudices of its author.<sup>66</sup> Cases in which intention can strongly affect the reliability of the reports are auto-biographies and political writings. Some prejudices and assumptions can be related to the culture of that time (e.g. the value of female testimony or the possibility of miracles), while others can be shared. Oftentimes prejudices shared between an author and the historian studying the text are more difficult to identify. In summary, reliability depends on whether an author is trustworthy and competent to report about the event in question. Ideally therefore, the minimal facts derive from testimonies of such kind.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the critical textual analysis of an individual source, available sources also need to be compared against each other. Historians can also use independent sources to examine their reliability. As Tucker states, “When independent evidence coheres repeatedly, it increases our confidence in the fidelity of all the independent sources.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, the reliability of two independent sources is higher, if they agree with each other. However, when they disagree, the historian can prefer the more reliable source over the other, though not under all circumstances. Upon weighing and cross-examining different sources, they can then be combined to build a case. This way, even though a single eyewitness testimony can be very unreliable, Trueman

---

<sup>65</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Note, however, that this is only a necessary but not a sufficient criterion.

<sup>68</sup> Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past*, loc. 2469.

explains that a strong cumulative case can be built, if various sources corroborate each other.<sup>69</sup> This also has important implications for a Bayesian analysis. Tucker explains that “when the prior probability of a hypothesis is low but at least two independent evidential sources such as testimonies support it, however unreliable each of the testimonies is, the posterior probability leaps to stratospheric heights.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, given multiple independent attestation, the probability of a hypothesis given the evidence can overcome relatively small prior probabilities. Consequently, this aspect is crucial for the present analysis.

Finally, a report needs to be judged in terms of plausibility. It should be asked what is probable and in accordance with common sense. This is perhaps where the historian’s horizon exerts the greatest influence. Howell and Prevenier suggest that when two sources contradict each other and neither of them can be verified independently, plausibility can be the decisive factor.<sup>71</sup> As noted in *chapter 1*, the plausibility of the RH is one of the key factors that needs to be taken into account adequately. For this reason, the value of the prior probability of the RH is not specified in this thesis and is henceforth denoted by the variable  $P(h_R|k)$ . This way it can be explored how the plausibility affects which hypothesis is preferred. Furay and Salevouris suggest that individual pieces of testimony should also be examined on the basis of their inherent probability.<sup>72</sup> Hence, it appears reasonable to judge the hypotheses based on historical facts which are inherently probable, that is to say, they have a sufficiently high inherent probability.

---

<sup>69</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 57–58.

<sup>70</sup> Tucker, “The Reverend Bayes vs. Jesus Christ,” 136.

<sup>71</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Furay and Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History*, 145.

In historical Jesus studies, several additional criteria are commonly applied. They include the criterion of dissimilarity and embarrassment. If an event fulfills such a criterion, it is thought to be more likely to have occurred. Tuckett defines dissimilarity this way: “If a tradition is dissimilar to the views of Judaism and to the views of the early church, then it can confidently be ascribed to the historical Jesus.”<sup>73</sup> But the criterion is criticized on various grounds. Carrier argues that our knowledge about Judaism and the early church is insufficient and too diverse so as to establish these differences and he reminds us that something attributed to Jesus does not automatically become true, only because it is unusual.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Bock points out the criterion presupposes a lack of relationship between Jesus, his Jewish roots, and his disciples.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the value of this criterion is limited.

The criterion of embarrassment, on the other hand, is met according to Craig, if a saying or event is “awkward or counterproductive for the persons who serve as the source of information for [it].”<sup>76</sup> This criterion can be beneficial in historical investigations, even though its value is sometimes questioned. After mentioning that this criterion is an application of the legal principle of “statement against interest,” Carrier points out that courts increasingly require corroborating evidence before admitting testimonies based on this principle and that statements which meet this criterion should nevertheless be critically evaluated.<sup>77</sup> Carrier is certainly right

---

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Tuckett, “Sources and Methods,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132–133.

<sup>74</sup> Carrier, *Proving History*, loc. 1879.

<sup>75</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), loc. 3995.

<sup>76</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 298.

<sup>77</sup> Carrier, *Proving History*, loc. 1932.

that even if the criterion is met, the statement itself needs to be critically evaluated. However, it seems that if there were two testimonies, one of which meets the criterion, while the other does not, and all other things were equal, the first testimony should be preferred over the other.

Moreover, if there were only one testimony, which fulfills the criterion, and any testimony to the contrary is absent, then likelihood of the testimony being accurate should also be higher than if it did not meet the criterion. Therefore, even though corroboration (as Carrier suggests) strengthens the case for the historicity of an event, it is not a requirement that must be met before the criterion of embarrassment can be applied.

## The Facts

After the brief survey of why and how certain facts about Jesus' death and Resurrection are established, a handful of facts are now identified. At this point, a distinction needs to be made between first- and second-order facts, since there is better evidence for some propositions than for others. Later, when the hypotheses are examined individually, this distinction is taken into consideration. The first-order facts obtain a very high likelihood because they are supported by very strong arguments. These are the facts by which the hypotheses are judged. The second-order facts, on the other hand, may but need not necessarily be less secure than the first-order facts. They are still probable and can thus be adduced as part of the background knowledge when the first-order facts are discussed in relation to each hypothesis.

### Fact 1: The death of Jesus by crucifixion

That Jesus died by crucifixion is not only uncontroversial but also beyond reasonable doubt. Before turning to the historical evidence, some archaeological data needs to be considered to see whether there is evidence for the Roman practice of crucifixions in first-century Palestine. In 1968 multiple limestone ossuaries were found in burial caves at Giv'at ha-Mivtar. Amongst the skeletal remains were also two calcaneaen bones which were pierced by a large iron nail. In his examination, Haas finds a piece of wood below the head of the nail and concludes that the victims shins were intentionally broken and that the death resulted from crucifixion.<sup>78</sup> These remains are dated to the late AD 20s, the time when Pontius Pilate served as governor of

---

<sup>78</sup> Nicu Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at Ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, no. 1/2 (1970): 42.

Judaea.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, even though the exact mode of crucifixion as interpreted by Haas has been questioned repeatedly, the crucifixion itself is not.<sup>80</sup>

The practice of crucifixion is also historically well-documented. In his extensive survey of sources that are dated between approximately 200 BC and AD 300, Cook notes several common elements such as (1) torture prior to crucifixion, (2) (sometimes) victims carrying the *patibulum* (i.e. the horizontal part of the cross), (3) (occasional) placement of a *titulus* (i.e. placard) above the cross, and (4) the usage of ropes or nails for fixing a criminal to the cross.<sup>81</sup> These elements lend additional support to the possibility that Jesus was crucified.

The historical sources that mention Jesus' death can be grouped into non-Christian and Christian sources. The advantage of the non-Christian sources is that the writers do not consider themselves Christians. Thus, they may be less biased because of their religious views. A first examination of these sources serves as background information against which Christian sources can be checked. The writers include Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Josephus, and Mara Bar-Serapion.

Tacitus Cornelius (ca. AD 56-120) wrote his work *Annals* sometime between AD 115 and AD 120. He covers, amongst other emperors, the life of Tiberius and briefly refers to Jesus' death:

Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition

---

<sup>79</sup> Craig A. Evans and N. T. Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days: What Really Happened*, ed. Troy A. Miller, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), loc. 578-579.

<sup>80</sup> Y. Yadin, "Epigraphy and Crucifixion," *Israel Exploration Journal* 23, no. 1 (n.d.): 18-22; Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles, "The Crucified Man from Giv'at Ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal," *Israel Exploration Journal* 35, no. 1 (1985): 22-27.

<sup>81</sup> John G. Cook, "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 104, no. 1 (January 2013): 27-28. Note, however, that the Latin term "titulus" is usually better translated as "inscription."

was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.<sup>82</sup>

According to Tacitus, the term “Christian” finds its roots in “Christus,” who suffered the death penalty, while Tiberius and Pilate held their respective offices. He associates its origin geographically with Judaea. That Tacitus is not too well-disposed towards Christianity is evident from the fact that he labels Christianity a “disease.” This decreases the likelihood that the report is embellished. Nevertheless, the value of the source should also not be exaggerated because it is not clear from where Tacitus obtained this information, not least due to the large time gap of approximately 90 years between the time of writing and the actual event.

As with all other Greek or Latin writings, since they were transmitted through Christian scribes, it is possible that the documents were tampered with. But there are several reasons why the report is probably authentic. Williams notes that scribes generally copied the text faithfully and that it would have been difficult for later scribes to imitate Tacitus’ style of silver Latin.<sup>83</sup> Van Voorst adds that the passage is typically Tacitean in terms of style and content, that it fits into the context and that the likelihood of an interpolation is decreased by the fact that much of it is attested to in one of Sulpicius Severus’ writings already at the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>84</sup> Besides this, it seems unlikely that the passage was modified by a Christian scribe because of its negative tone and attitude towards Christianity. Thus, this source indicates at the very least that

---

<sup>82</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 283.

<sup>83</sup> Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), loc. 166.

<sup>84</sup> Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*, *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), loc. 672. See Sulpicius Severus *Chronicle* 2.29.

by the time of the second century it was generally believed that Jesus was put to death under Pontius Pilate sometime between AD 26 and AD 36, when Pilate oversaw Judaea.

Several decades later, Lucian of Samosata (ca. AD 115-200) addresses Jesus and his death in one of his satires *The Death of Peregrine*, written at around AD 165. Although some of the books attributed to Lucian are disputed, this satire is generally regarded as genuine.<sup>85</sup> Without directly stating the name, Lucian refers to him as one, “whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.”<sup>86</sup> Shortly thereafter, he states, “. . . their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.”<sup>87</sup> According to these passages, Christianity derives from Jesus, who was crucified in Palestine and is worshipped by his followers. His reference to Jesus as a “sophist” or wise man should probably be understood in a negative sense. Since it is likely that some of Lucian’s text is embellished for satiric effect, as Van Voorst points out,<sup>88</sup> not too much weight should generally be given to certain details of the text. Notwithstanding this, the aspect of Jesus’ death in Palestine by crucifixion does not exhibit signs of embellishment. It is more likely that Lucian passes on information that is already widely known in the second century.

---

<sup>85</sup> Sean A. Adams, “Lucian and the New Testament: An Evaluation of His Life, Work, and Relationship to New Testament Studies,” *The Expository Times* 121, no. 12 (September 1, 2010): 595; Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, loc. 946.

<sup>86</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrine* 11, trans. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, loc. 948; Bock translates it as “impaled” instead of “crucified.” However, he sees in this a mocking allusion to the origins of the Roman crucifixion practice.

<sup>87</sup> Lucian, *Passing of Peregrine* 13.

<sup>88</sup> Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, loc. 1014.

Josephus Flavius (ca. AD 37/38-100) was born in Jerusalem. He was a military commander and was captured by emperor Vespasian in AD 67. In *Jewish Antiquities*, it is stated that “Pilate, . . . , had condemned him [i.e. Jesus] to be crucified, [and] those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him.”<sup>89</sup> One of the reasons why the authenticity of the (surrounding) passage, known as *Testimonium Flavianum*, is disputed is because it sounds as if Josephus had converted to Christianity, despite the fact that Origen states that Josephus was not a Christian.<sup>90</sup> Since it is mentioned that Jesus was a “wise man,” “the Messiah,” that he appeared to those who loved him after his death and that this was announced by the prophets, an interpolation is likely. The most common explanations are that either (1) parts of it,<sup>91</sup> or (2) the passage in its entirety,<sup>92</sup> result from Christian interpolation. The first is currently the majority position. But even if it is correct and Josephus mentioned Jesus, though in a somewhat different manner, it is difficult to determine whether the comment on Jesus’ death, as well as the details (i.e. the death by crucifixion and that it occurred under Pilate), go back to Josephus or not. Since there is too much uncertainty involved, the value of this source is low.

Another passage in one of Josephus’ writings provides a valuable contribution to the issue of whether Jesus may have survived the crucifixion. In his book *The Life*, Josephus describes how he sees three of his acquaintances being crucified. Titus grants him permission to

---

<sup>89</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.63, trans. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>90</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.47 and *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 10:17. But it should be noted that the passage is also disputed on philological grounds.

<sup>91</sup> John P. Meier, “Jesus in Josephus: A Modest Proposal,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1990): 76–103.

<sup>92</sup> K. A. Olson, “Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (April 1999): 305–322.

take them down and they receive “the most careful treatment.”<sup>93</sup> Despite this intense medical care, only one out of three survives.<sup>94</sup> This statement is helpful in assessing the likelihood that Jesus may have survived the crucifixion. Hence, even if Jesus had survived the crucifixion and received the best medical care, it is unlikely that he would have recovered. What is more, since there are no references available which mention that Jesus was removed from the cross prior to his death and since there are no indications that Jesus received medical care afterwards, it is all the more improbable that Jesus would have survived the crucifixion.

Sometime after AD 73, Mara Bar-Serapion wrote a letter in Syriac addressed to his son.<sup>95</sup> In it he mentions Jesus’ death, although he does not refer to him by name but rather calls him a “wise king:”

For what else have we to say, when wise men are forcibly dragged by the hands of tyrants, and their wisdom is taken captive by calumny, and they are oppressed in their intelligence without defense? For what advantage did the Athenians gain by the murder of Socrates, the recompense of which they received in famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, because in one hour their country was entirely covered with sand? Or the Jews by the death of their wise king, because from that same time their kingdom was taken away?<sup>96</sup>

In this passage, various examples are given for how the killing of a prominent person (i.e. Socrates, Pythagoras, and the “wise king [of the Jews]”) is recompensed with tragedy. In contrast to the other two historical figures, the mode of execution is not stated in the third case. Since Jesus is equated with other “wise men,” this must be a non-Christian source. Theißen and Merz think that the term “wise king” goes back to Christian sources because this royal title plays an

---

<sup>93</sup> Josephus, *The Life* 420, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>95</sup> Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, loc. 825-826.

<sup>96</sup> Mara Bar-Serapion, *Epistle to his Son*, trans. William Cureton (London: Rivingstons, 1855).

important role in the birth (Mt 2:1ff) and passion narratives.<sup>97</sup> The death of this “wise king” is associated with the time when the Jews lost their kingdom. The terms “taken away” suggest destruction and perhaps foreign occupation and are therefore likely an allusion to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The author does not seem to be aware of the conflicts in Palestine around AD 132,<sup>98</sup> as is sometimes argued.<sup>99</sup> Because the death of the king and the seizure of the Jewish kingdom are linked, a shorter time gap of less than a century between these two events should be assumed, such that people would see a causal link between the two. This makes it likely that the source still goes back to the last quarter of the first century. Hence, even though an exact date cannot be given, the Christian message of Christ’s death, Jesus’ royal entitlement and the view that his death was recompensed with tragedy for the Jewish people permeated larger parts of the Roman empire.

In terms of potential bias, the ability of these non-Christian writers to report accurately about the event is not negatively affected by their religious beliefs or worldview.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, there is no apparent reason why they should lie about or invent the event. It is possible that they obtained reliable information, although it is rarely possible to detect from where they obtained their information. Unfortunately, these writers are further removed from the actual event (in terms of time and place) than other available sources and their material is less likely to derive

---

<sup>97</sup> Gerd Theißen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 85.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, loc. 870.

<sup>100</sup> Perhaps Josephus would be the most likely candidate for being affected in his religious views when reporting on the event. But since the passage is disputed, it is not counted as an additional, independent source, thereby supporting multiple attestation.

directly from eyewitness accounts. Thus, earlier sources, even if they may be more prone to religious biases, need to be consulted and can be preferable.

The Christian sources can be categorized into canonical and non-canonical sources. The earliest non-canonical Christian sources are found in the writings commonly referred to as Apostolic Fathers. “The name was given because it was assumed that disciples of the apostles wrote the works, a false assumption in nearly all, if not all, cases,” remarks Ferguson.<sup>101</sup> This, however, does not mean that none of these writers knew at least one of the apostles.

An early non-canonical, Christian source, in which Jesus’ death is mentioned, is *I Clement*. According to Irenaeus (ca. AD 140-202), the letter was sent from the church of Rome to the church in Corinth at a time when Clement was (third) bishop of Rome.<sup>102</sup> Irenaeus also indicates that Clement knew the apostles. He states, “. . . this Clement . . . wrote a most effective letter to the Corinthians . . . [setting forth] the tradition which it had recently received from the Apostles.”<sup>103</sup> Irenaeus’ claim that Clement was the third bishop may be challenged by an alternative tradition according to which he was directly ordained by Peter and could, therefore, have been the second bishop.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the acquaintance with at least one of the apostles is thereby not invalidated. The letter is usually dated to AD 95-97,<sup>105</sup> but there is also evidence that it may have been written earlier, shortly prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, because the text indicates that the temple is still standing and offerings are being made:

---

<sup>101</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Church History: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, Second edition., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 91.

<sup>102</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.3., trans. John Keble (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1872), 207.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 32.

<sup>105</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 250–255.

Not everywhere, brothers, are the sacrifices *continually offered* [emphasis added], or vows or [sin-offerings and trespass-offerings], but only in Jerusalem, and even there, offerings are made not in every place, but before the temple, at the altar, the offering being examined for blemishes by the high priest and those doing the previously mentioned service.<sup>106</sup>

Christ's death is repeatedly referred to in *1 Clement*. It says, for instance, "Because of the love that he had for us, he gave his blood for us, Jesus Christ our Lord, . . . and his flesh for our flesh, and his life for our lives."<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Jesus' death is also alluded to in *1 Clement* 16.3-14, where the Servant song in Isaiah 53:1-12 is cited and directly applied to Christ.<sup>108</sup> This is thus another early source in which Jesus' death is mentioned. But in contrast to the sources considered above, this one directly links the author to the apostles. In addition, the text states that the apostles received the gospel, which probably refers to a set of oral teachings, from Jesus himself.<sup>109</sup>

Even though there are several sources that are dated earlier and could be considered part of the non-canonical Christian literature in which Jesus' death is mentioned, only Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians (*Pol. Phil.*) shall be discussed because, in his case, there is another potential link to the apostles. Polycarp (ca. AD 70-155) was a bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor. Irenaeus refers to *Pol. Phil.* and provides several details concerning Polycarp's association with the apostles and others who saw Jesus: "Polycarp . . . had not only been trained by the Apostles, and had conversed with many of those who had seen Christ, but also had been constituted by the

---

<sup>106</sup> Clement, *1 Clement* 41.2, trans. Rick Brannan, in *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 49.6, see also 21.6.

<sup>108</sup> Specifically, in *1 Clement* 16.9, where it says: "For the transgressions of my people he entered into death."; Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 42.1-2.

Apostles, Bishop over Asia, in the Church of Smyrna.”<sup>110</sup> The current majority position with respect to the date is that there were originally two authentic letters, the first written around AD 110 and the second around AD 135, which were later combined by someone else.<sup>111</sup> But others argue that it should only be regarded as a single letter.<sup>112</sup> In the latter case, the date of composition would have to be around AD 110, that is prior to Ignatius of Antioch’s martyrdom in Rome, since Polycarp mentions Ignatius’ letters.<sup>113</sup> In *Pol. Phil.*, Polycarp refers to Jesus’ death at the beginning of his letter to the church in Philippi. After mentioning that the Christian faith is based on a firm foundation, which was passed on over the years, he refers to Jesus’ death as follows: “. . . because of the secure root of your faith, being proclaimed from ancient times, [still continuing and bearing] fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured because of our sins, to reach even [a violent] death . . . .”<sup>114</sup>

In summary, it can be concluded that as in the case of the early non-Christian writings, the non-canonical Christian writers around the beginning of the second century clearly indicate that Jesus was killed. In at least two cases (i.e. *1 Clement* and *Pol. Phil.*), it is possible that the writers knew at least one apostle, who would have been in a good position to know whether

---

<sup>110</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.4., trans. John Keble, *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford; London; Cambridge: James Parker and Co.; Rivingtons, 1872), 208. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 35. Bauckham points out that there must be “some substantial truth” behind these statements because Florinus himself, the recipient of Irenaeus’ polemic, was a member of Polycarp’s circle and could have easily refuted them had they been unfounded.

<sup>111</sup> P. N. Harrison, *Polycarp’s Two Epistles to the Philippians* (Cambridge, 1936), 15-20.

<sup>112</sup> Wilhelm Pratscher, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 120–121.

<sup>113</sup> Polycarp, *Pol. Phil.* 13.2., trans. Rick Brannan, in *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.

Jesus died or not and to therefore pass on reliable information. There are, however, still earlier sources that can be examined.

Jesus' death by crucifixion is reported in each of the canonical Gospels.<sup>115</sup> Due to the wealth of information available on the authorship and dating of these four writings, these issues shall only be sketched. It is generally agreed that they were written sometime in the second part of the first century.<sup>116</sup> Most scholars disagree that they are eyewitness accounts, amongst other reasons because of the discrepancies between the accounts.<sup>117</sup> But this view continues to be challenged.<sup>118</sup> If the mainstream position is correct and if the previously discussed non-canonical Christian writings are linked to apostolic testimony, this produces the counter-intuitive result that some of the later non-canonical Christian sources such as *1 Clement* in which Jesus' death is reported may more likely be linked to apostolic testimony than the earlier sources (viz. the Gospels). In any case, due to the approach taken in this study the current consensus opinion is presupposed and the testimony in the Gospel narratives is given less weight. Nevertheless, some remarks concerning the Gospels are in order, particularly since the descriptions fit well with what is known from a medical point of view.

The Gospels report that Jesus died because he was crucified (Mk 15:37.39 and Lk 23:46). From a medical perspective, it is likely that Jesus would not have survived a crucifixion.

---

<sup>115</sup> Mk 15:37-39; Mt 27:50; Lk 23:47; Joh 19:30.

<sup>116</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. Marion L. Soards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 36; Schuyler Brown, *The Origins of Christianity: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, Rev. ed., The Oxford Bible series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22–30.

<sup>117</sup> Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 105.

<sup>118</sup> See, for instance, Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*; Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (Chillicothe: DeWard, 2017); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs*, ed. Robert B. Stewart, B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

According to Edwards, Gabel and Hosmer, exhaustion asphyxia was one of the most common causes of death for crucifixion victims because the victim was required to lift the body up in order to exhale, thereby scraping with the scourged back against the wood and putting more weight on the tarsals and wrists, which were pierced by the nails.<sup>119</sup> Understandably, this process was not only tiring but exceptionally painful and became increasingly so until the victim breathed his last. Hence, due to exhaustion the victim would, at some point, become unable to exhale. There are of course additional factors that may have contributed to Jesus' death, including hypovolemic shock and acute heart failure.<sup>120</sup> In any case, medical knowledge is in agreement with the reports in the Gospels that the crucifixion led to Jesus' death.

Finally, the crucifixion reports in Acts briefly need to be considered. Even though the composition of Acts is usually dated to the late AD 80s,<sup>121</sup> many scholars think that some of the material is earlier. In this regard, one conspicuous feature of Acts is that it contains a large amount of speeches.<sup>122</sup> Vermès argues that the teachings which are attributed to the early church in Jerusalem substantially mirror the thoughts of the first Jewish-Christian communities in Palestine.<sup>123</sup> But the veracity of this position depends on (1) the degree with which ancient historians were permitted to invent or modify speeches and (2) to what extent those speeches in Acts reflect Lukan style and vocabulary. Allison circumvents these objections by pointing to the

---

<sup>119</sup> William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (1986): 1461.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Mark A. Powell, "Acts of the Apostles," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*, ed. Mark A. Powell (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011), 11.

<sup>122</sup> Colin J. Hemer, *Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf (Wiona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 415; According to Hemer, the twelve major speeches in Acts alone already make up 22.5% of the text. If the other, shorter speeches are also added, it is even slightly more than 50%.

<sup>123</sup> Géza Vermès, *The Resurrection: History and Myth*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 112.

core parallels between Acts 2:22-24 (“Jesus of Nazareth . . . you crucified. . . . But God raised him up.”) and Acts 4:10 (“Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.”) and suggesting that these verses may preserve an early kerygma. Thus, similarly to Vermes’ claim, it may be that these speeches do reflect the early proclamation of the church in its essence. If this is so, then they do attest to Jesus’ crucifixion and death (by implication because he is also said to be raised).<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify to what degree this material was redacted and when exactly the material originated. Hence, Licona’s advice to be cautious and to practice restraint when appealing to this material should be heeded.<sup>125</sup> However, even if it does not go back to the earliest years of the church in Jerusalem, the report of Jesus’ crucifixion and death should be dated no later than five decades after the event. In both cases, the probability of legendary development is lowered.

To conclude, that Jesus experienced a violent death is rendered probable by the non-Christian and the Christian but non-canonical sources alone. Jesus’ death by crucifixion is multiply attested by various sources that appear authentic and whose setting (i.e. time and place) can be identified with a reasonable amount of precision with the possible exception of Mara Bar-Serapion. The wealth of sources that attest to Jesus death, deriving from a variety of writers within different contexts, renders it unlikely that prejudices or collusion led to fallacious reports concerning Jesus’ death. For some non-Christian sources, there is a time gap of several decades between the reported event and the time of writing. Hence, legendary developments cannot be completely dismissed, but it is rendered unlikely since their reports significantly overlap with the

---

<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that the early kerygma that may be crystallized from these speeches does not necessarily specify how Jesus was resurrected in detail. For this reason, it is not discussed again under the next heading.

<sup>125</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 219.

testimony of earlier Christian sources.<sup>126</sup> That Jesus was crucified is plausible considering archaeological and historical evidence that attests to the practice of crucifixion around the Mediterranean area around the first century, including Jerusalem. Moreover, given further historical and medical considerations, it is very improbable that Jesus survived the crucifixion.

Fact 2: After his death, Jesus appeared to various disciples, James and Saul of Tarsus

Several days after Jesus died on a cross at Jerusalem, various individuals reported that they saw him alive and that He was raised. But before examining the evidence that is available in favor of this claim, it should briefly be sketched what kind of evidence is not available. In contrast to the previous fact, there are no non-Christian sources that support this contention, except, of course, for the unlikely case that the *Testimonium Flavianum* is authentic. Multiple reasons can be given as to why not more non-Christian sources report these events.

First, even though Jesus' death is mentioned in some non-Christian sources, additional references to Jesus' life are scarce, possibly because Greco-Roman writers lacked interest in this topic. Palestine was a relatively unimportant, small part at the edge of the Roman empire. Bock writes, “. . . from a Roman perspective, Jesus was a seemingly minor figure. He was a religious leader from an ethnic minority tucked away in a small, distant corner of a massive empire.”<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Jesus was seen as a trouble-maker from a Jewish perspective, as Bock observes.<sup>128</sup> If anything, it is rather surprising that some non-Christian sources mention Jesus at all.

---

<sup>126</sup> Additional early Christian sources include the references to Jesus' crucifixion in the Pauline epistles and the pre-Pauline creeds, which could be adduced here as well. But to improve the readability of the thesis, those passages are discussed below because many of them refer to Jesus' death and the resurrection appearances.

<sup>127</sup> Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, loc. 848.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

With respect to the writers who do mention Jesus, it needs to be stressed that their neglect to mention the appearances is not the same as if they would have stated that there were no appearances. The latter kind of evidence would be particularly useful for making a case against the appearances. The claim that the silence of non-Christian sources, on the other hand, demonstrates that these appearances did not occur is an argument from absence. It is especially problematic in this case because the likelihood that Roman writers would write about Jesus and the literacy rate in first-century Palestine is relatively low.<sup>129</sup>

Second, there appears to be a correlation between someone's belief that Jesus was raised and that this person reports about these appearances. If someone reports that Jesus was seen alive, that person is likely to embrace the Christian faith or else the report may be suspected to result from interpolation. Therefore, this leads to the possibility that religious prejudices may exert influence on the author's report concerning the events. But it needs to be stressed that the causality could go in the opposite direction, namely that the events themselves affect the author's beliefs. In any case, it can be readily admitted that caution is needed when examining the reports historically. At the same time, historical evidence to the contrary (i.e. against the resurrection appearances) needs to be gathered. A strong case would include multiple, early eyewitness testimonies which indicate that the reports of the resurrection appearances are unreliable.

Perhaps the earliest source that may testify against the resurrection appearances is found in Matthew 28:11-13, where the chief priests and the elders say to some of the guards that they

---

<sup>129</sup> Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 496; Hezser hesitates to offer an exact estimate. However, she maintains that if literacy is defined such that it includes writing more than one's own signature, then Jewish literacy rate was well below the Roman average of 10-15%. Given a broader definition, which includes people who could only read a few words and sentences and write their signature, the literacy rate would have been closer to the Roman average. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 173 and 281; Harris estimates the literacy rate of the Roman mid-republican times to no more than 10%. Unfortunately, he does not discuss Judaea in detail. But he notes that "the evidence about literacy is relatively good" and refers to Joh 7:14-15, Lk 4:16-17 and Joh 8:6-8.

should tell the people: “[The] disciples came by night and stole him [Jesus’ body] away while we were asleep.” Although it is not stated explicitly, the passage implies that the disciples lied about the appearances. According to the Gospel writer, this story circulated among Jews at the time of composition, which would be at some point in the second part of the first century.<sup>130</sup> But if it is held that Matthew is not based on reliable and early eyewitness testimony, then the passage should not be given too much weight. Besides this source, there is no additional first-century source available which explicitly states that the reports of the resurrection appearances are unreliable. Thus, the proposition that the reports of these appearances is unreliable lacks multiple attestation, even if the Matthaean testimony is considered authentic and reliable.

Unlike the case of the counterclaim that there were no post-mortem appearances, there is, however, more evidence in favor of the claim that various individuals reported to have seen Jesus after his death. In a first step, more general claims about Jesus being raised from the dead are considered. Then, in a second step, some of the earliest sources which contain reports of Jesus’ actual appearance(s) are examined.

A formula that is related to Jesus’ Resurrection and can be dated with a higher degree of confidence appears in 1 Thessalonians. This is perhaps Paul’s earliest extant letter and could be dated to AD 41, although a later date of AD 50/51 is more likely.<sup>131</sup> The formula in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 reads as follows: “. . . to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” General declarative statements similar

---

<sup>130</sup> As evident in Justin Martyr’s dialogue between the Christian Justin and the Jew Trypho, this polemic was probably still used by the Jews in the second half of the second century. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 108.2.

<sup>131</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians, Volume 45*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al. (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2015), 35; M. C. Tenney, “First Epistle to the Thessalonians,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Revised. (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 833.

to this one are repeated in numerous other passages (cf. Rom 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15; and 2 Cor 4:14), usually following the structure “God (subject) + raised (verb) + Jesus (object).” Since this recurring pattern appears already in the earliest Pauline epistle, the message that God raised Jesus probably pre-dates the New Testament writings.<sup>132</sup>

Notwithstanding this, it is also correct that there is no direct indication of appearances in this sort of tradition. Thus, the value of this tradition with respect to the post-mortem appearances is limited, even though it does imply that people at least thought Jesus was alive in some sense.

One of the central passages concerning the resurrection appearances is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Paul provides a list of witnesses to the Resurrection, including himself:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,  
that he was buried,  
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* at one time,  
(most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.)  
Then he appeared to *James*, then to all the *apostles*.

(Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to *me*.)<sup>133</sup>

The authenticity of Paul’s letter sent to the church at Corinth is universally recognized and does not require additional comments. The date of the letter and/or Paul’s time in Corinth can be ascertained relatively precisely. Aquila and Priscilla arrived at Corinth before Paul due to Claudius’ edict to expel the Jews (Acts 18:2). Based upon Orosius’ statement in *Historiae contra*

---

<sup>132</sup> Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 229; Theißen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*, 422.

<sup>133</sup> 1 Cor 15:3-5a; 5b-7; 15:8; emphasis and parentheses added. The reference to the passages are placed in the footnote to improve the readability.

*Paganos*, this event is commonly dated to AD 49, the ninth year of Claudius' reign.<sup>134</sup> According to Acts 18:11-17, Jews brought Paul before the tribunal at the time when Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia during Paul's time at Corinth (cf. Acts 18:11). The inscription on the Gallio stone found at Delphi allows us to narrow down the date to Gallio's proconsulship. Conzelmann explains that the number 26 found on the stone refers to acclamations to the emperor Claudius, whose 26<sup>th</sup> acclamation lies between January and August 52.<sup>135</sup> This allows for the periods 51/52 or 52/53. The former date is more likely, according to Conzelmann, because proconsuls entered office in spring and the inscription itself contains a response to a report of Gallio, which requires that there was sufficient time for investigation and transmission of the correspondence.<sup>136</sup> After the uproar, Paul journeyed on to Ephesus from where the letter was written no later than AD 55. With reference to 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 the date of Paul's visit to Corinth is more important than the date of composition because Paul states, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received" (1 Cor 15:3). It is generally recognized that the terms *paredoka* ("delivered") and *parelabon* ("received") are Jewish technical terms used for the transmission of tradition.<sup>137</sup> The apostle is thereby referring to information that he himself received and had already passed on to the Corinthians during his visit sometime before AD 52. Thus, reports of resurrection appearances are spread in Greece already around that time. It should now be examined of what quality these reports were and from where Paul received the information.

---

<sup>134</sup> Orosius, *Historiae Adversus Paganos* 7.6.15f; see also Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.4.

<sup>135</sup> Hans Conzelmann, "1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians," trans. James W. Leitch (n.d.): 12–13, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctvb6v88r>.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>137</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament commentaries v. 7 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), 157; Kirk R MacGregor, "1 Corinthians 15:3b-6a,7 and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 226.

There are several reasons why most scholars think that at least the material in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is probably pre-Pauline. First, Paul himself indicates that he received the material and passed it on to the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 15:3a). Second, the language is not typically Pauline. Kloppenborg identifies the following terms as non-Pauline: (1) *hyper ton harmarton hemon* (“for our sins”), (2) *kata tas graphas* (“according to the Scriptures”), (3) *etaphe*, (4) *egegetai* (“he has been raised”), (5) *te hemera te trite* (“on the third day”), (6) *opthe* (“he was seen”), and (7) *hoi dodeka*.<sup>138</sup> Third, the name *kepha* is an Aramaic transliteration of Cephas for Peter and the repetitive phrase *kai hoti* (“and that”) is typical for Aramaic narration and therefore possibly indicates a Semitic origin.<sup>139</sup> But whether the formula does in fact originate from an Aramaic community is disputed.<sup>140</sup>

The discussion is more complex with respect to 1 Corinthians 5b-7, however. Kloppenborg summarizes several conflicting characteristics, namely that verses 5b to 8, on the one hand, can be attributed to Paul because of the connectives *eita* and *epeita*, but that material in 6a and 7 may be non-Pauline due to the usage of the terms *opthe*, *epano*, and *ephapax*, on the other hand.<sup>141</sup> Stuhlmacher argues convincingly that verse 6b (“most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep”) is typically Pauline.<sup>142</sup> MacGregor agrees because the terms *meno* and *koimaomai* are frequently used elsewhere in the Pauline corpus.<sup>143</sup> But, he sees in the

---

<sup>138</sup> John Kloppenborg, “An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15: 3b-5 In Light of Some Recent Literature,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1978): 351-352n3.

<sup>139</sup> See, for instance, MacGregor, “1 Corinthians 15,” 226.

<sup>140</sup> See Hans Conzelmann, “On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5,” *Interpretation* 20, no. 1 (January 1966): 15–25.

<sup>141</sup> Kloppenborg, “An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15,” 351–352.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 268-269.

<sup>143</sup> MacGregor, “1 Corinthians 15,” 227.

phrase *heos arti* (“still”) a hint that Paul is providing a comment on this passage.<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, Moffitt finds that, when Paul’s comments in verses 6b and 8 are removed and verses 6a and 7 are stitched together with the formula in verses 3b to 5, several parallels emerge, including a chiasmic pattern and a structural similarity between the last *hoti* and *epeita* clauses, since they both refer to either Cephas or James, followed by the designation “the twelve” or “the apostles”:<sup>145</sup>

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* at one time,  
Then he appeared to *James*,  
then to all the *apostles*. (1 Cor 15:3b-6a, and 7; emphasis added)

Thus, while there are clear indications that verses 3b to 5 reflect an early tradition, the verses 6a and 7 may also be part of it. But in the latter case the evidence is less decisive. In summary, then, the creed reflects awareness of appearances to the following individuals or groups: (1) Cephas, (3) the twelve, (4) more than 500, and (5) James, (6) the apostles. At this point, it should be noted that “the twelve” should not be equated with “all the apostles.” The latter probably encompasses a wider circle of disciples.

This tradition goes back to very early times, probably no later than six years after the crucifixion. According to Paul, he spent fifteen days in Jerusalem with Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19). Since Paul met Peter, their exchange would have ensured that their messages were in line with each other. Or, as Schweizer puts it, the tradition “can, at least, not contradict what

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>145</sup> David M. Moffitt, “Affirming the ‘Creed’: The Extent of Paul’s Citation of an Early Christian Formula in 1 Cor 15,3b-7\*,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 99, no. 1 (2008): 54–55.

[Paul] has heard then.”<sup>146</sup> It is, on the one hand, possible that Paul received the tradition during the time in Jerusalem. If Paul refers to his conversion experience on the road to Damascus in Galatians 1:18, then the visit occurred three years after his conversion. The Damascus road experience is normally dated to between one and three years after the crucifixion and thus the visit took place around four to six years after the crucifixion.<sup>147</sup> If, on the other hand, Paul already received the tradition in Damascus, then he received it no later than three years after the actual events. Paul could, of course, also have received the tradition or parts thereof on one of his later visits to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-29; and Gal 2:1-10). With respect to these visits, Licona emphasizes that the interactions with the apostles and the leadership of the church in Jerusalem further ensure that “we have what amounts to a certifiably official teaching of the disciples on the Resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>148</sup> So, in any case, the tradition of these resurrection appearances is not only very early but also directly linked to or at least in line with apostolic testimony.

Luke 24:34 probably constitutes a pre-Lukan formula: “saying, The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Prior to discussing why this appears to be the case, however, it should be noted that a textual problem may be associated with the passage at hand. Depending on whether “saying” refers to the apostles (i.e. “the eleven,” cf. Lk 24:33) or the Emmaus disciples, Simon may be either the apostle Peter or the companion of Cleopas. Ramelli argues that the readings of the Bezae Codex, as well as the ones of the Old Syriac and Coptic

---

<sup>146</sup> Eduard Schweizer, “Resurrection: Fact or Illusion?,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 1 (1979): 145.

<sup>147</sup> Habermas and Licona, *Case for the Resurrection*, loc. 436-437n25.

<sup>148</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 232.

tradition, favor the second option and remove various interpretive difficulties.<sup>149</sup> She hypothesizes that *legontes* may have changed to *legontas*.<sup>150</sup> This assertion however does not seem very plausible because almost all other available manuscripts (including earlier ones) attest to the latter reading and the more difficult reading is normally preferred by textual critics, so the argument that interpretive difficulties are removed rather serves as an argument against her suggested reading. What is more, since Peter's protophany is also directly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:5 and possibly alluded to in Mk 16:7, as O'Collins notes,<sup>151</sup> it is more likely that the phrase also refers to the apostle Peter in this instance.

There are various reasons why Luke 24:34 probably reflects an old tradition. First, when the context of the narrative in Luke 24 is followed, the phrase appears suddenly, only to disappear immediately afterwards again. No additional details about the appearance to Simon are provided in Luke nor in any of the other canonical Gospels. This is not to say that it does not serve any purpose in the narrative, but rather that it is not too tightly linked to the events prior (i.e. the appearance to the Emmaus disciples) or after (i.e. the appearance to the eleven and others) the locus of the passage. O'Collins suggests that Luke introduces this formula to "head off any impression that the Emmaus appearance is the primary one."<sup>152</sup> The way the verse is thus embedded in its context allows for the possibility that Luke is citing a formula.

Second, another important feature is that the apostle is referred to as "Simon" and not as "Peter."

---

<sup>149</sup> Ilaria Ramelli, "The Emmaus Disciples and the Kerygma of the Resurrection (Lk 24,34): A Greek Variant and the Old Syriac, Coptic, and Latin Traditions," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 105, no. 1 (2014): 4–9.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>151</sup> Gerald O'Collins, "Peter as Witness to Easter," *Theological Studies* 73, no. 2 (2012): 271–273.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Luke primarily refers to the him as Simon before narrating the appointment of the twelve disciples (cf. Lk 6:12-16). Afterwards, he calls him Peter, with only very few exceptions. The exceptions include cases in which Jesus directly addresses Peter (Lk 7:40 and Lk 22:31) and two verses that immediately follow a direct address (Lk 7:43; 7:44). Apart from the latter two cases, the apostle is always called Peter when referred to in the third person singular. It is, therefore, surprising that he is called Simon, even though he is referred to in the third person singular. The passage also differs from the other preceding exceptions because Luke 24:34 neither contains a direct address to Peter nor one that is placed subsequently. It is therefore not typically Lukan and thus likely pre-Lukan. Pesch suggests that this designation could point to a high age of the formula.<sup>153</sup> But the exact age of the formula is difficult to determine. Eckstein thinks that, from a form-critical standpoint, this designation precedes the more honorable epithet “Kephas.”<sup>154</sup> If this assessment is correct, then this pre-Lukan formula even predates the one found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, since Peter is referred to as Kephas in the latter passage. But even if, contrary to Eckstein, the tradition cited in Luke 24:34 somehow relies on 1 Corinthians 15:5, Theißen and Merz stress that each of these formulas is autonomous and has its own language tradition.<sup>155</sup> Jesus’ appearance to the apostle Peter is thus supported by multiple, early and, most importantly, independent sources, since both of them exhibit their own language tradition.

In summary, several early sources report that Jesus was seen alive after his death by both individuals (including Peter, James and Paul) and groups. The oral traditions attesting to these

---

<sup>153</sup> Rudolf Pesch, “Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 30, no. 1–2 (1983): 92.

<sup>154</sup> Hans-Joachim Eckstein, “Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung Jesu: Lukas 24,34 Als Beispiel früher formelhafter Zeugnisse,” in *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, ed. Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 14.

<sup>155</sup> Theißen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*, 433n34.

events date back very early, probably within a few years after Jesus' execution. The reliability of these reports is strengthened because they either directly derive from eyewitnesses or could be verified through them. In contrast, there is no direct testimony to the contrary, namely that these sightings did not occur or were invented. Consequently, it is permissible to deduce from these reports that appearances were not only reported but also experienced.

### Fact 3: The transformation of Saul of Tarsus

Saul of Tarsus plays a crucial role in examining what happened after Jesus' death. As discussed above, he was acquainted with at least some of the other apostles and others who claimed to have seen the risen Christ. Moreover, we find the earliest eyewitness reports of the appearances in his writings. Prior to his conversion, however, Saul (hereafter Paul) was a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the church. It was due to what he believed to be an encounter with the risen Jesus that he became a Christian, as nearly all scholars who research this subject concede.<sup>156</sup>

Paul was a devout Jew and committed to the Jewish way of living (Phil 3:5). According to Luke, he was born in Tarsus (Acts 22:3), a city in Asia Minor known for its philosophical and rhetorical schools.<sup>157</sup> Brown lists several reasons for why the majority of scholars think that Paul was not only born but also educated there, including (1) his skill in Greek, (2) his rhetorical abilities, (3) Greek quotations from Scripture, and (4) his acquaintance with Deuterocanonical books in Greek.<sup>158</sup> The claim that Paul was educated by Gamaliel (cf. Acts 22:3) is disputed. It is

---

<sup>156</sup> Habermas, *Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 10.

<sup>157</sup> See, for instance, N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 339. They derive this information from Strabo *Geogr.* 14.5.131.

<sup>158</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 151–152.

noteworthy, however, that Chilton and Neusner identify affinities between the teachings of Paul and Gamaliel.<sup>159</sup> Although this would support the biblical testimony, this evidence does not necessarily show that they were in direct contact with each other. But, irrespective of whether Paul was taught in Jerusalem and/or Tarsus, Paul did exhibit good scholarly credentials.

The apostle Paul repeatedly admits in his undisputed letters that he persecuted the church. He sees himself unworthy even to be called an apostle because he “persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9). Elsewhere, he also explains that he violently persecuted Christians in his attempt to destroy the church (Gal 1:13). Paul’s persecution of the early Christian church is also numerous attested in Acts (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1.3; 22:4-5; and 26:9-11). Thus, Paul’s hostility towards the church is multiply attested. This is not to say that each of these sources are usually seen as equally reliable. The reliability of Acts hinges on whether Luke wrote Acts and was a companion of Paul. Nevertheless, even within the Pauline corpus itself, it is attested several times and supported by the oral testimony that was passed on to the churches in Judea (Gal 1:22-23). If it is correct that Paul met Peter and James between four and six years after the crucifixion, as discussed above, then the oral testimony would probably have originated from the Judean churches before that, at the time when Paul was still an enemy of the church.

The claim that Paul formerly persecuted the church is also strengthened because it meets the principle of embarrassment. It is difficult to think of reasons for why Paul would falsely make such an assertion such that it outweighs the disadvantages of making such an embarrassing confession. Moreover, according to Acts 9:26-27, Paul encountered difficulties when attempting to join the church in Jerusalem because these Christians did not trust him. Since Paul’s former

---

<sup>159</sup> Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, “Paul and Gamaliel,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8, no. 1 (2005): 148.

persecution was even a hindrance to his efforts within the church, the accuracy of this confession is thus further substantiated.

Concerning the question as to why Paul changed his mind and became a follower of Christ further elaboration is needed. Paul refers to the personal appearance of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8. While the first passage refers to Paul's sighting of Jesus ("Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"), the latter one speaks about Jesus' appearance to Paul ("he appeared also to me"). Even though both passages do not provide any additional details about where and when this experience occurred, they do stress that Paul believed that he had a personal encounter with Jesus. This event is referred to in more detail in Galatians 1:11-19, as most scholars think that Paul here refers to his conversion experience on the road to Damascus:<sup>160</sup>

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

In this passage, Paul explains that due to a revelation (*apokalypsis*) of some sort, his life was changed in such a manner that he stopped persecuting the church and started to proclaim the very message he once sought to destroy. Concerning the persecution, Moo notes that Paul stresses the intensity of his former persecution, particularly in Galatians 1:13.<sup>161</sup> Paul introduces

---

<sup>160</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 375.

<sup>161</sup> Douglas J Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 100, accessed August 6, 2019, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10805953>.

the effect the experience had on him in Galatians 1:16, where he states that the Son was revealed in him “in order that [he] might preach him among the Gentiles,” which serves to support his apostolic call, according to Schreiner.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, Paul’s transformation from a persecutor to an apostle due to what he believed to be an encounter with the risen Christ can be solely established based on the evidence from the Pauline corpus itself.

There is a disagreement, however, as to what sort of appearance Paul is referring to. The beginning of verse 16 can also be rendered “to reveal his son *in me*” (Gal 1:16a, NIV). Some commentators argue that Paul is thinking of a hallucinatory or visionary experience in this case, whereas others think that the passage does not require such an interpretation and should be weighed against Paul’s other remarks concerning the Resurrection, where he seems to imply a bodily view of the Resurrection. The latter view seems more convincing because the text can also be rendered “to me” instead of “in me,”<sup>163</sup> and the root word *apokalypsis* can denote “to reveal, to disclose, to make fully known” in this context, according to Louw and Nida.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, elsewhere Paul employs the term to refer to a physical “revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19).<sup>165</sup> In any case, the term need not necessarily refer to either a hallucinatory or visionary appearance. But, due to the selected methodology in approaching the question about Jesus’ Resurrection, it is important that a distinction is made at this point between the historical facts that are accepted by most scholars and the hypotheses which are based upon these facts. For

---

<sup>162</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Galatians*, ed. Clinton E Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 92, accessed August 6, 2019, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5397771>.

<sup>163</sup> In fact, the ESV as cited above renders the passage exactly this way. See also Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 376–378.

<sup>164</sup> J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 338.

<sup>165</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

this reason, the question concerning the type of appearance needs to be relegated until the hypotheses themselves are examined. So far, it shall suffice to point out that the discussed passages do not preclude any sort of appearance that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Paul's conversion experience is narrated in more detail in Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; and 26:12-18. Even though a good case can be made for the reliability of Acts,<sup>166</sup> since not nearly all scholars agree that Luke, a travelling companion of Paul, wrote Acts,<sup>167</sup> those passages cannot be given too much weight with respect to their details in the present investigation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these three passages not only agree amongst each other concerning several core features, namely (1) Paul's persecution of Christians, (2) Paul encountered Jesus, and (3) that his life was changed due to this event such that he became a Christian missionary, as Allison points out,<sup>168</sup> but they also agree with Paul's own testimony in his letters as already discussed above. The main aspects of Paul's transformation are thus attested by multiple sources.

Moreover, the conversion experience is corroborated in Acts 9:3-8 and Galatians 1:11-18. In the letter to the Galatians, McGrew observes, Paul's first visit to Damascus is implied because it states he "returned *again* [emphasis added] to Damascus" (Gal 1:17).<sup>169</sup> Because of this implication, it corroborates the narrative in Acts which confirms that Paul went to Damascus after his conversion, although the place Damascus is mentioned sequentially after Arabia in Galatians. It is unlikely to be the case that the author of Acts invented the first visit to Damascus

---

<sup>166</sup> See, for instance, Hemer, *Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*.

<sup>167</sup> Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 382n361; Licona mentions that the estimate was provided by Craig Keener.

<sup>168</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 263 The items two to six in Allison's list are subsumed in the second point above because they all relate to Paul's encounter with Jesus.

<sup>169</sup> McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View*, loc. 1951.

such that it corroborates the passage found in Galatians. This cumulatively substantiates the approximate geographical location of his conversion experience.

Paul's commitment to following Christ and proclaiming the gospel resulted for him also in persecution and suffering. There are various passages in his undisputed letters in which he refers to multiple occasions on which he experienced adversity. One such passage is 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, where Paul reports that he was imprisoned, flogged, beaten and stoned. Even an extra-biblical source exists. *1 Clement* was written approximately thirty years after Paul's death and confirms some of Paul's sufferings for the Christian faith. The following passage refers to several ways in which he suffered, including jealousy and strife, imprisonment, exile and stoning:

Because of jealousy and strife Paul pointed the way to the prize for endurance. Seven times he bore chains; he was sent into exile and stoned; he served as a herald in both the East and the West; and he received the noble reputation for his faith. He taught righteousness to the whole world, and came to the limits of the West, bearing his witness before the rulers. And so, he was set free from this world and transported up to the holy place, having become the greatest example of endurance.<sup>170</sup>

Concerning the text that directly precedes the passage cited above, Ehrman notes Paul is referred to as one of the pillars who was persecuted "even to death."<sup>171</sup> Ehrman's assessment that Paul is included amongst those pillars is probably correct because Paul is mentioned almost immediately after this reference, only second to Peter, whose sufferings are also briefly referred to.<sup>172</sup> But the data in support of Paul's martyrdom is not sufficiently strong and not accepted by

---

<sup>170</sup> *1 Clement* 5.5-7.

<sup>171</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 173. Ehrman does not state explicitly which passage he means. It is probably *1 Clement* 5.2, since it is there where the term "even to death" occurs in conjunction with martyrdom.

<sup>172</sup> *1 Clement* 5.4.

the majority of scholars, so as to be counted a minimal fact. In contrast, however, the references to Paul's sufferings are multiply attested and can, therefore, be adduced in this case.

To summarize, even though certain details concerning Paul's conversion experience, particularly the ones in Acts, and the type of appearance are not part of the first-order facts, the general sequence of events that led to Paul's transformation from persecuting to promoting the church in the face of persecution can be firmly established on historical grounds. Moreover, although there is no general agreement over the kind of experience that led to Paul's conversion, the sources indicate that Paul believed that he saw the risen Jesus near Damascus.

### Chapter 3 – Evaluation of the Hypotheses

Based on the previous chapter, several historical facts concerning Jesus' death and what happened thereafter could be established. These facts include (1) Jesus' death by crucifixion, (2) the resurrection appearances thereafter, and (3) the transformed life of the apostle Paul. As indicated in *chapter 1*, the conditional probabilities of these facts given the competing hypotheses ( $P(e_1 | h_j, k)$ ), as well as the prior probabilities of the hypotheses ( $P(h_j | k)$ ), now need to be estimated, so as to allow for a comparison between the likelihood of these hypotheses.

In this section, only those hypotheses are considered that are given greater emphasis and generally regarded as more plausible in recent academic literature. These include the subjective vision, objective vision, and the resurrection hypothesis. Notwithstanding, several of the omitted hypotheses should briefly be mentioned.

First, the *swoon hypothesis* (i.e. that Jesus survived the crucifixion) is not discussed because it does not fit the first fact and is seldomly advocated by specialists ever since Strauss' devastating critique:

It is impossible that a being who had been stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression he had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.<sup>173</sup>

Second, the *legend hypothesis* which claims in its most radical form that Jesus never existed or in a somewhat less extreme form that the aforementioned facts cannot be established

---

<sup>173</sup> David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 412.

with a sufficient degree of certainty.<sup>174</sup> It is not addressed because it essentially constitutes an attempt to undermine these very facts. If the analysis in the preceding chapter is accurate, the legend hypothesis is no plausible candidate because it does not explain these facts. For this reason, it is also useless to estimate the conditional probabilities of facts which are denied by that hypothesis.

Third, the *fraud hypothesis* indeed explains the fact that Jesus was crucified, assumes however that people falsely asserted that there were appearances because they either lied or they were misled by others into thinking so.<sup>175</sup> The hypothesis does, therefore, not agree that Jesus appeared to the disciples and, hence, fails to account for the second fact. Moreover, unless it is assumed that the apostle Paul was somehow involved in the supposed conspiracy, it needs to be combined with an additional hypothesis to explain the conversion of the apostle to Christianity.

---

<sup>174</sup> Arguments for this hypothesis are offered in George Albert Wells, *Did Jesus Exist?*, rev. ed. (London: Pemberton, 1986); Robert M. Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NY: American Atheist Press, 2011); Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Responses against the legend hypothesis are discussed in Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2012); Daniel N. Gullotta, “On Richard Carrier’s Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier’s On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 15, no. 2–3 (December 11, 2017): 310–346.

<sup>175</sup> Although contemporary advocates for this hypothesis are difficult to be found, it is at least alluded to in Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95; For an earlier defense, see Hermann S. Reimarus, *Fragments from Reimarus*, vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), sec. 56.

## Subjective Vision Hypothesis

According to the subjective vision hypothesis (SVH), the disciples experienced visions or hallucinations in which Jesus appeared as the risen Christ while they were grieving after Jesus' death. Saul of Tarsus presumably converted to Christianity because Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. In this view, the sensory experiences of an object that is seen are a mere product of the mind. Thus, the object cannot be said to exist outside of or apart from the observer. More precisely, Davis defines it as a sort of vision that occurs when "someone sincerely claims to see something, no one else can see it, and the reason that no one else can see it is because the item purportedly seen is not real, is not objectively there to be seen."<sup>176</sup>

Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$

When examining the first factor, one of the main concerns lies in assessing the relationship between subjective visions and sudden death. It is not intuitive to estimate the probability that Jesus died by crucifixion given that several people experienced subjective visions afterwards ( $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$ ) because the causal relation is more likely to run in the other direction due to the perceived sequential order of the events. Fortunately, the likelihood can also be computed indirectly by estimating it in the other direction, that is the probability of people experiencing visions given that someone else died ( $p(H_{SVH} | F_1)$ ). But caution is warranted because Bayes' theorem informs us that the two likelihoods differ unless  $p(F_1)$  equals

---

<sup>176</sup> Stephen T Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127, accessed August 13, 2019, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10283785>.

$p(H_{SVH})$ .<sup>177</sup> Notwithstanding, estimating  $p(H_{SVH}|F_1)$  provides a good starting point for examining this hypothesis. The higher the likelihood that people experience subjective visions upon the death of a person they knew, the more plausible the hypothesis.

To argue in favor of the SVH, it needs to be shown that there is a relationship between visions occurring subsequently to the death of a close relative or friend. Lüdemann, for instance, appeals to psychological research in support of the notion that people may experience such visions as they mourn the death of a beloved person. He cites a study of Parkes and Weiss in which they identify three factors that hinder widows in their bereavement process, namely (1) sudden death, (2) conflicting feelings towards the person who died, and (3) a dependent relationship.<sup>178</sup> Lüdemann then argues that these factors apply in Peter's case.<sup>179</sup> He then concludes that such a psychotic disorder led to Peter's "self-deception."<sup>180</sup>

The difficulties entailed by historical psychological analyses has been discussed repeatedly. Based on a comprehensive survey of existing literature on the subject, Anderson lists six difficulties entailed by such an analysis.<sup>181</sup> Even though he suggests methodological improvements in an attempt to overcome these difficulties, Anderson warns of inflated

---

<sup>177</sup> Recall that using Bayes' theorem the likelihood can be computed as follows:  $P(H_{SVH}|F_1) = \frac{P(F_1|H_{SVH}) \cdot P(H_{SVH})}{P(F_1)}$ .

<sup>178</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, "The Resurrection of Jesus: Fifteen Years Later," in *Resurrection of the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Geert Van Oyen and Tom Sheperd (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2012), 556; See Colin Murray Parkes and Robert Stuart Weiss, *Recovery from Bereavement* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>179</sup> Lüdemann, "The Resurrection of Jesus: Fifteen Years Later," 557.

<sup>180</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004) Kindle loc. 198.

<sup>181</sup> James William Anderson, "The Methodology of Psychological Biography," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 3 (1981): 455–475 (1) reductionism, (2) inflated expectations, (3) disparagement, (4) applying contemporary psychology to another era, (5) inadequacies in psychological theory, and (6) absence of the subject.

expectations and clarifies that “the psychobiographer's explanations should be recognized as speculative.”<sup>182</sup> But even if such an analysis were feasible, it is still questionable whether the likelihood of bereavement hallucinations (BH) are sufficiently high in the case of any of the disciples. Therefore, a closer look at Peter, who seems to be the most likely candidate for experiencing a BH, is in order.

First, the three factors identified by Parkes and Weiss are based on a study of widows and need not apply to the relationship between Peter and Jesus. BHs are more common in the case of widows. As Kamp et al. summarize, studies report that between 40% to 70% of cases of BHs are due to widowhood.<sup>183</sup> Additionally, they note that the length of the marriage significantly affects the likelihood of BHs.<sup>184</sup> Unfortunately, it is a relatively common statistical mistake that such findings are applied to Peter. Applying a false reference class (in this case “widow” instead of “close friend”) to Peter results in using a too high base rate and, hence, leads to an overestimation of the SVH’s probability.<sup>185</sup> In their meta-study, Castelnovo et al. analyze studies in which the prevalence is not limited to widows but also encompasses the general public. They observe that rates found in these studies vary between 10% and 41%.<sup>186</sup> But the upper bound can

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 461.

<sup>183</sup> Karina Stengaard Kamp et al., “Bereavement Hallucinations after the Loss of a Spouse: Associations with Psychopathological Measures, Personality and Coping Style,” *Death Studies* 43, no. 4 (April 21, 2019): 260.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>185</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Schnelles Denken, Langsames Denken*, trans. Thorsten Schmidt, 4th ed. (München: Siedler Verlag, 2011), 184–194; This is a common heuristic that even statisticians can commit. Kahneman especially warns that associative coherence can make us “believe in the stories we spin for ourselves.” See Ibid., 194.

<sup>186</sup> Anna Castelnovo et al., “Post-Bereavement Hallucinatory Experiences: A Critical Overview of Population and Clinical Studies,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 186 (November 1, 2015): 268 The prevalence rates are 10% (Sidgewick, 1894), 14% (West, 1948), 23%-41% (Kalish and Reynolds, 1973), 17% (Palmer and Dennis, 1974), and 25% (Greeley). They note that the range in the case of Kalish and Reynolds is particularly high because they fail to distinguish between dreams and hallucinations.

be misleading, since the study of Kalish and Reynolds which reports the highest value of up to 41% is not limited to hallucinations but also includes dreams and felt presences.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, the second-highest value of 25% reported by Greeley also adds felt presences.<sup>188</sup> Hence, if the studies are limited to those that only report BHs, the value is more likely to lie between 10%-17%, which is significantly lower than in the case of widows only. In fact, the relevant probability in Peter's case can be assumed to be even lower, as Castelnovo et al. observe, "little is known about grief hallucinations in cases where the deceased is not a spouse but a son, a relative or close friend, which mainly consist in sporadic case reports."<sup>189</sup> Such a low probability renders the hypothesis that Peter saw Jesus in a vision less than improbable.

Next, it is reductionistic to limit the psychological analysis to correlating three factors with Peter. In fact, it seems unlikely that Peter's experience was a BH, once additional factors that increase the likelihood of BHs are also discussed. For instance, Kamp et al. find that an avoidant and detached coping style and openness to new experiences are significant explanatory variables for BHs,<sup>190</sup> none of which seem to apply in Peter's case. Because many of these factors do not apply to Peter, the probability can be lowered to very improbable.

Additional qualifications need to be made concerning the aforementioned remarks. It would be fallacious to assume that "people are intellectually and psychologically the same in all

---

<sup>187</sup> Richard A. Kalish and David K. Reynolds, "Phenomenological Reality and Post-Death Contact," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12, no. 2 (1973): 218.

<sup>188</sup> A. M. Greeley, "Hallucinations among the Widowed," *Sociology and Social Research* 71 (1987): 258–265.

<sup>189</sup> Castelnovo et al., "Post-Bereavement Hallucinatory Experiences," 269.

<sup>190</sup> Kamp et al., "Bereavement Hallucinations after the Loss of a Spouse," 264–265.

times, places, and circumstances,”<sup>191</sup> as Fisher notes. Since the frequency of such experiences need not be identical in the first century and today, it is crucial to not only consider how probable these sorts of subjective experiences are today. Casey claims that they were more prevalent than today,<sup>192</sup> stating that the “Second Temple Judaism was a visionary culture, in which people believed that people saw appearances of God and angels, and had visions and dreams in which God and angels appeared to them.”<sup>193</sup> Thus, the likelihood of experiencing BHs may be higher after all, due to differences in the historical context. That Peter experienced a vision (*ekstasis*), though not a bereavement hallucination, is acknowledged in Acts 10:10-16. Louw and Nida define the Greek term used in this passage as “vision accompanied by an ecstatic psychological state.”<sup>194</sup> This is not to say, however, that the vision described in Acts 10 does not constitute or entail a message communicated to him by God. In any case, even though Peter does not appear to be particularly prone to BHs, the likelihood that he experienced a vision after Jesus’ death needs to be adjusted upwards because he also experienced a vision in a different situation. Considering the previous aspects of the discussion, I adjust  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$  from very improbable to even odds.

Finally, the mode of execution also affects the likelihood of  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$ . Several scholars point out that Jews generally thought of crucified people as being cursed by God (cf.

---

<sup>191</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 203–204.

<sup>192</sup> Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian’s Account of His Life and Teaching* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2010), 490, accessed August 13, 2019, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=617181>.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>194</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 1:444.

Deut 21:22-23).<sup>195</sup> It seems *ceteris paribus* more likely that a disciple would experience a vision in which Jesus appears to be raised from the dead, if Jesus would not have been crucified. In other words, the fact that Jesus was crucified, decreases the likelihood that Jesus would be regarded as victorious. A person crucified and, therefore, cursed by God would have been regarded as a loser not a winner. Moreover, even if the disciples would have thought that he was raised, it is improbable that a pious Jew like Peter or Paul would have continued to maintain the wishful thoughts that were so contrary to the Mosaic view that the crucifixion victim was cursed. Hence, it is slightly improbable that the disciples would have had a subjective vision in which they saw the risen Jesus, given that Jesus was crucified and seemingly under a curse.

Taking into account the various aspects that affect  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$ , including (1) the possibility of BHs after someone died, (2) the somewhat higher prevalence of hallucinations in first-century Palestine in comparison to today, (3) Peter's visionary experience described in Acts 10, and (4) the tension between curse due to crucifixion and vindication, I estimate that  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$  is slightly improbable (40%).

Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$

The second factor involves an assessment of how likely it is that people report seeing appearances, given the SVH. At first glance, it seems plausible that the SVH can account for the appearances because subjective visions entail appearances. When a person experiences a (subjective) vision, that person may think that he or she sees another person. Manford and

---

<sup>195</sup> Carsten Peter Thiede and Gerd Lüdemann, eds., *Die Auferstehung Jesu - Fiktion oder Wirklichkeit? Ein Streitgespräch*, ABC-Team (Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 2001), 42; Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Wirklich auferstanden! Historische und philosophische Argumente für den Osterglauben*, 4th ed. (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2011), 26–27.

Andermann explain these sorts of visual hallucinations (i.e. a particular type of subjective visions) as follows:

The content of the hallucinations is dramatic; they are usually in vivid colours and may evolve from simple spots of light through geometric patterns to complex images, or they may be complex from the outset. Sufferers often see human figures or faces (sometimes torsos without heads or vice versa); animals (real or bizarre), sometimes in miniature (Lilliputian hallucinations) or scenery of outstanding beauty.<sup>196</sup>

Since the disciples claimed that they saw a human figure (i.e. Jesus) alive after the crucifixion, it is initially probable that they would claim that Jesus appeared to them, given the SVH. But additional factors need to be considered.

It is evident from the discussion of fact two that after Jesus' death people claimed that He was alive because they saw Him. The claim of the passages in which the appearances are reported (cf. Lk 24:34 and 1 Cor 15:4) entails that Jesus is (somehow) alive because He is risen. Hence, the value  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$  also pertains to the likelihood that people report and sincerely believe that Jesus is alive, given that they experience hallucinations. This depends on the cultural background of that time.

There appears to be a strong tradition in Greco-Roman culture that speaks of the finality of death. Aeschylus, for instance, clearly states that there is no resurrection and that dead people cannot be called back from Hades.<sup>197</sup> This was, according to Wright, the general attitude amongst the ancients.<sup>198</sup> In first-century Judaism, on the other hand, there was either no belief in an afterlife or a belief in a general resurrection at the end of times. Vermès concludes his discussion

---

<sup>196</sup> Mark Manford and Frederick Andermann, "Complex Visual Hallucinations: Clinical and Neurobiological Insights," *Brain* 121, no. 10 (October 1, 1998): 1819.

<sup>197</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 647-648.

<sup>198</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 74.

of how prevalent the belief in a resurrection was in first-century Jewish society, stating, “the notion of bodily resurrection propagated by the Pharisees was alien to first-century Hellenistic Jews, and was on the whole unfamiliar in most layers of Palestinian Jewry.”<sup>199</sup> Understandably, therefore, Wright, remarks that “such visions meant precisely, as people in the ancient and modern worlds have discovered, that the person was dead, not that they were alive.”<sup>200</sup>

There are, however, examples to the contrary which at minimum allude to the possibility of a reversal of death. In this regard, after discussing examples of mythical antiquity (Orpheus and Eurydice, Aesclepius, Alcestis, and Protesilaus), Bryan finds that according to some stories, “however difficult or unlikely such reversal might be, it could happen if the conditions were right, and occasionally even had happened.”<sup>201</sup> These few examples do not offset the general attitude concerning the finality of death, which increases the probability that people would have remained convicted that Jesus was dead, even though He had appeared to them. Nevertheless, Bryan’s examples do show that it may have been considered at least possible by some people that Jesus was alive again after having died. Thus, even though it is possible that the disciples saw Jesus in a SV, it is unlikely the disciples would have believed that Jesus was alive.

Another important question to consider is whether people in the first century were able to distinguish between different kinds of appearances, namely subjective and objective ones, as well as corporeal and non-corporeal ones. This can be referred to as the distinguishability factor. Oberdorfer speaks of how the SVH requires that the disciples “objectified” a spiritual vision into

---

<sup>199</sup> Géza Vermès, *Jesus: Nativity, Passion, Resurrection* (Penguin Books, 2010), 353, accessed September 24, 2019, <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=4A21E3C9-4620-48AE-BB31-E2E975886C46>.

<sup>200</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 3:690–691.

<sup>201</sup> Christopher Bryan, *The Resurrection of the Messiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Kindle, loc. 403-404.

corporeal revivification.<sup>202</sup> The SVH is more likely, if they were unable to distinguish between these categories. According to Greek thinking, dead people remain dead. The Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 484-425 BC), describes how a man named Aristeas was seen alive after his death, but Herodotus consistently assumes that the man remained dead.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, he reports that the appearance was understood by the people living in that area as a vision.<sup>204</sup> Thus, people at that time were evidently able to categorize experiences as such.

In Paul's case, coming from a Pharisaic tradition, his thinking would have differed from that of Herodotus. But even though Paul maintained that there would be a physical resurrection in the future, like the Pharisees of his day, he was also acquainted with visionary experiences (2 Cor 12:2-4). Two remarks are in order concerning these experiences. First, they need not necessarily be subjective visions and thus reduced to mere psychological phenomena. To presuppose that they were SVs, is to beg the question. In fact, they seem to differ from SVs, because according to Paul there is some objective component to these experiences (2 Cor 12:3). But this shall be discussed in more detail below, since it is directly relevant to fact three. Second, even if those experiences could be reduced to SVs, it does not follow that Jesus' appearance to Paul was also a SV, since Paul clearly differentiates between the two.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Bernd Oberdorfer, "Was sucht ihr den Lebendigen bei den Toten?": Überlegungen zur Realität der Auferstehung in Auseinandersetzung mit Gerd Lüdemann," in *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, ed. Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2002), 173.

<sup>203</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories* 4.14.1-4.15.4, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.15.3.

<sup>205</sup> Dunn concludes his discussion of 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 12 as follows: "It is clear then that Paul himself made a firm distinction between his conversion experience and his subsequent spiritual experiences." James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 103.

The claims of the early church, however, are not only limited to appearances, but also include the assertion that “the Lord has risen” (Lk 24:34). Even though appearances are probable in the OVH, it is questionable whether a non-physical appearance explains why the disciples came to be convinced that God had actually raised Jesus from the dead. Craig argues that a non-physical appearance only helps insofar that the disciples would have arrived at the belief that Jesus was assumed into heaven (as in the cases of Enoch and Elijah), but not that he was raised.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, given the Jewish beliefs about the afterlife, it seems more likely that SVs would have originated from their minds with a content other than a bodily resurrection (prior to the last day). It seems considerably more probable that they would have had projected visions of Jesus in paradise (Lk 23:43) or Abraham’s bosom (Lk 16:22, RSV). In short, the setting of Jesus’ appearances in this world rather than in the afterworld would be quite unexpected.

Initially,  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$  seems very probable because subjective visions entail appearances. Since people living in the first century, however, were (1) aware that dead people remain dead, (2) able to distinguish between subjective and objective appearances, and (3) more likely to experience a vision of Jesus in the afterworld, the factor  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$  should be lowered to even odds (50%).

Fact 3:  $p(F_3 | H_{SVH})$

Sometime after Jesus’ crucifixion, Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus in a way that transformed his life. Thus, the first question to consider is how probable it is that a SV can have such a transformational effect in the first place. Or, in other words, how likely is it that someone becomes an adherent and promoter of what he perceived to be a dangerous sect as a result of a

---

<sup>206</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 394.

SV. The second question, when considering the transformation of Paul's life, is whether a SV can have a long-term effect on how he would live the rest of his life.

As shall be seen shortly, Paul's medical condition plays a key role in making such a case. It can be argued that Paul suffered from an eye disease. Landsborough derives from Paul's statements in Galatians 4:15 and Galatians 6:11 that Paul had a "poor visual acuity."<sup>207</sup> Landsborough is thereby attempting to identify Paul's medical conditions based on certain clues from the text, which is akin to a psychological analysis of Paul and therefore may be dubious. But because medical conditions can be associated with outward symptoms, a medical diagnosis based on historical records can be more plausible than a psychological one. In any case, even if Landsborough is correct, the kinds of visions that are more likely to occur in conjunction with an ocular pathology need to be considered in Paul's case.

In one of the largest studies on hallucinations occurring among visually handicapped (and elderly) patients, Teunisse et al. detect a prevalence of 12% (63 of 505).<sup>208</sup> The phenomenon they observe is referred to as Charles Bonnet's syndrome (CBS) and can be defined as a "presence of complex visual hallucinations in psychologically normal people."<sup>209</sup> Teunisse et al. also examine how often CBS patients perceive the unreal nature of the hallucinations. They find that 82% of the patients were immediately aware that the hallucinations were illusory, while the remaining 18%, although being deceived at first, became aware of the unreal nature after some time.<sup>210</sup> In

---

<sup>207</sup> David Landsborough, "St Paul and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 50, no. 6 (June 1, 1987): 660.

<sup>208</sup> Robert J. Teunisse et al., "Visual Hallucinations in Psychologically Normal People: Charles Bonnet's Syndrome," *The Lancet* 347, no. 9004 (March 23, 1996): 794.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 795–796.

other words, they do not find a single CBS patient who remained deluded concerning the hallucination over a longer period of time. If Paul was subject to the CBS but would otherwise have been a normal and healthy person, and if people living in the first century were equally likely to perceive the unreal nature of such hallucinations as today, then it is likely that Paul would have realized either immediately or after some time that his experience did not correspond to reality.

There are, of course, visual hallucinations that may occur as a result of other diseases. But for all these it is even more difficult to show that the corresponding symptoms apply to Paul due to the scarcity of data. Nonetheless, it should still briefly be considered whether another disease can bring about a visual hallucination that would ensure a long-term change of Paul's behavior. The potential candidates include hypnagogic and peduncular hallucinations, Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia, migraine coma, delirium tremens and focal epilepsy. Manford and Andermann report cases in which patients perceive the unreal nature of the hallucination for peduncular hallucinations,<sup>211</sup> Parkinson's disease,<sup>212</sup> and migraine coma<sup>213</sup>. In case of delirium tremens, a pathology that is more common among chronic alcoholics, there are some instances in which patients believe in the reality of what they see, although usually only at earlier stages.<sup>214</sup> But delirium tremens can be dismissed as an explanation, since it is unlikely that Paul had undergone an exceedingly high alcohol intake prior to seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus. Finally, visual hallucinations due to focal epilepsy, on the other hand, are rare, can be

---

<sup>211</sup> Manford and Andermann, "Complex Visual Hallucinations: Clinical and Neurobiological Insights," 1820.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 1824.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 1825.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 1826–1827.

interpreted as dreams when experienced during sleep, and the figure therein seen can rarely be identified.<sup>215</sup> Some religious experiences such as the awareness of the presence of a great or evil figure are more often observed among religious patients with temporal lobe epilepsy, a common type of focal epilepsy.<sup>216</sup> But it hardly seems to apply in Paul's case. Thus, the thesis that Paul was an epileptic "has fallen on hard times," as Allison notes.<sup>217</sup>

In summary, while there are many examples of people who recognize that the things which they saw in their hallucination are not real, I was unable to find any documented case for the aforementioned diseases in which people continually maintained over a long period of time that what they saw was real. Consequently, it seems unlikely that Paul would remain a Christian disciple for a long period of time and persist believing in the reality of a risen Christ, if he was dealing with a SV.

The previous discussion of potential causes for a SV shows that they are incapable of affecting the (long-term) behavior of the person experiencing such a vision. However, it is often observed that Paul experienced religious visions and it can be argued that they had effects on his behavior too. According to Acts 16:9, for instance, Paul decided to travel from Troas to Macedonia because a man told him in a vision that he should go and preach the gospel there. But since SVs do not possess such transformational power, it is unlikely that such a vision was merely subjective. It seems that the real cause that can bring about such transformational effects has been overlooked and that there must be another qualitative difference, perhaps an objective

---

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 1826.

<sup>216</sup> Michael Trimble and Anthony Freeman, "An Investigation of Religiosity and the Gastaut–Geschwind Syndrome in Patients with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy," *Epilepsy & Behavior* 9, no. 3 (November 1, 2006): 413.

<sup>217</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 266n280.

component to it. This is explored when considering the objective vision hypothesis. Moreover, in any case a theistic explanation may apply. God could have actively brought about such a transformation. This result also shows that a SV also may unlikely be the correct cause when examining contemporary religious conversions such as the one of Sadhu Sundar Singh, a twenty-first century Hindu who opposed and killed Christians until Jesus appeared to him in a vision.<sup>218</sup>

Because it is improbable that Paul would convert to Christianity as a result of a SV, and since it is extremely unlikely that he remains convinced of the reality of the content of the vision, I find it very improbable (5%) that Paul turned away from persecuting Christians and became a follower of Christ, given the SVH.

Prior Probability:  $p(H_{SVH}|k)$

When considering the prior probability of the SVH, it needs to be considered how common subjective visionary experiences were in the first century. Next, when assessing the likelihood of the mind producing the particular content of the supposed vision, the Jewish background of the earliest disciples needs to be taken into account. Moreover, since the hypothesis posits that multiple people shared the same or similar experiences (i.e. they believed that Jesus was raised from the dead), it should be considered how common such phenomena occur in group settings given SVs.

It is nearly impossible to provide an accurate estimate of how prevalent visionary experiences were in first century Palestine. Nevertheless, an educated guess needs to be made to assess the prior probability. As mentioned above, contemporary studies record a prevalence of

---

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 267 Allison likens Sundar's conversion to the one of Paul. As elucidated above, from a Christian perspective neither of those two experiences have to be reduced to merely subjective psychological phenomena because God could have been actively involved in both encounters.

somewhere around 10-17%. It may be that such visions were more common, possibly because they were more accepted and thus the 10-17% are underreported. But it is difficult to say how much more common. Numerous reports of conversion dreams, epiphanies and visions are scattered in ancient literature. Herman mentions an apparition found in 2 Macc. 3:24-36 involving Heliodorus, the chief minister of king Seleucus IV Philipator and his companions,<sup>219</sup> several ones of Zeus Sabazius (prior to 135 BC),<sup>220</sup> and one of Zeus Panamaros (around 40 BC in Asia Minor).<sup>221</sup> Casey intends to add biblical examples to the list such as God's appearance to Abram (Gen 12:7), Isaiah (Isa 6:1), Daniel (Dan 8:1;15), and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:26;28).<sup>222</sup> Yet it needs to be pointed out again that none of the biblical examples need to be equated or reduced to mere SVs. The same applies to the apostles Peter (Mk 9:2-8; and Acts 11:5) and Paul (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; and 2 Cor 12:1). Since it is impossible to compute a sufficiently accurate value due to the scarcity of the data, the probability can be adjusted from improbable (based on contemporary numbers) to slightly improbable, if we assume that the number underestimates the prevalence of such experiences.

Another important aspect relates to the Jewish expectations about the future or more specifically the end of times. These expectations affect the probability of hallucinations and consequently also the probability of the SVH. Hempelmann states that the religious context of the disciples would not have made them expect a resurrection of an individual, as the prevalent

---

<sup>219</sup> Gabriel Herman, "Greek Epiphanies and the Sensed Presence," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 60, no. 2 (2011): 137–139.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 489.

conception was rather that there would be a general resurrection at the end of times.<sup>223</sup> This expectation was increasingly prevalent in the first century and can be seen, for instance, in 2 Maccabees 7:9, 1 Enoch 62.13–15, or Josephus.<sup>224</sup> After discussing various views in post-biblical Judaism, Wright concludes that “nobody imagined that any individuals had already been raised, or would be raised in advance of the great last day.”<sup>225</sup> This cultural predisposition is important. As Herman notes, “the content of visions, like the content of dreams, is culture specific; people are culturally predisposed to behold certain visions more than others.”<sup>226</sup> Since the claim that Jesus alone was raised from the dead does not conform to these expectations, it is unlikely to be hallucinatory, Craig concludes.<sup>227</sup> O’Connell likewise agrees that “people do hallucinate in accordance with expectation,” since the content of the hallucination must be contained in the mind, as it is a product thereof.<sup>228</sup> Consequently, this lowers the prior probability of the SVH.

The Jews who expected a future resurrection believed in the physicality of the resurrection body, including the Hillelites and the Shammaites.<sup>229</sup> This, on the one hand, renders it more likely that those who “saw” Jesus would have believed that he had a body. On the other hand, it makes it more likely that they would have recognized that there was a mismatch between

---

<sup>223</sup> Hempelmann, *Wirklich auferstanden!*, 27.

<sup>224</sup> Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 3.374f.

<sup>225</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 3:205.

<sup>226</sup> Herman, “Greek Epiphanies and the Sensed Presence,” 144.

<sup>227</sup> William L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* v. 16 (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989), 290 and 297–304.

<sup>228</sup> Jake O’Connell, “Jesus’ Resurrection and Collective Hallucinations,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 60, no. 1 (2009): 90.

<sup>229</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 3:195.

what they thought they saw and what they actually saw. The second factor is already considered above in relation to fact two. But the first factor raises the prior probability that they would see Jesus in bodily form, since such visions entail what is already contained in the mind. With respect to the degree to which the aspect of the physicality of the resurrection increases the prior probability, it seems that the negative effect of the Jewish expectation of the resurrection at the end of time is not overridden. If no one expected a premature resurrection in the first place, then the nature of the resurrection does not matter as much.

As mentioned above, the evidence in favor of the claim that Jesus appeared to groups in various settings is strong. Bergeron and Habermas note that psychiatric explanations (such as the SVH) for the resurrection appearances cannot be found in medical literature for the time period between 1918 and 2012.<sup>230</sup> They add that “simultaneous identical collective hallucinations are not found in peer-reviewed medical literature.”<sup>231</sup> This does not mean that the SVH is virtually impossible, but it may indicate that it is at odds with medical knowledge and thus improbable. It may be premature though to dismiss the SVH by merely pointing out that hallucinations are not group phenomena. O’Connell refutes this claim by listing over fifteen well-documented modern cases of subjective visions experienced by religious groups.<sup>232</sup> Consequently, it is not warranted that the prior probability of the SVH is zero on the basis of claiming that group visions do not occur. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the content of the vision experienced by the

---

<sup>230</sup> Joseph W. Bergeron and Gary R. Habermas, “The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 158.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>232</sup> O’Connell, “Jesus’ Resurrection and Collective Hallucinations,” 75–83.

group members differs demonstrably in several of the cases mentioned by O’Connell,<sup>233</sup> as he himself agrees.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, Breitenbach argues that none of the group appearances of Jesus matches the qualities of the ones mentioned by O’Connell.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, the fact that subjective visions are private experiences renders it very improbable that two or more people experience the same content in the vision.

Since (1) visionary experiences were not uncommon, but (2) due to the unexpected timing of the appearances (viz. a resurrection prior to the end of times) and because the SVH maintains that (3) such experiences occur in group settings the prior probability is improbable (20%).

---

<sup>233</sup> The details differ in cases 1, 3, 4, and 5. Nevertheless, among these cases the object of the vision is identical in cases 1 (armed companies), 4 (Marian apparition), and 5 (Marian apparition). *Ibid.*, 76, 78–81.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>235</sup> Zachary Breitenbach, “A New Argument That Collective Hallucinations Do Not Adequately Account for the Group Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 2 (June 2019): 344.

## Objective Vision Hypothesis

In comparison to the other two hypotheses that are discussed in this chapter, the objective vision hypothesis is more difficult to define. Davis defines it as follows:

An objective vision [is] a situation where someone sincerely claims to see something, no one else can see it, and the reason that no one else can see it is because it is not the sort of thing that can be seen by normal vision. That is, the person who has the objective vision has been enabled by God to see the real and objective presence of the thing; the see-er has an ability to see it that others lack.<sup>236</sup>

Similarly, Grass emphasizes that the thing being seen in an objective vision is not accessible to everyone.<sup>237</sup> The hypothesis requires that what is seen in the vision cannot be seen by those who are not enabled (by God) to do so. Hence, even though the OVH entails a literal viewing of some kind, Jesus could not have been seen by others because the hypothesis assumes that it was a noncorporeal seeing.

It is noteworthy that the definition above entails a supernatural element, namely that it is God who enables a person to experience a particular vision. Habermas states that the hypothesis is “an appeal beyond nature,”<sup>238</sup> and can thus be classified as a supernatural internal hypothesis concerning Jesus’ Resurrection.<sup>239</sup> This impacts the evaluation of the hypothesis because the probability of God’s existence affects the prior probability as in case of the RH. Given this supernatural element and the fact that the likelihood of God’s existence is accounted for in the

---

<sup>236</sup> Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, *The Resurrection*, 127.

<sup>237</sup> Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 235.

<sup>238</sup> R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 272.

<sup>239</sup> Gary R. Habermas, “Mapping the Recent Trend Toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 82; Elsewhere (cf. p. 87) Habermas refers to it as “supernatural subjective theory.” However, since the hypothesis pertaining to this category is commonly referred to as “objective vision,” I find it better to distinguish between internal and external supernatural explanations.

prior probability, there is no longer a reason why theological considerations should not be taken into account when estimating the conditional probabilities below.

Since the OVH resembles both the SVH as well as the RH in some respects, the arguments that apply to the OVH and the SVH are considered to estimate the corresponding probabilities. But they need not be reiterated here in detail. Where such estimates are applicable, the reader is referred to the corresponding sections.

Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{OVH})$

The OVH posits a different causal order of the visions and the Resurrection belief. Grass argues that it is, in contrast to the SVH, not the belief that resulted in the visions, but the visions that caused the faith in the Resurrection.<sup>240</sup> Whereas the appearances are seen as part of the bereavement process in the aftermath of Jesus' death on account of the SVH, the OVH posits a different reason for the appearances and the disciples' faith. From the latter perspective, it can be argued that Jesus' death requires a Resurrection involving appearances to the disciples, which then resulted in their belief that Jesus was raised. If this line of reasoning is correct, it lends credibility to the claim that the OVH is positively related to Jesus' death.

As pointed out earlier (cf. "Subjective Vision Hypothesis"), crucifixion victims were regarded as cursed by God in Jewish society (cf. Deut 21:22-23). Blomberg expresses the implications of a crucified messiah this way: "No would-be Messiah could possibly be legitimate if crucified as a criminal by the Roman regime."<sup>241</sup> If God approved of Jesus' life, however, the necessity arises for God to vindicate and act on behalf of Jesus to avoid leaving the impression

---

<sup>240</sup> Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 234.

<sup>241</sup> Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, loc. 9957.

that he was cursed rather than glorified. This is likely given the following items of background knowledge: (1) it is in line with the majority view of critical scholars due to the strong historical attestation that Jesus and his followers thought that he performed miracles and exorcisms,<sup>242</sup> and (2) Paul infers that the Resurrection authenticated Jesus as the Son of God (cf. Rom 1:3-4).

Therefore, it is more probable that God would raise Jesus from the dead after subjecting him to the death penalty by means of crucifixion. As Swinburne writes, such an act “would constitute God’s authenticating signature on the life of Jesus.”<sup>243</sup> Since this argument is not only based on historical but also theological considerations, the initial probability  $p(F_1 | H_{OVH})$  is set to slightly probable (0.6), so as to account for the uncertainties involved in these deliberations.

An advantage of the OVH over the SVH is that it supposes that there was a less fluid transition in the disciples’ faith in the period between shortly prior to and after Jesus’ death. The SVH needs to minimize the negative impact of Jesus’ death. According to Grass, this is not taken seriously enough on the view that they experienced merely subjective visions.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, it seems a priori probable that Jesus’ death had a very negative impact on the disciples’ faith, even apart from the textual evidence in favor of it (e.g. Mk 16:8). The OVH renders it more likely that God would overcome the negative impact of Jesus’ death on the disciples’ faith by bringing about an objective vision such that the disciples would uphold the veracity of their message and proclaim the gospel. As a result,  $p(F_1 | H_{OVH})$  needs to be shifted upwards to 80%.

---

<sup>242</sup> Twelftree puts it even more strongly, stating that “If we can be certain of anything about the historical Jesus, it is that his contemporaries considered him to have performed wonders or miracles.” See Graham Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 258.

<sup>243</sup> Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 190.

<sup>244</sup> Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 240.

Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{OVH})$

The OVH explains the disciples' claims concerning Jesus' appearances after his death. If God objectively appeared to the disciples in visions, it is likely they would have thought and claimed that Jesus appeared to them. If objective visions entail similar visual (and auditory) effects as subjective visions, and if God can bring about such effects, then the conditional probability of objective appearances is initially as high as for subjective visions. Given the theistic underpinnings of the OVH, the OVH ensures that God can bring about visions with effects similar to subjective visions. This is warranted because God's existence is accounted for in the prior probability of this hypothesis. Thus, it is initially probable (80%).

The OVH better explains the multiplicity and qualitative differences of the appearances than the SVH. The latter views the visions as some sort of chain reaction, namely that starting from some individuals such as Peter, the appearances spread. On the other hand, the OVH suggests that these appearances were more independent. In support of this contention, Grass points out that the appearances to Paul and James, in contrast to the ones to Peter and other disciples point towards an independence of these appearances because of the time gap in between them.<sup>245</sup> Pannenberg distinguishes between the earlier appearance to Peter, then the appearance to James (who did not belong to the very earliest witnesses), and Paul (three years after Jesus' death).<sup>246</sup> The hypothesis that Jesus appeared to individuals at various points in time fits better with the sporadic appearances. This makes the hypothesis slightly more likely. But the argument is not sufficiently strong so as to change it to very probable.

---

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>246</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 4th ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1972), 94.

The anthropology of the early church plays another important role in estimating the conditional probability concerning the appearances. According to the OVH, Jesus did not appear to the disciples in a physical body. But if it can be shown that Paul or the other disciples believed in the physicality of Jesus' resurrection body, then the likelihood of them confusing the non-physical appearance with a corporeal one needs to be considered. This is why their conception of the resurrection body plays an important role. Besides this, it is crucial to recognize that Paul does not necessarily equate the nature of Jesus' appearance in his case with the appearances to the other disciples (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-8).<sup>247</sup> In fact, O'Connell states that the phrase "one untimely born," which directly precedes Paul's testimony about Jesus' appearance to him in 1 Corinthians 15:8, "indicates Paul knew there was something different about his appearance."<sup>248</sup> Thus, the views of and appearances to both individuals or groups need to be discussed separately.

In Paul's case, there are strong reasons for believing that he anticipated a physical resurrection body. As Allison writes, "there is just no good evidence for belief in a non-physical resurrection in Paul . . . ."<sup>249</sup> Gundry offers the following arguments for the view that Paul thought of the resurrection body in physical terms: (1) Paul being a Pharisee (cf. Phil 3:5) would have probably embraced the Pharisaical view of a physical resurrection, (2) the juxtaposition of the buried and the raised body in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 implies a physical resurrection, (3) Paul's somatic reference concerning the transformation of "our lowly body" in the likeness Christ's

---

<sup>247</sup> It is insufficient to argue that what is known from Jesus' appearance(s) to Paul can be applied to other appearances in the New Testament on the basis that Paul adds himself to the list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:8 and the fact that he met and conversed with Kephias and James, as Fuller argues. See Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 43.

<sup>248</sup> Jake H. O'Connell, *Jesus' Resurrection and Apparitions: A Bayesian Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 249.

<sup>249</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 317.

“glorious body” in Phil 3:20-21.<sup>250</sup> As argued above (cf. “Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$ ”), it is likely that people in the first century (and Paul especially) were able to distinguish between corporeal and non-corporeal visual perceptions. This renders it unlikely that Paul was unable to distinguish a discrepancy, had there been one.

It is sometimes argued that the OVH fits well with Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9, 22 and 26). As Pannenberg notes, this appearance must be referred to as a vision because Paul saw something that others who were present did not see.<sup>251</sup> In Acts 26:19, it is even specified that this was a “heavenly vision.” However, even though these details do not necessarily contradict fact 2, they are not part of this fact and do not represent the historical bedrock. Moreover, there are reasons for omitting this detail. As Fuller points out, even though Paul admits having experienced visions (cf. 2 Cor 12:1ff), he carefully avoids using this term in relation to his Damascus road experience. Given that only the epistles of Paul are taken into account which are regarded as authentic and that are superior in historical value concerning this event,<sup>252</sup> it should not be adduced as evidence in the present investigation. But even if this data could be adduced, the evidence is still inconclusive. For in response of the claim that Acts attests to a non-physical appearance of Jesus to Paul, O’Connell points to the possibility that Paul’s companions did not see Jesus because they did not look into the light (and thus were not blinded

---

<sup>250</sup> Robert H. Gundry, “The Essential Physicality of Jesus’ Resurrection According to the New Testament,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 204–219; Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 159–183.

<sup>251</sup> Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 90.

<sup>252</sup> This is due to the fact that Paul is a first-hand witness of the Damascus road experience, whereas the author of Acts is not.

like Paul), even though Jesus was there to be seen.<sup>253</sup> Consequently, this line of reasoning neither speaks in favor of nor against the OVH and is thus neglected.

With respect to disciples other than Paul, the Gospels themselves already indicate that first-century Christians distinguished between real people and ghosts and that under uncertain and extraordinary circumstances they tended to classify an unknown being as a ghost (Mk 6:49, Mt 14:26). With this information in mind, there are the following two options: (1) the early church held and continued to hold to the physicality of the resurrection (as reflected in the Gospels), or (2) it developed between AD 30 and ca. AD 70/80, when the Gospels were written. The first option seems more plausible, especially because Paul believed in a physical resurrection body, he conversed with other leaders of the early church in Jerusalem, and he spread this view around the Mediterranean churches already between AD 30 and AD 70. But it is unlikely that the disciples would have claimed that Jesus' resurrection body was physical had they only experienced a (non-physical) OV. In that case, they would have had to maintain theological beliefs that were in conflict with what they actually had experienced. Considering the second option, it could be argued that it was only until later in the first century that Christians started to believe in the physical Resurrection of Jesus. But due to the short time period between the Easter events and the time when the Gospels were recorded, it is unlikely that the early church changed from a non-physical to a physical resurrection, as reflected in the Gospels, within a matter of decades. After all, some of the disciples could then still have served as "authoritative guarantors of their traditions," as Bauckham convincingly argues.<sup>254</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> O'Connell, *Jesus' Resurrection and Apparitions*, 249.

<sup>254</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 39.

As a result of the argument concerning the anthropology within the early church, the likelihood  $p(F_2 | H_{OVH})$  is lowered to slightly improbable (40%), since it is unlikely that not only Paul but also the other disciples would confuse a physical with a non-physical appearance.

The text in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 attests that Jesus appeared to groups of people (“the twelve,” “more than five hundred brothers” and “all the apostles”) at the same time. The historicity of the appearances to these groups poses a dilemma. According to the OVH, only those people who were enabled by God could see Jesus. It is either possible that (1) these groups only consisted of people whom God allowed to have such an experience or (2) there were some people present who did not see Jesus alive. The texts do not tell which of the two options is correct. However, it seems that the OVH faces difficulties in both cases. On the one hand, if it is claimed that God granted such a vision to all of them, then the OVH could be accused of explaining away the data for the following reason. According to the RH, every person present during an appearance could have seen Jesus. To explain the data away, the advocate of the OVH can simply claim that God enabled everyone present to see Jesus. This is, of course, possible, but the more group appearances such an argument is applied to, the more arbitrary the hypothesis becomes. On the other hand, if some people were present who did not experience such a vision, it might not only have led to a confusion amongst the people present and antagonism towards those who claimed to have such experiences as a result of this experiential discrepancy, but it could also have been powerfully employed by adversaries who claimed that Jesus was not raised from the dead.<sup>255</sup> Even though it is likely that such a discrepancy would have been exploited, the historical records do not seem to give the indication that it was. This renders the hypothesis

---

<sup>255</sup> Since advocates of this position emphasize the importance of the appearances for the rise of Christianity, it should be noted that this could have posed a hindrance to the expansion of Christianity, especially at the beginning.

slightly less likely, but not sufficiently strong such that  $p(F_2|H_{OVH})$  should be further decreased. Therefore, the likelihood of observing fact 2 given the OVH remains slightly improbable (40%).

Fact 3:  $p(F_3 | H_{OVH})$

Grass finds it implausible that Paul's conversion resulted from a religious crisis, since there are no indications in the New Testament writings that he slowly opened up to Christianity or turned against his paternal religion.<sup>256</sup> On the contrary, he says, Christ revealed himself to the disciples as exalted Lord such that they became confident that He was alive.<sup>257</sup> Indeed, if Jesus objectively appeared to Paul, it is more likely that this would have turned around his life and caused him to proclaim the gospel message. In other words, God's direct involvement, as opposed to mere psychological phenomena, in the appearances increases the likelihood that this would have led to a transformation in Paul (or for the matter any other disciple). Thus, this hypothesis does not exhibit the same deficiency as the SVH, in which it is unlikely that Paul's experience resulted from wish-fulfillment or other hidden psychological motives. On the OVH, it is more probable that he would have converted and started to spread Christianity around the Mediterranean world because God could have reassured the disciples of the truth of the reality of Jesus' Resurrection.

In addition to God being able to bring about such a change, it is also reasonable to expect that God would choose to reveal himself to Paul, since he played a crucial role in the persecution of the church (and could therefore have caused further damage to the church). Moreover, because of his theological education as a Jewish rabbi, which was evidently beneficial to the church, as

---

<sup>256</sup> Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 242.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

demonstrated by the theological depth of the Pauline epistles, it is likely that God would choose to reveal himself to him. Consequently, it is probable (80%) that Paul's transformation is to be expected under the OVH.

Prior Probability:  $p(H_{OVH}|k)$

The prior probability of the OVH involves the probability of theism and the likelihood that God would raise Jesus (in non-bodily form) from the dead. As elucidated in *chapter 1*, the prior probability is not computed for hypotheses that involve a supernatural element. Estimating the probability of theism involves too many additional considerations pertaining to the field of natural (a)theology such as the various arguments for God's existence or objections like the problem of evil. For these reasons  $p_{min}(H_{OVH}|k)$ , the minimum value needed so that a supernatural hypothesis becomes more likely than the most probable alternative hypothesis, is computed in *chapter 4*.

## Resurrection Hypothesis

According to the RH, Jesus of Nazareth appeared to several individuals after his death by crucifixion. As in the case of the OVH, this constitutes “a supernatural event brought about by God,” writes Groothuis.<sup>258</sup> The RH further holds that Jesus appeared to various individuals in a physical body after his death. It is important, however, that the hypothesis is not understood in such a way that the continuity between Jesus’ physical pre- and post-Resurrection body is overemphasized because it would be out of sync with Jewish resurrection beliefs in general and Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 in particular. Bryan clarifies:

The first followers of Jesus seem to have experienced his "being raised" as involving the physical, but more precisely as involving a transformed physicality—a transformed physicality that they perceived in terms of Jewish resurrection belief and Jewish eschatological hope.<sup>259</sup>

One of the characteristics of the RH is that it involves normal visual perception. According to Davis, this normal vision “entails both (1) that the perceptual processes work as they regularly do, and (2) that the object seen is a material object.”<sup>260</sup> Advocates of this hypothesis maintain that Jesus was ordinarily seen after his death such that, in contrast to the OVH, had others been present during one of the appearances, they would have been able to see him as well. The RH maintains that the disciples’ confidence in Jesus was strengthened and they started to proclaim that Jesus is risen and alive, as a result of these encounters.

---

<sup>258</sup> Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 530.

<sup>259</sup> Bryan, *The Resurrection of the Messiah*, loc. 505-507.

<sup>260</sup> Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, *The Resurrection*, 127.

Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{RH})$

In the same way as the OVH (cf. “Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{OVH})$ ”), the RH posits a different order of causality and events in contrast to the SVH. The claim is thus that the appearances produced belief in Jesus’ Resurrection. Likewise, it is due to theological necessity that God raised Jesus from the dead to vindicate him. Hence, the initial estimate for this factor amounts to the estimate for the OVH because the same arguments apply. The initial value of  $p(F_1 | H_{RH})$  is, therefore, set to probable (80%). However, there are additional factors that need to be taken into consideration because they affect this probability.

Since Jesus died physically, it is more likely that God would raise him also bodily to make us clear that his sacrificial death was accepted by God. Swinburne sketches this argument as follows:

God accepts a life offered for us if he brings it to life again and allows it to benefit us. Our human life is an embodied life; God would accept the gift of the embodied life of Jesus by bringing him to life again in his body, that is, by bodily resurrecting him. God would accept the sacrifice by taking it away (not leaving the body in the tomb) to be (apparently) with himself, and by allowing us to plead that sacrifice in atonement for our sins. But if God is to do this, Jesus must make it clear to us that he is making available his life as a sacrifice.<sup>261</sup>

In contrast to Old Testament characters such as Enoch (Gen 5:24) or Elijah (2 Ki 2:1ff), who were taken up into heaven, the early Christians claimed that Jesus died a sacrificial death (“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3)). Because of this difference there is a didactical need for God to show to humanity that God raised Jesus from the dead and thereby accepted his sacrifice for our sins. It is, of course, possible that God could have taken Jesus up into heaven without resurrecting his body. But it is easier to infer that Jesus’

---

<sup>261</sup> Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 190.

sacrifice was accepted, if God raised Him bodily rather than non-bodily. Moreover, due to the widespread belief in a physical afterlife amongst Jews, it is more probable that God would have chosen to raise him bodily in order to avoid leaving them with a cognitive dissonance or, even worse, theologically confused.

As a result of the previous considerations, it is, therefore, very probable (95%) to observe Jesus' Resurrection in conjunction with his death because it vindicates his life and teaches humanity that Jesus' sacrificial death on our behalf was accepted by God.

Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{RH})$

It is sometimes said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence to overcome suspicion against such claims. Unfortunately, this principle is rarely applied to the origin of the disciples' faith. Wright's discussion of the story of Simon bar Giora, a leader whom many Jews regarded as the Messiah around AD 66-70 and who was flogged and crucified, helps to illustrate this point. Wright takes on the perspective of Simon's followers and argues that people would have rejected, if someone had claimed to "have had a sense of presence" of such a leader.<sup>262</sup> Instead, people may have responded something along these lines: "Why are you saying he has been raised from the dead? He clearly hasn't been; he's still dead and buried; and if he hasn't been raised then he certainly wasn't and isn't the Messiah."<sup>263</sup> In contrast, if Jesus was raised bodily and appeared to the disciples, it is likely that God could have overcome their doubt and suspicion. It is possible that some may have doubted at first. But surely, if anything, it is a real bodily Resurrection that would most likely lead people to claim that Jesus was actually raised.

---

<sup>262</sup> Evans and Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days*, loc. 972.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 976-977.

Consequently, if something extraordinary happened, as the RH claims, it is probable that the disciples would have claimed that Jesus was raised.

The argument in the previous paragraph, namely that it is more likely that the disciples would have claimed that Jesus was raised in comparison to the discussed visionary experiences of the SVH or the OVH, is also supported by two more considerations. First, recall Craig's argument that visions "would have only led the disciples to say Jesus had been translated or assumed into heaven, not raised from the dead."<sup>264</sup> This argument as elucidated in Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{SVH})$  favors the RH. Second, Wright adds that the disciples might have thought that Jesus would return some day in the future, but not that he actually has already done so.<sup>265</sup> On the RH it is probable that the disciples would not only have claimed that Jesus appeared to them, but that he was in fact raised from the dead and thus alive, not at some time in the future, but already in the presence.

In contrast to the OVH and the SVH, the anthropology of the early church favors the RH because it emphasized the physicality of the resurrection body. Wright summarizes that "if a first-century Jew said that someone had been 'raised from the dead,' the one thing they did not mean was that such a person had gone to a state of disembodied bliss, there either to rest forever or to wait until the great day of re-embodiment."<sup>266</sup> The fact that the Jewish expectation consisted of a "re-embodiment" points to a continuity in Judeo-Christian thought because no discrepancy

---

<sup>264</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 394.

<sup>265</sup> Evans and Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days*, loc. 979-980.

<sup>266</sup> N. T. Wright, "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem," *Sewanee Theological Review* 41, no. 2 (1998), <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/christian-origins-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-resurrection-of-jesus-as-a-historical-problem/>.

arises between their expectations of a physical (although future) resurrection body and their claim that Jesus was raised bodily.

Appearances to large groups are relatively more likely under the RH, especially in comparison to the SVH, for several reasons. Firstly, O’Connell suggests that since Jesus gathered groups during his earthly ministry, it is plausible that he would have desired to do so after his Resurrection.<sup>267</sup> Most critical scholars accept that Jesus dealt with larger groups, particularly because Jesus would have been expected to teach crowds, similarly to the rabbis of his time.<sup>268</sup> Secondly, it is sometimes objected why Jesus did not appear to more people, but this surely implies that a person making such an objection expects that Jesus would appear to more people. It is probable that God wants to show to many people that Jesus was raised, if this was indeed the case and thus more probable that he would also appear to groups. Thirdly, an appearance to multiple people at the same time would have provided a better evidential basis for people to believe that Jesus was actually raised. The fact that group appearances provided grounds for believing in Jesus’ Resurrection is evident from the creed in 1 Cor 13:5b-7, where Paul cites not less than three group appearances. On the RH it is not only likely that Jesus would appear to groups, but he would also certainly have the power to do so. Therefore, group appearances are extremely probable (99%) given the RH.

---

<sup>267</sup> O’Connell, *Jesus’ Resurrection and Apparitions*, loc. 6259.

<sup>268</sup> On the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:5, Ehrman notes that Paul was aware of a “close-knit group of disciples of Jesus,” known as “the twelve.” That Jesus’ taught small groups is, therefore, well-evidenced. As it was customary for more successful Jewish rabbis already at earlier times, Jesus would probably also have taught even larger groups. See, for instance, Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 120–121; Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl, trans. Markus Bockmuehl, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 11.

Fact 3:  $p(F_3 | H_{RH})$

As in case of the OVH, the RH can avail itself of the possibility that God actively intervened in the natural order of events when Jesus appeared to Paul. Such an intervention by God certainly provides the necessary ground for the transformational and long-lasting effects the encounter had on Paul. Based on the reasons described when considering the OVH, the initial value of  $p(F_3 | H_{RH})$  is set to probable.

The RH is the hypothesis that takes Paul's own testimony concerning his encounter with Jesus and the change it brought about in his life most seriously. This also includes Paul's proclamation that because Jesus was raised Christians will one day also be raised and obtain a new, transformed body. The way Paul perceived of believers' future bodies is directly relevant. As addressed in "Fact 2:  $p(F_2 | H_{OVH})$ " Paul not only believed in the physicality of the resurrection bodies, but he also equated them with the glorified resurrection body of Jesus (Phil 3:20-22).

To investigate the veracity of this encounter, two issues need to be addressed: (1) whether Paul could trust his own experience and (2) whether his testimony as passed on in the Pauline epistles can be trusted. If these two conditions are met, then it is very likely that it was the kind of encounter which turned Paul's life upside down, in the way he claims it to have. In examining the question concerning the trustworthiness of Paul's testimony, Swinburne's principle of credulity is directly relevant. He summarizes it as follows:

It is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations), if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that  $x$  is present (and has some characteristic), then probably  $x$  is present (and has that characteristic); what one seems to perceive is probably so.<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 303.

When the principle is applied to Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, and before any indications to the contrary are considered, Paul is epistemically justified to believe that since it seemed to him that Jesus appeared to him, this probably also was the case. But special considerations that would result in a false perception need to be addressed.

The first one relates to whether the conditions (at the time of the experience) would have rendered the perceptions unreliable or whether the subject was found unreliable in the past.<sup>270</sup> Of the potential conditions that could have rendered Paul's perception unreliable, medical conditions that result in hallucinatory experiences seem to be the most probable ones. But as discussed in the "Fact 3:  $p(F_3 | H_{SVH})$ ," it is first of all very difficult to identify the exact medical condition and, secondly, unlikely that Paul would have continued to maintain the belief in the veracity of the experience in the long-run. The fact that Paul did claim to have had visionary experiences (cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4) may render it somewhat plausible that his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus was similar. But to argue that these perceptions were unreliable, it needs to be presupposed that those other encounters were merely subjective. Moreover, even if those experiences were subjective, this need not be applied to his encounter with the risen Christ as Paul sharply distinguishes those experiences. The second potential claim, namely that Paul was found unreliable concerning such experiences in the past, fails in the absence of evidence in support of this contention.

There are two more special considerations to be made. First, whether it can be shown that it is very unlikely that Paul had such an experience and second, whether Jesus' presence would have convinced Paul of the reality of the appearance.<sup>271</sup> It is very improbable that Paul could have

---

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

had such an experience, if the prior probability of the RH is set very low. But this is accounted for in the prior probability of the hypothesis. Given theistic belief, however, the principle of credulity continues to hold for the RH. With respect to the latter issue (namely whether Jesus' presence would have allowed Paul to believe that Jesus was also actually present), it seems fairly clear that an actual appearance of Jesus could have and did indeed overcome Paul's intuitions to the contrary and potential doubts.

As introduced above, it could be objected that Paul's testimony cannot be trusted. If this is the case, then Swinburne's principle of testimony, which entails that "other things being equal, we believe that what others tell us that they perceived probably happened,"<sup>272</sup> is not met. Now there may be grounds for scepticism concerning religious claims. But in Paul's case it is unlikely that he was a habitual liar, lied or exaggerated in order to gain attention, or that he would have misremembered the crux of this crucial event. What can be done to test such a claim, is to "see whether the subject's lifestyle has undergone change,"<sup>273</sup> as Swinburne suggests. But this is part of fact 3, which also entails that Paul suffered for proclaiming the Christian message.

Consequently, these special considerations yield insufficient grounds for doubting that the principle of credulity and the principle of testimony are met. It therefore appears that the religious experience Paul claimed to have made and the inferences he made based on this experience are very probable (95%).

---

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 323.

Prior Probability:  $p(H_{RH}|k)$

For the same reasons as for the OVH, the prior probability of the RH (another hypothesis involving the supernatural) is also not estimated. However, because it is sometimes argued that philosophical problems are involved with the concept of a bodily resurrection, its effects on the prior probability needs to be addressed. O’Connell recognizes that “if the concept of physical resurrection is incoherent, then clearly Jesus could not have risen from the dead.”<sup>274</sup> If this is correct, the prior probability of the RH is very low (if not even zero) and thus likely lower than for the OVH. This is not to say that it remains difficult to estimate more precisely to what degree this argument might shift the prior probability of the hypothesis up- or downwards. In any case, if the idea of a physical resurrection lacks coherence, this would negatively affect the likelihood of the RH and would, therefore, necessarily lead to preference of another hypothesis.

Murray recognizes that the numerical identity of a physical resurrection body poses an important issue when he raises the question about “how a body that has been destroyed could possibly be numerically identical with a body that exists long after the destruction.”<sup>275</sup> Allison ponders this problem using the example of Polycarp’s martyred body. After alluding to the possibility that God could make three Polycarps out of the atoms that constituted his body at three different stages in his life (say thirty, fifty and seventy), he then asks which of them is the real one.<sup>276</sup> At least two remarks need to be made in response. Firstly, the objection probably does not apply to Jesus, since in contrast to Polycarp’s case, his body did not (sufficiently) decay due

---

<sup>274</sup> O’Connell, *Jesus’ Resurrection and Apparitions*, 206.

<sup>275</sup> Michael J. Murray, “The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 270–271.

<sup>276</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 223.

to the short amount of time between his death and purported resurrection. Although secondly, even if the objection applies, Craig responds that this objection at most implies duplicity rather than numerical identity of these bodies, but that it does not “preclude personal identity of the deceased and resurrected individual if one believes . . . in the reality of a soul distinct from the body.”<sup>277</sup> More could be said about this issue, but it appears that the concept of a bodily resurrection does not constitute a defeater in any case for the hypothesis.

---

<sup>277</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 358.

## Chapter 4 – Discussion of Results

### Overview

In this section the results of the previous chapter are listed, compared and evaluated. The estimated probabilities for each fact given its hypothesis and the prior probability for the SVH are displayed in *table 1*.

	SVH	OVH	RH
$P(F_1 H)$	0.40	0.8	0.95
$P(F_2 H)$	0.50	0.40	0.99
$P(F_3 H)$	0.05	0.8	0.95
$P(H k)$	0.20	$p_{min}(h_{OVH} k)$	$p_{min}(h_{RH} k)$

*Table 1. Estimated Probabilities*

The estimated values in *table 1* indicate that in terms of conditional probabilities, the RH renders all three facts more likely than the other hypotheses. The first fact relates to how probable each hypothesis is, given Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Here the SVH is rendered slightly improbable, particularly because of its inability to show how subjective visions could have resulted from the bereavement process of the disciples after Jesus’ death or by similar means. The other two hypotheses provide better grounds to account for the causal order of the events and the negative impact Jesus’ death had on their faith; it is further strengthened because on these hypotheses God would have had sufficient reasons for vindicating Jesus.

Although at first glance each of the hypotheses appears to explain the appearances of Jesus (i.e. fact 2) similarly well, the final estimates do differ. The estimates are lower for the SVH and the OVH because the other hypotheses suffer from the problem that a risen Messiah was not according to Jewish expectation and because it is relatively likely that the early disciples would have detected or not continued to maintain the mismatch between the content of their experiences and their proclamation. The estimate for the RH is higher because it better explains the multiplicity and the qualitative differences of the appearances.

With respect to the transformation of Paul, a man who was turned from a persecutor of the Christian church to an evangelist and preacher of the gospel message as a result of his encounter with Jesus, the OVH and the RH once again better explain the data than does the SVH. Paul does not seem to exhibit the psychological or medical conditions that could result in the kind of subjective visionary experiences that are posited. Moreover, he sharply distinguishes between visionary experiences and his Damascus road experience. And it is unlikely that a mere subjective experience would have had such a long-lasting impact. On the other hand, due to the supernatural characteristics of the OVH and the RH, these two hypotheses can posit God as the cause of this transformation and are therefore more likely. However, the RH is slightly more probable than the OVH because if the principles of credulity and testimony are met, Paul's inference that the believers' resurrection body is physical, as Jesus' glorious body is, can be trusted because this was what he actually saw in his encounter with Jesus.

## Independence Assumption

As previously remarked in “Refined Methodology,” one important underlying assumption of the approach, in which conditional probabilities of the various facts given a particular hypothesis are multiplied with one another, is the independence between the various facts. If these probabilities are not independent of one another, then the product of these conditional probabilities and consequently also the computed posterior probability may be over- or underestimated.

First, consider the relationship between the appearances of Jesus to the disciples and the transformation of Paul. It was primarily the appearances of Jesus to the disciples, including Peter and the appearance to more than 500 men, that were considered. The appearance to Paul was not included in the second fact, since it is not part of the original creed in 1 Corinthians 15. It may be objected that the primary testimony for these appearances is derived from Paul’s letter and thus there is some dependency between these two facts. But, as explained in “Fact 2: After his death, Jesus appeared to various disciples, James and Saul of Tarsus,” even though the testimony was written down by Paul, he himself received it from others, most likely Peter and James in Jerusalem three years after his own transformative experience on the road to Damascus. Because of this chronological sequence and the independence between Paul’s experience and the way the creed was formed, these two factors are very likely independent of each other.

Second, we need to examine whether there is a potential dependency between Jesus’ death and Paul’s transformation. The fact that Saul persecuted Christians is indeed to some extent positively related to Jesus’ death. In Saul’s view, at that time, Jesus would probably have been a false Messiah, one who failed to accomplish his mission. But this relationship is, of course, insufficient to bring about a transformation. Jesus’ death must somehow be related to

Paul's transformational experience in order for there to be a dependency. This potential dependence must be considered for each hypothesis.

With respect to the SVH, the discussion in "Fact 3:  $p(F_3 | H_{SVH})$ " did not yield any purely psychological or medical condition as a result of which Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and which is directly related to Jesus' death. The most likely candidates that led to this encounter, wishful thinking or bereavement, are far less likely to apply to Paul than in case of the other disciples, who had followed Jesus already prior to his death.

In case of the OVH and the RH, it is difficult to think of any way in which these two facts would be related to each other. Moreover, since between one and three years had passed after Jesus' death at the time when Paul encountered Jesus (see "Fact 2: After his death, Jesus appeared to various disciples, James and Saul of Tarsus"), it is unlikely that there is a direct relationship between the two facts under all three hypotheses anyway.

Third, Jesus' death and the appearances to multiple individuals, including the disciples, need to be discussed. These two facts are the most likely ones that may be related to each other. The product of the conditional probabilities may be underestimated especially given the SVH. If the appearances to the disciples are bereavement hallucinations (BHs), Jesus' death plays a major role in explaining those appearances. It is noted above the likelihood of widows experiencing BHs is approximately 10%-17%, but that only sporadic case reports are known in which a son, relative or friend experiences a BH.<sup>278</sup> Therefore, unless it can be shown that BHs are more likely to occur in cases where the mourner is not a widow, it is unlikely that there is a strong relationship between fact one and two in case of the SVH.

---

<sup>278</sup> See Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{SVH})$ .

In case of the two hypotheses OVH and RH these two facts may be positively related to each other and the product of these probabilities may, therefore, be underestimated. As argued in “Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{OVH})$ ” and which also applies to the RH (cf. “Fact 1:  $p(F_1 | H_{RH})$ ”), Jesus’ death by crucifixion made him appear as a person cursed by God. On the OVH and the RH, God approved of Jesus’ life by raising Jesus from the dead. Hence, there is a direct relationship between these two facts and the independence assumption leads to an underestimation of the posterior probabilities for these hypotheses of a similar magnitude. But since this would only strengthen the case for a supernatural hypothesis, the probabilities need not be adjusted upwards.

## Implications

It is now time to consider the prior probabilities of the hypotheses. As pointed out above, one way to overcome the influences of worldview (philosophical and theological considerations) lies in computing the minimum prior probability of a supernatural hypothesis such that this hypothesis becomes more probable than the best alternative natural hypothesis. As a result of the historical investigation in *chapter 2*, in which three historical facts surrounding Jesus' death and post-mortem appearances are identified, several natural hypotheses (including the swoon, legend and fraud hypothesis) dropped out of the pool of candidates because they do not explain these facts. Thus, only the subjective vision hypothesis remained due to its potential ability to explain the resurrection appearances. The prior probability for the SVH is 0.2 because visionary experiences were not too uncommon (at that time or in general) but it is nevertheless low because first-century Jews did not normally expect a resurrection prior to the end times.

Next, the minimum prior probability for the OVH is computed. Recall that this is the minimum value that needs to be assigned to the prior probability of the OVH such that the OVH is more probable than the SVH, the natural hypothesis that best explains the three facts identified in *chapter 2*. The value for  $P_{min}(h_{OVH}|k)$  is computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} P_{min}(h_{OVH}|k) &= \frac{P(f_1 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(f_2 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(f_3 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(h_{SVH}|k)}{P(f_1 | h_{OVH}, k) \cdot P(f_2 | h_{OVH}, k) \cdot P(f_3 | h_{OVH}, k)} \\ &= \frac{0.4 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.05 \cdot 0.2}{0.8 \cdot 0.4 \cdot 0.8} = 0.0078 = 0.78\% \end{aligned}$$

Surprisingly, this value does not need to be very large because the OVH explains the data much better than does the SVH, especially when it comes to explaining the transformation in Paul's life. More shall be said about how, and under which circumstances this value is obtained.

Before doing so, however, the minimum prior probability of the RH needs to be computed in order to provide a direct comparison between the OVH and the RH:

$$P_{min}(h_{RH}|k) = \frac{P(f_1 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(f_2 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(f_3 | h_{SVH}, k) \cdot P(h_{SVH}|k)}{P(f_1 | h_R, k) \cdot P(f_2 | h_R, k) \cdot P(f_3 | h_R, k)}$$

$$= \frac{0.4 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.05 \cdot 0.2}{0.95 \cdot 0.99 \cdot 0.95} = 0.0022 = 0.22\%$$

The value of 0.0022 is even lower than for the OVH (0.0078). This is due to the fact that the three historical facts are more likely to be expected under the RH than under the OVH. As addressed earlier, the prior probability of the RH does not necessarily need to be lower than for the OVH because the physicality of the resurrection body is not an incoherent concept. Therefore, unless other deficiencies pertaining to the prior probability of the RH can be shown, the RH should be preferred over the OVH, if these three historical facts are considered.

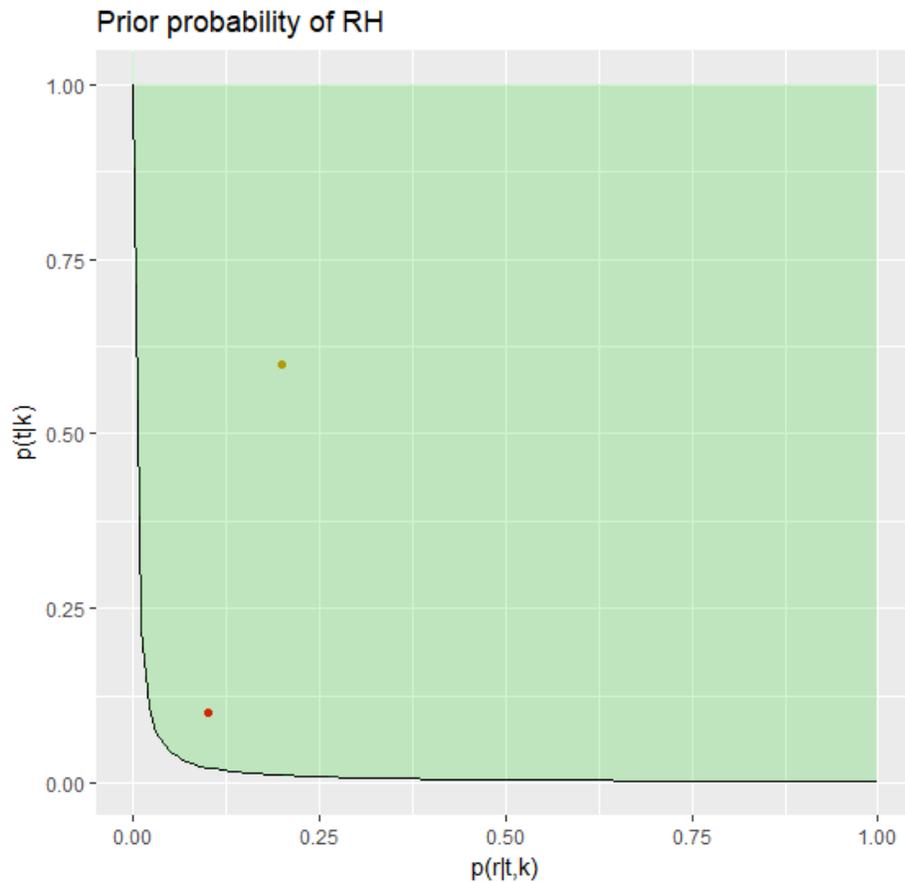
Finally, several considerations need to be made as to under which conditions the prior probability of the RH reaches a minimum value of 0.0022, such that it should be preferred over the SVH. Swinburne suggests that the prior probability of God becoming incarnate is a product of the probability of God becoming incarnate  $p(c|t, k)$  and of the likelihood of God's existence  $p(t|k)$ .<sup>279</sup> The same reasoning applied to the Resurrection yields that the prior probability of the Resurrection is the product of how likely it is that God exists  $p(t|k)$  and that He would raise Jesus from the dead  $p(r|t, k)$ . The mathematical relationship between these two factors can be expressed mathematically as follows:

$$p(t|k) = 0.0022 \cdot \frac{1}{p(r|t, k)}$$

---

<sup>279</sup> Swinburne, *Resurrection of God Incarnate*, 213.

Alternatively, it can be displayed graphically, as in *figure 1*. The graph shows under which circumstances the prior probability of the RH reaches 0.0022. Each historian will, of course, assign different values to these two probabilities, depending on that person's worldview and their stance, for instance towards arguments for or against God's existence. In any case, if someone assigns any of these values such that its coordinates lie in the green area above the black line, then the RH should be preferred. What is perhaps most striking is that the issues of worldview should, in fact, not influence the decision as to which hypothesis is to be preferred, to the extent to which it has sometimes been suggested in the past. This is due to the superiority of the RH in comparison to the most likely natural alternative hypothesis, the SVH.



*Figure 1. Factors affecting the prior probability of RH*

As *figure 1* shows, if someone believes that it is at least slightly probable that God exists ( $> 60\%$ ) and it is more than improbable ( $> 20\%$ ) that God would raise Jesus from the dead, then the prior probability of the Resurrection is already sufficiently large ( $> 12\%$ ) such that the person should accept the RH given the previous historical considerations discussed above (see brown circle in *figure 1*). In fact, even if a relatively low probability of 0.1 is assumed for both God's existence and that He would raise Jesus from the dead, that person is still epistemically justified in regarding the RH as more probable than the SVH (see red circle in *figure 1*).

## Further Reflections

In this section, it shall be briefly sketched how these results fit in with religious epistemology and natural theology. Plantinga convincingly argues that theistic (and Christian) belief can and probably does have warrant, if theism (or Christianity) is true.<sup>280</sup> In this case, all humans could rightly trust their innate sense of the divine or what Calvin referred to as the *sensus divinitatis*, even apart from considering sophisticated arguments for and against God's existence. At the same time, however, Plantinga also maintains that it could not be warranted, if the belief is false.<sup>281</sup> His ultimate conclusion based on these observations is, then, that the *de jure* question (viz. whether theistic belief is warranted) is related to the *de facto* question (viz. whether theism is actually true).<sup>282</sup>

There are numerous issues related to the *de facto* question. They include atheological objections, primarily the evidential argument from evil,<sup>283</sup> but also, for instance, arguments that the concept of God is problematic in one way or another.<sup>284</sup> These objections need to be weighed against the arguments for God's existence, particularly the traditional ones such as the

---

<sup>280</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 39.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>283</sup> See the dialog between Rowe and Wykstra: William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn M. Adams and Robert M. Adams, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Stephen J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn M. Adams and Robert M. Adams, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); however, it should be noted that evil also poses a problem on other worldviews, including naturalism. See Ronnie P. Campbell, Jr., *Worldviews & the Problem of Evil: A Comparative Approach* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

<sup>284</sup> For an introduction, see Bede Rundle, "Problems with the Concept of God," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad V. Meister and Paul Copan, 2nd ed., Routledge Philosophy Companions (New York: Routledge, 2013).

ontological,<sup>285</sup> teleological,<sup>286</sup> cosmological,<sup>287</sup> or moral argument.<sup>288</sup> Ideally, a cumulative case is made, one in which both arguments for and against God's existence are taken into account, in similar fashion to the case made by Swinburne.<sup>289</sup>

In his response to the debate between Crossan and Wright in March, 2005, Geivett points in the right direction as to how such arguments need to be taken into account when considering the Resurrection. He observes that both of them “ground their verdicts about the Resurrection on historical evidence that prescind from any particular metaphysical perspective, conceptual framework, or worldview.”<sup>290</sup> He goes on to say that the range of explanations that someone considers depends on one's worldview commitments.<sup>291</sup>

Geivett's observations are spot on. Future studies on Jesus' miraculous feats or the Resurrection in particular need to elucidate what constitutes their worldview and what stance they take regarding the value of natural theology. Moreover, if the assessment of this thesis is correct, advocates of natural hypotheses need to find very strong arguments against God's

---

<sup>285</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “The Ontological Argument,” in *God, Freedom, and Evil*, reprinted. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>286</sup> Robin Collins, “The Argument from Physical Constants: The Fine-Tuning for Discoverability,” in *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>287</sup> William L. Craig and James D. Sinclair, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>288</sup> The argument is laid out in an abductive form by David Baggett, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>289</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*.

<sup>290</sup> Douglas R. Geivett, “The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 93–94.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–97.

existence so as to be rationally justified in adopting a naturalistic worldview.<sup>292</sup> This, however, would seem to go against the current atmosphere in the philosophy departments, for even naturalist philosophers such as Quentin Smith claim, “God’s not ‘dead’ in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.”<sup>293</sup>

Consequently, as long as no stronger case is made against theism, it would be too simplistic and it would not suffice if, based on the reasoning that miracles are the least probable events,<sup>294</sup> historians merely assert:

. . . there are lots of other explanations for what happened to Jesus that are more probable than the explanation that he was raised from the dead. None of these explanations is very probable, but they are more probable, just looking at the matter historically, than the explanation of the resurrection.<sup>295</sup>

Moreover, it is crucial that historians demonstrate working knowledge of how supernatural explanations can be compared to natural ones and how philosophical considerations affect the likelihood of historical explanations in future studies on the Resurrection. I submit that Bayes’ theorem is a good starting point to lay out and increase transparency about these sorts of presuppositions and assessments.

---

<sup>292</sup> This thesis is of course limited by the number of historical facts that are considered. But the methodology outlined above allows for future studies to take advantage of considering additional potential facts such as the empty tomb, if so perceived or the likelihood of how the Christian message disseminated throughout the Roman empire. If additional facts are adduced to the case, this might have an impact of how strong arguments against God’s existence need to be such that a naturalistic hypothesis should be preferred.

<sup>293</sup> Quentin Smith, “The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism,” *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 197.

<sup>294</sup> Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 175.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 176–177.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to identify how well the three major historical explanations explain a set of historical facts, all of which are well supported and accepted by a majority of scholars with various backgrounds. The explanations include one natural hypothesis, the subjective vision hypothesis, and two supernatural hypotheses, namely the objective vision and the RH. Moreover, the list of historical facts in need of an explanation include: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion, (2) various groups and individuals claimed that he appeared to them alive as the risen Christ, and (3) the former persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, experienced a radical transformation after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus.

A Bayesian approach is preferred over an inference to the best explanation for the purposes of the present study because it allows us to take into account different aspects of worldview, particularly supernatural elements such as the belief in theism and the likelihood that such a God would raise Jesus from the dead. This methodology allows for considering under which circumstances a theistic explanation is more likely than the most probable natural explanations.

The result of the study is that, unless it is extremely improbable that God exists and that He would raise Jesus from the dead,<sup>296</sup> the explanation that Jesus was raised bodily after his death is the best explanation for the three historical facts herein considered.

---

<sup>296</sup> Note that the more precisely computed value is  $\leq 0.0022$ . But, since the canon of probabilities (see *table 2*) only allows for a verbal classification of virtually impossible (0.000001) and extremely improbable (0.01), the value is rounded up.

## Appendix

<i>Term</i>	<i>Probability (in percent)</i>
Virtually impossible	0.0001
Extremely improbable	1.0000
Very improbable	5.0000
Improbable	20.0000
Slightly improbable	40.0000
Even odds	50.0000
Slightly probable	60.0000
Probable	80.0000
Very probable	95.0000
Extremely probable	99.0000
Virtually certain	99.9999

*Table 2. Canon of Probabilities*<sup>297</sup>

---

<sup>297</sup> Carrier, *Proving History*, 286.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Sean A. "Lucian and the New Testament: An Evaluation of His Life, Work, and Relationship to New Testament Studies." *The Expository Times* 121, no. 12 (September 1, 2010): 594–600.
- Allison, Dale C. *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters*. New York: T&T Clark, 2005.
- Anderson, James William. "The Methodology of Psychological Biography." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 3 (1981): 455–475.
- Baggett, David. *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Baggett, David, and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Bergeron, Joseph W., and Gary R. Habermas. "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 157–172.
- Bird, Alexander. *Inference to the Best Explanation, Bayesianism, and Knowledge*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2018. Accessed May 27, 2019. <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198746904.001.0001/oso-9780198746904-chapter-7>.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs*. Edited by Robert B. Stewart. B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Breitenbach, Zachary. "A New Argument That Collective Hallucinations Do Not Adequately Account for the Group Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 2 (June 2019): 341–351.
- Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Edited by Marion L. Soards. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Brown, Schuyler. *The Origins of Christianity: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*. Rev. ed. The Oxford Bible series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

- Bruce, F. F. *1 and 2 Thessalonians, Volume 45*. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger, David Allen Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, James W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie. Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2015.
- Bryan, Christopher. *The Resurrection of the Messiah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Campbell, Jr., Ronnie P. *Worldviews & the Problem of Evil: A Comparative Approach*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.
- Carrier, Richard. *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014.
- . *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012.
- Casey, Maurice. *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*. London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2010. Accessed August 13, 2019. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=617181>.
- Castelnovo, Anna, Simone Cavallotti, Orsola Gambini, and Armando D'Agostino. "Post-Bereavement Hallucinatory Experiences: A Critical Overview of Population and Clinical Studies." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 186 (November 1, 2015): 266–274.
- Cavin, Robert G., and Carlos A. Colombetti. "Swinburne on the Resurrection: Negative versus Christian Ramified Natural Theology." *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 2 (2013): 253–263.
- Chilton, Bruce, and Jacob Neusner. "Paul and Gamaliel." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8, no. 1 (2005).
- Collins, Robin. "The Argument from Physical Constants: The Fine-Tuning for Discoverability." In *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God: The Plantinga Project*, edited by Trent Dougherty and Jerry L. Walls. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Conzelmann, Hans. "1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians." Translated by James W. Leitch (n.d.). Accessed July 8, 2019. <https://www.jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctvb6v88r>.
- . "On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5." *Interpretation* 20, no. 1 (January 1966): 15–25.
- Cook, John G. "Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine." *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 104, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–32.
- Cowan, Steven B., ed. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. Accessed June 17, 2019. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5397364>.

- Craig, William L. *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity v. 16. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989.
- . *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.
- Craig, William L., and James D. Sinclair. “The Kalam Cosmological Argument.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Davis, Stephen T. “Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational? A Response to Michael Martin.” *Philo* 2, no. 1 (1999): 51–61.
- . “The Rationality of Christian Belief in Resurrection: A Reply to Michael Martin.” *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 2 (2003): 501–517.
- . “The Rationality of Resurrection for Christians: A Rejoinder.” *Philo* 3, no. 1 (2000): 41–51.
- Davis, Stephen T, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins. *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Accessed August 13, 2019. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10283785>.
- Day, Mark, and Gregory Radick. “Historiographic Evidence and Confirmation.” In *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*. Blackwell Companions to Philosophy. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Eckstein, Hans-Joachim. “Die Wirklichkeit Der Auferstehung Jesu: Lukas 24,34 Als Beispiel Früher Formelhafter Zeugnisse.” In *Die Wirklichkeit Der Auferstehung*, edited by Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker, 1–25. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002.
- Edwards, William D., Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer. “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ.” *Journal of American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (1986): 1455–1463.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. 1st ed. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
- . *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don’t Know About Them)*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.
- . *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

- Evans, Craig A., and N. T. Wright. *Jesus, the Final Days: What Really Happened*. Edited by Troy A. Miller. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Church History: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*. Second edition. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Fischer, David Hackett. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Fuller, Reginald H. *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- Furay, Conal, and Michael J. Salevouris. *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. 3rd ed. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2010.
- Gauch, Hugh G., Jr. "Natural Theology's Case for Jesus's Resurrection: Methodological and Statistical Considerations." *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 2 (2011): 339–355.
- Geivett, Douglas R. "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief." In *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, edited by Robert B. Stewart. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Geivett, R. Douglas, and Gary R. Habermas, eds. *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Grass, Hans. *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*. 3rd ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964.
- Greeley, A. M. "Hallucinations among the Widowed." *Sociology and Social Research* 71 (1987): 258–265.
- Groothuis, Douglas R. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Gullotta, Daniel N. "On Richard Carrier's Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier's On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt." *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 15, no. 2–3 (December 11, 2017): 310–346.
- Gundry, Robert H. *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- . "The Essential Physicality of Jesus' Resurrection According to the New Testament." In *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, 204–219. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Haas, Nicu. "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at Ha-Mivtar." *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, no. 1/2 (1970): 38–59.

- Habermas, Gary R. "Mapping the Recent Trend Toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions." In *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*. Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- . "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus: The Role of Methodology as a Crucial Component in Establishing Historicity." *Southeastern Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2012): 15–26.
- . *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- Habermas, Gary R., and Mike Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004.
- Harris, William V. *Ancient Literacy*. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Hemer, Colin J. *Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Edited by Conrad H. Gempf. Wiona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016.
- Hempelmann, Heinzpeter. *Wirklich auferstanden! Historische und philosophische Argumente für den Osterglauben*. 4th ed. Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2011.
- Herman, Gabriel. "Greek Epiphanies and the Sensed Presence." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 60, no. 2 (2011): 127–157.
- Hezser, Catherine. *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.
- Howell, Martha C., and Walter Prevenier. *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Schnelles Denken, Langsames Denken*. Translated by Thorsten Schmidt. 4th ed. München: Siedler Verlag, 2011.
- Kalish, Richard A., and David K. Reynolds. "Phenomenological Reality and Post-Death Contact." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12, no. 2 (1973): 209–221.
- Kamp, Karina Stengaard, Maja O'Connor, Helle Spindler, and Andrew Moskowitz. "Bereavement Hallucinations after the Loss of a Spouse: Associations with Psychopathological Measures, Personality and Coping Style." *Death Studies* 43, no. 4 (April 21, 2019): 260–269.
- Kloppenborg, John. "An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15: 3b-5 In Light of Some Recent Literature." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1978): 351–367.
- Landsborough, David. "St Paul and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy." *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 50, no. 6 (June 1, 1987): 659–664.
- Licona, Michael R. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

- Lipton, Peter. *Inference to the Best Explanation*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2004.
- Loftus, John W. *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*. Rev. and exp. Ed. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012.
- Louw, J. P., and E. A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.
- Lüdemann, Gerd. *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004.
- . “The Resurrection of Jesus: Fifteen Years Later.” In *Resurrection of the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, edited by Geert Van Oyen and Tom Sheperd, 535–557. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2012.
- MacGregor, Kirk R. “1 Corinthians 15:3b-6a,7 and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 225–234.
- Manford, Mark, and Frederick Andermann. “Complex Visual Hallucinations: Clinical and Neurobiological Insights.” *Brain* 121, no. 10 (October 1, 1998): 1819–1840.
- Martin, Michael. “Christianity and the Rationality of the Resurrection.” *Philo* 3, no. 1 (2000): 52–62.
- . “Reply to Davis.” *Philo* 2, no. 1 (1999): 62–76.
- . *The Case Against Christianity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- . “The Resurrection as Initially Improbable.” In *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave*, edited by Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005.
- . “Why the Resurrection Is Initially Improbable.” *Philo* 1, no. 1 (1998): 63–73.
- McCullagh, C. Behan. *Justifying Historical Descriptions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- . *The Logic of History: Putting Postmodernism in Perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.
- McGrew, Lydia. *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts*. Chillicothe: DeWard, 2017.
- . “Minimal Facts vs. Maximal Data.” *What’s Wrong with the World*, February 21, 2015. Accessed June 18, 2019. [http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2015/02/minimal\\_facts\\_are\\_not\\_enough.html](http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2015/02/minimal_facts_are_not_enough.html).

- McGrew, Timothy, and Lydia McGrew. "The Argument from Miracles: A Cumulative Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth." In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 593–662. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009. Accessed January 28, 2019. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444308334.ch11>.
- Meier, John P. "Jesus in Josephus: A Modest Proposal." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1990): 76–103.
- Moffitt, David M. "Affirming the 'Creed': The Extent of Paul's Citation of an Early Christian Formula in 1 Cor 15,3b-7\*." *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 99, no. 1 (2008): 49–73.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Galatians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Baker Publishing Group, 2013. Accessed August 6, 2019. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10805953>.
- Morris, Leon. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament commentaries v. 7. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008.
- Murray, Michael J. "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting." In *Reason for the Hope Within*, edited by Michael J. Murray. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Oberdorfer, Bernd. "'Was sucht ihr den Lebendigen bei den Toten?': Überlegungen zur Realität der Auferstehung in Auseinandersetzung mit Gerd Lüdemann." In *Die Wirklichkeit Der Auferstehung*, edited by Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker, 165–182. Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2002.
- O'Collins, Gerald. "Peter as Witness to Easter." *Theological Studies* 73, no. 2 (2012): 263–285.
- O'Connell, Jake. "Jesus' Resurrection and Collective Hallucinations." *Tyndale Bulletin* 60, no. 1 (2009).
- O'Connell, Jake H. *Jesus' Resurrection and Apparitions: A Bayesian Analysis*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016.
- Olson, K. A. "Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (April 1999): 305–322.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Grundzüge der Christologie*. 4th ed. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1972.
- Parkes, Colin Murray, and Robert Stuart Weiss. *Recovery from Bereavement*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Pesch, Rudolf. "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 30, no. 1–2 (1983): 73–98.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Knowledge and Christian Belief*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015.

- . “The Ontological Argument.” In *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Reprinted. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- . *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Powell, Mark A. “Acts of the Apostles.” In *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*, edited by Mark A. Powell. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011.
- Pratscher, Wilhelm, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010.
- Price, Robert M. *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems*. Cranford, NY: American Atheist Press, 2011.
- Ramelli, Ilaria. “The Emmaus Disciples and the Kerygma of the Resurrection (Lk 24,34): A Greek Variant and the Old Syriac, Coptic, and Latin Traditions.” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 105, no. 1 (2014): 1–19.
- Reimarus, Hermann S. *Fragments from Reimarus*. Vol. 1. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879.
- Rowe, William L. “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism.” In *The Problem of Evil*, edited by Marilyn M. Adams and Robert M. Adams. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Rundle, Bede. “Problems with the Concept of God.” In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Chad V. Meister and Paul Copan. 2nd ed. Routledge Philosophy Companions. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Galatians*. Edited by Clinton E Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. Accessed August 6, 2019. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5397771>.
- Schweizer, Eduard. “Resurrection: Fact or Illusion?” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 1 (1979): 137–159.
- Smith, Quentin. “The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism.” *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 195–215.
- Strack, Hermann L., and Günter Stemberger. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Edited by Markus Bockmuehl. Translated by Markus Bockmuehl. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Strauss, David. *A New Life of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- . *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

- Tenney, M. C. "First Epistle to the Thessalonians." In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Revised. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979.
- Teunisse, Robert J., Frans G. Zitman, Johan R. Cruysberg, Willibrord H. Hoefnagels, and André L. Verbeek. "Visual Hallucinations in Psychologically Normal People: Charles Bonnet's Syndrome." *The Lancet* 347, no. 9004 (March 23, 1996): 794–797.
- Theißen, Gerd, and Annette Merz. *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch*. 4th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011.
- Thiede, Carsten Peter, and Gerd Lüdemann, eds. *Die Auferstehung Jesu - Fiktion oder Wirklichkeit? Ein Streitgespräch*. ABC-Team. Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 2001.
- Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*. 6th ed. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
- Trimble, Michael, and Anthony Freeman. "An Investigation of Religiosity and the Gastaut–Geschwind Syndrome in Patients with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy." *Epilepsy & Behavior* 9, no. 3 (November 1, 2006): 407–414.
- Trueman, Carl R. *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Tucker, Aviezer. *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . "The Reverend Bayes vs. Jesus Christ." *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 55, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 129–140.
- Tuckett, Christopher. "Sources and Methods." In *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, edited by Markus Bockmuehl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Van Voorst, Robert E. *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*. Studying the Historical Jesus. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.
- Vermès, Géza. *Jesus: Nativity, Passion, Resurrection*. Penguin Books, 2010. Accessed September 24, 2019. <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=4A21E3C9-4620-48AE-BB31-E2E975886C46>.
- . *The Resurrection: History and Myth*. 1st ed. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Wells, George Albert. *Did Jesus Exist?* Rev. ed. London: Pemberton, 1986.
- Williams, Peter J. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018.
- Wright, N. T. "Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem." *Sewanee Theological Review* 41, no. 2 (1998).

<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/christian-origins-and-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-resurrection-of-jesus-as-a-historical-problem/>.

———. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Vol. 3. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Wright, N. T., and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. London: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

Wykstra, Stephen J. “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of ‘Appearance.’” In *The Problem of Evil*, edited by Marilyn M. Adams and Robert M. Adams. Oxford Readings in Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Yadin, Y. “Epigraphy and Crucifixion.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 23, no. 1 (n.d.): 18–22.

Zias, Joseph, and Eliezer Sekeles. “The Crucified Man from Giv’at Ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 35, no. 1 (1985): 22–27.