

JESUS - ACCORDING TO ORTHODOX HISTORIC BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY.

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ASSUMPTIONS:

I have been asked to write an article on “Who is Jesus,” which I feel is putting the cart before the horse. The logically prior topics should have been the existence of God, the possibility of miracles & the historicity of the New Testament. There is ample evidence for each of these but since these are not the topics of discussion, I will assume:

1. God exists & the corollary that therefore
2. Miracles are possible.
3. The historicity of the New Testament (which is based on eyewitness testimony & hard evidence).
4. The historicity of Jesus (i.e. He was not a legend/mythological figure).

I may however address some of these topics in a summary manner where necessary.

THE CLAIMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The accounts of the New Testament paint an unmistakable picture of Jesus. The three most controversial non-negotiable irrevocable foundational beliefs of Christianity are:

1. Jesus was supernaturally conceived without a biological father.
2. He claimed to be God.
3. He arose from the dead.

These events occurred in real history – in the space-time continuum and are not myths or superstitions.

PRESUPPOSITIONS:

A presupposition is a view that you accept as a given before you have studied the topic. You presuppose it a priori without looking at the evidence. Presuppositions prevent people from objectively examining the historical data with an open unbiased mind resulting in intellectual dishonesty. Where you begin largely predetermines where you end – consequently garbage in garbage out.

The question is, whose views should you rationally accept – the interpretation of the Biblical writers who laid down their lives for the truth of their message about Jesus or the speculative claims of those who are removed by 2000 years from the relevant sensory evidence, the culture, the society, the religion, the language, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and have their minds clouded with preconceived prejudices & biases?

D) JESUS WAS VIRGIN BORN.

The actual miracle was not in His birth, but in the conception. C.G. April says: “The account of our Lord's birth has the form, not of myth, but of history; place, date and contemporary persons and events are specified, and it is interwoven not only with the texture of general history, but also with the events of our Lord's life in such a way as to be inseparable from the Gospel account of them”.

The reason most people deny the Virgin Conception is because they have an antsupernatural bias, which cannot accept miracles. If one believes in a supernatural omnipotent creator God who created the vast universe, then the supernatural creation of a few miniscule Y-chromosomes, and their impregnation without the agency of a man would not be hard for such a God. If there is a God who created the universe, if He flung the galaxies out from His fingertips (metaphorically speaking), if He painted the sky with a scintillating Milky Way then surely for Him to take a tiny seed and place it in the womb of a woman is nothing at all. The Virgin Conception is no big problem at all for God. As Dr. Gutzke added, “if you can't believe that God can do that little thing, you really don't believe in God at all. If He can't do that He can't do much of anything- an impotent god.” Taking this anti-supernatural physicalism to its logical conclusion, implies that if miracles do not occur then creation could not have taken place. A person who cannot (or will not) believe in the Virgin Conception thus has an inconsistent view of God. This person believes that God can create an entire and vast universe but is INCAPABLE of creating a few chromosomes to be immaculately conceived without the biological agency of a man.

The Virgin Conception is neither a logical impossibility nor a contradictory concept. The real problem behind the rejection of the Virgin Conception is one's presuppositions and worldview. People who reject the Virgin Conception of Christ assume the following presuppositions in their worldview known as PHYSICALISM:

1. The universe is a self contained, closed system.
2. Everything happens according to natural laws, which are absolute and unbreakable.
3. No miracles or supernatural intervention are possible. Therefore they conclude that the Virgin Conception of Christ is impossible and never occurred, since miracles CANNOT happen.

But natural laws are descriptive, not prescriptive. They do not prescribe what nature must be like; they describe what nature seems to be like. They seem to summarize past observation and predict the future. But this raise the problem of induction for natural laws are statistical in nature, describing the statistical probability of what generally occurs in a large number of cases. The idea that the laws of nature describe a situation with absolute certainty is absurd. It is therefore illegitimate to exclude *a priori* a certain event that does not conform to known natural laws, since those laws cannot be rigidly applied to individual cases. Given quantum indeterminacy, there is at least *some* chance of an event's occurring, regardless of how bizarre it might be. This alone does not settle the problem of miracles; quantum indeterminacy and the statistical character of certain natural laws only shows that one cannot *absolutely* rule out in advance an event not conforming to known laws. Furthermore, according to Christianity the universe is not

"run" or "held together" by any so-called "laws" but that God is personally upholding and running the universe (Heb 1:3). Miracles do not violate "laws," because "laws" are simply human observations of the ways God upholds the universe.

The Scottish philosopher, Hume argued against miracles by saying that there is uniform experience against the miraculous & therefore miracles do not occur. But this is begging the question & is fallacious circular reasoning. You cannot deductively assume on an issue like this, you have to investigate what happens in the universe. For further reading, I suggest *MIRACLES AND THE MODERN MIND* by Norman L. Geisler, *MIRACLES* by C.S.Lewis, *IN DEFENSE OF MIRACLES* edited by R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas and lastly *JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER: A HISTORICAL & THEOLOGICAL STUDY* by Graham H. Twelftree.

A Christian's belief in the Virgin Conception of Christ is not "blind faith" for Christianity is not fideistic (blind faith without evidence), it is evidential. The truth claims of its cardinal defining doctrines are foundational, and based on a whole variety of evidences, which are SUFFICIENT BASIS for putting one's complete faith and trust in what Christianity teaches. Christianity is based on the SUFFICIENCY of the evidences, not the paucity of the evidences. The Christian faith is not a blind faith and therefore is not fideistic. Not only is an attack on the Virgin Conception an assault on the power of God, it is also an attack on the reliability of scripture, the incarnation and dual nature of Jesus and His sinless substitutionary death as the Savior of mankind.

The foundational basis and grounding for the belief in the Virgin Conception is not only the omnipotent nature of God but also the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus takes it out of the personal and private realm of "blind faith" and puts it into the objective, the real, and the publicly verifiable. As we shall see, the resurrection of Jesus is the most firmly attested fact of antiquity, for which there exists more evidence than any other event in history. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He put His imprimatur (approval) upon the atonement (payment for sin) of Jesus Christ thereby declaring that the sacrifice had been accepted. The sacrifice would not have been accepted if Christ was not pure, and He would not have been pure if He were born a sinner and not Virgin born. Therefore, all the evidence to the resurrection of Christ is evidence for the Virgin Conception.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke report that Jesus was born of a virgin, that is, by the power of God without the agency of a biological father. But can one accept it as true without simply deciding to believe something unbelievable (fideistic blind faith)? Perhaps someone made up the story of the virgin conception in order to endow Jesus with greater glory.

The New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen wrote a book in which he provided a powerful argument for the plausibility of the virgin conception¹. The argument is: The fact is that Matthew and Luke recorded a virgin conception. The two hypotheses are:

¹ J. Gresham Machen, "*The Virgin Birth of Christ.*"

- (1) It did happen or
- (2) It did not happen.

But how does one decide between these two hypotheses?

The key lies in a corollary to hypothesis (2), that the virgin conception did not occur. If it did not occur, then Matthew and Luke or their sources made up the story. If this is true, they must have had plausible motivation to do such a thing. The upshot of Machen's argument is that no such plausible motivation can be found and therefore it is highly improbable that the story could have been invented.

The first point to consider in the course of this argument is that Matthew, and Luke's sources, would have been Jewish. They were God fearing Jews who saw themselves in continuity with the Old Testament and could not have made up the story of the virgin conception. The very notion would have been considered blasphemous. The idea of making up a story in which God, through pure miraculous power, causes a child to be conceived without a father did not fit into Jewish thinking of the day at all.

Because of the foregoing, most people seeking an alternative explanation do not propose the virgin conception as a Jewish invention but point to the evident pagan parallels. For example, there are various stories in which Zeus seduced a maiden and fathered a son by her. What the gospel writers did, so it is claimed, was to borrow the idea of a virgin conception from these pagans. Machen pointed out two major flaws with this idea:

- (a) The idea that Christians borrowed a piece of mythology from the pagans to enhance the standing of Jesus is wrong-headed. The whole point of Christian teaching was to set Christianity apart from paganism, not to assimilate it.
- (b) Furthermore, there were no actual pagan virgin conception stories. All of these stories are incidents where gods seduced women and had offspring. The women may have been virgins before intercourse, but they most certainly were not virgins afterwards. The miraculous thing about the New Testament virgin conception story is that Mary was a virgin both before and after conception. This story could not have been copied from pagan parallels because it is not found in any pagan accounts.

This points out a serious problem in the second hypothesis. If the virgin conception did not happen, there is no plausible explanation for why it was ever recorded.

- Matthew and Luke's sources could not have made it up, for no pious Jew would have invented such a story.
- They could not have borrowed the idea from parallel pagan sources because there are no true parallels.

CONCLUSION:

Thus the most likely explanation is that a virgin conception was reported because a virgin conception occurred.

II) THE DEITY OF JESUS.

In the New Testament there are many verses in which Jesus claimed to be God and many more that apply to Him the attributes of God. In fact of all the major religious leaders, only Jesus made this claim.

NEW TESTAMENT TESTIMONY TO THE DEITY OF CHRIST

(From Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Baker, 1992)

A) IMPLICIT CHRISTOLOGY

1) **Divine functions performed by Jesus**

- a) In relation to the universe
 - (i) Creator (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2)
 - (ii) Sustainer (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3)
 - (iii) Author of life (John 1:4; Acts 3:15)
 - (iv) Ruler (Matt 28:18; Rom. 14:9; Rev. 1:5)
- b) In relation to human beings
 - (i) Healing the sick (Mark 1: 32-34; Acts 3:6; 10:38)
 - (ii) Teaching authoritatively (Mark 1:21-22; 13:31)
 - (iii) Forgiving sins (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; Col. 3:13)
 - (iv) Granting salvation or imparting eternal life (Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:12-14)
 - (v) Dispensing the Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:17, 33)
 - (vi) Raising the dead (Luke 7:11-17; John 5:21; 6:40)
 - (vii) Exercising judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:19-29; Acts 10:42; 1 Cor 4:4-5)

2) **Divine status claimed by or accorded to Jesus**

- a) In relation to his Father
 - (i) Possessor of divine attributes (John 1:4; 10:30; 21:17; Eph. 4:10; Col. 1:19; 2:9)
 - (ii) Eternally existent (John 1:1; 8:58; 12:41; 17:5; 1 Cor 10:4; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 11:26; 13:8; Jude 5)
 - (iii) Equal in dignity (Matt. 28:19; John 5:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 22:13; cf. 21:6)
 - (iv) Perfect revealer (John 1:18; 14:9; Col 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3)
 - (v) Embodiment of truth (John 1:9, 14; 6:32; 14:6; Rev. 3:7, 14)
 - (vi) Joint possessor of the kingdom (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15), churches (Rom. 16:16) Spirit (Rom. 8-9; Phil. 1:19), temple (Rev. 21:22), divine name (Matt 28:19; cf. Rev. 14:1), and throne (Rev. 22:1,3)
- b) In relation to human beings
 - (i) Recipient of praise (Matt. 21:15-16; Eph. 5:19; 1 Tim 1:12; Rev. 5:8-14)
 - (ii) Recipient of prayer (Acts 1:24; 7:59-60; 9:10-17, 21; 22:16, 19; 1 Cor 1:2; 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8)
 - (iii) Object of saving faith (John 14:1; Acts 10:43; 16:31; Rom. 10:8-13)
 - (iv) Object of worship (Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17; John 5:23; 20:28; Phil. 2:10-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:8-12)
 - (v) Joint source of blessing (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; 1 Thes. 3:11; 2 Thes. 2:16)

(vi) Object of doxologies (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 1: 5b-6; 5:13)

B) EXPLICIT CHRISTOLOGY

- 1) **Old Testament passages referring to Yahweh applied to Jesus**
 - a) Character of Yahweh (Exod. 3:14 and Isa. 43:11 alluded to in John 8:58; Ps. 101:27-28 LXX [MT 102:28-29] quoted in Heb. 1:11-12; Isa. 44:6 alluded to in Rev. 1:17)
 - b) Holiness of Yahweh (Isa. 8:12-13 [cf. 29:23] quoted in 1 Pet. 3:14-15)
 - c) Descriptions of Yahweh (Ezek 43:2 and Dan 10:5-6 alluded to in Rev. 1:13-16)
 - d) Worship of Yahweh (Isa. 45:23 alluded to in Phil. 2: 10-11; Deut. 32:43 LXX and Ps. 96:7 LXX [MT 97:7] quoted in Heb. 1:6)
 - e) Work of Yahweh in creation (Ps. 101:26 LXX [MT102:27] quoted in Heb. 1:10)
 - f) Salvation of Yahweh (Joel 2:32 [MT 3:5] quoted in Rom. 10:13; cf. Acts 2:21; Isa 40:3 quoted in Matt. 3:3)
 - g) Trustworthiness of Yahweh (Isa. 28:16 quoted in Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6)
 - h) Judgment of Yahweh (Isa. 6:10 alluded to in John 12:41; Isa. 8:14 quoted in Rom. 9:33 and 1 Pet. 2:8)
 - i) Triumph of Yahweh (Ps. 68:18 [MT v. 19] quoted in eph. 4:8)
- 2) **Divine titles claimed by or applied to Jesus**
 - a) Son of Man (Matt. 16:28; 24:30; Mark 8:38; 14:62-64; Acts 7:56)
 - b) Son of God (Matt. 11:27; Mark 15:39; John 1:18; Rom 1:4; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:2)
 - c) Messiah (Matt. 16:16; Mark 14:61; John 21:31)
 - d) Lord (Mark 12:35-37; John 20:29; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; 12:3; 16:22; Phil. 2:11; 1 Pet. 2:3; 3:15)
 - e) Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13; cf. 1:8; 21:6; of the Lord God)
 - f) God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1)

CONCLUSION:

Mk 14:61-64, is a very important passage for a variety of reasons:

1. Because it comes from Mark (the earliest gospel).
2. It uses the titles
 - a. The Messiah (the Christ), and
 - b. "Son of the Blessed One" (Blessed One is an euphemism for God) i.e. the "Son of God" indicating His DEITY.
 - c. When the high priest asks if Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One, Jesus answers "I am" -- a clear & unqualified affirmation that He is both the Messiah & the Son of God. He adds that He is also
 - d. "Son of Man", which numerous scholars say indicated an indirect claim to divinity as the heavenly, preexistent, glorified figure of Daniel 7:14. .
 - e. The passage ends with the claim that

- i. Jesus would sit on the right hand of Power (euphemism for God). Recent commentators think that this is what pointed most to a claim of Deity for he is claiming to be sharing the throne with God. And that
- ii. He would come on the clouds, which in the OT is always a prerogative of God.
- f. The response of "blasphemy" is what we would expect from such claims.

Thus the Bible teaches the deity of Jesus for He claimed to be God, which is an extraordinary claim to make. The idea of the Incarnation of Jesus is paradoxical & enigmatic but this does not invalidate it. Most critics & skeptics seem to work on the basis that they already know exactly what God is like, and that on the basis of this knowledge they are in a position to pass judgment on the Incarnation of Jesus, the God-man.

THE TRILEMMA:

Jesus' claim to be God must either be true or false.

- 1) If Jesus' claims are true then He is God.
- 2) If Jesus' claims are false, then there are just two options:
 - a) He knew His claims were false, or
 - b) He did not know they were false.

Jesus was either a liar, lunatic or Lord.

1) WAS JESUS A LIAR?

If when Jesus made His claims, He knew He was not God, then He was lying. But if He was a liar, then

- a) He was also a HYPOCRITE, because He told & taught others to be honest whatever the cost, while He at the same time, was living a colossal lie.
- b) More than that He deliberately told others to trust Him for their eternal destiny. If He could not back up His claims and knew they were false, then He was unspeakably EVIL.
- c) Last, He would be a FOOL, because it was His claim to deity that led to His crucifixion (Mark 14:61-64 & John 19:7).

But this cannot explain the fact that He left us with the most profound moral instruction and powerful moral example that anyone ever has left. Even John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, skeptic, and antagonist of Christianity, admitted that Jesus was a first rate ethicist supremely worthy of our attention & emulation. Someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar.

2) WAS JESUS A LUNATIC?

For someone to think he was God, especially in a culture that was fiercely monotheistic, and then to tell others that their eternal destiny depends on

believing in him, was the height of lunacy. The problem is that a lunatic could NOT be the source of the perceptive and effective psychological insights that Jesus had and which resulted in global impact & influence for good throughout the centuries. The reality is that there is an unbridgeable discrepancy between the depth sanity and shrewdness of Jesus' moral teaching & the untenable hypothesis that He was a lunatic.

3) **CONCLUSION: JESUS IS LORD.**

If Jesus is not a liar or a lunatic then He must be Lord, exactly as He claimed. He must therefore be taken very seriously for whatever He taught is in fact ultimate reality & true. .

Not only Jesus claimed to be God, but the amazing thing is that His followers who were devout monotheistic Jews *believed* Him to be God. No devout Jew would have been psychologically, ethically, or religiously capable of taking a man and calling him God. The disciples were devout Jews steeped in the Judaistic teachings of the unity of God (Deut 6:4). How could they have conspired to the gravest form of blasphemy by taking a man and making him God, thereby deliberately breaking the first commandment (Exodus 20:3)? Obviously something happened to transform the apostles, namely His resurrection, which validated His claims.

The reason most people cannot accept this fact is due to their presupposition – that God cannot incarnate & take on a human body. They rule out the deity of Jesus because of their unwarranted preconceived worldview not from the evidence of history. The founders of all other religions put their teachings (philosophical/theological propositions) as a priority of supreme importance and themselves secondary. In other words it is the message that is important not the messenger. This is not the case with Christ. He puts His ontological identity (deity) as of supreme importance. The veracity of His teachings hinged on who He was (John 8:24). His subjective claims were validated by the empirically verified objective eyewitness space-time event of the resurrection in real history. Christianity is not based on a complex of ideas but on the historical event of the resurrection. The skeptic St. Thomas would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless he had direct objective empirical evidence (John 20:25). When this was provided, he says to the risen Jesus, “My Lord & my God” (John 20:28).

III) THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

The resurrection of Jesus is not a temporary revivification, not just the resuscitation of a corpse but the supernatural transformation of the physical body of Jesus to an immortal glorified existence (not a mere re-arrangement of physical atoms as in the changing of water into wine). That dead men do not rise is a generally uniform observed pattern in our experience. But at most it only shows that as far as science is concerned, a resurrection is “naturally” impossible. But science cannot and does not show that such a

naturally impossible event has not in fact occurred – that’s a matter of history. If the historical evidence makes it reasonable to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then it is illegitimate to suppress this evidence because all other men have always remained in their graves. It may well be the case that a ‘naturally’ impossible event has occurred. Christians believe that given that God exists, miracles are possible because of:

- (1) The omnipotence of God &
- (2) Sovereign Freedom of God to act as He wills.

Skeptics like Hume contend that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is impossible because causal powers of nature are insufficient to return a corpse to life. The Christian hypothesis agrees with this because we posit that GOD the Father raised Jesus from the dead!

The crucifixion of Jesus is an established historical fact, which no historian who would dispute. The resurrection validates all the claims of Jesus & the New Testament, including His virgin conception & deity. Therefore this is the deciding factor as to the identity of Jesus for it takes it out of the personal subjective & private and puts it into the objective, the real, and the public. For if he really rose, that validates His claim to be divine and not merely human, for resurrection from death is beyond human power; and his divinity validates the truth of everything else he said, for God cannot lie (Mat 12:39; Mat 16:4; Luke 11:29-30; Heb 6:18).

Christ's resurrection can be proved with at least as much certainty as any universally believed and well-documented event in ancient history. To prove this, we do not need to presuppose anything controversial (e.g. that miracles happen). But the skeptic must also not presuppose anything (e.g. that miracles do not happen). We do not even need to presuppose that the New Testament is infallible, or divinely inspired or even true. We do not need to presuppose that there really was an empty tomb or post-resurrection appearances, as recorded. We need to presuppose only two things, both of which are hard data, empirical data, which no one denies:

1. The existence of the New Testament texts as we have them.
2. The existence (but not necessarily the truth) of the Christian religion as we find it today.

The question is this: Which theory about what really happened in Jerusalem on that first Easter Sunday can account for the data?

METHODOLOGY & RULES OF WRITTEN EVIDENCE:

He who makes the rules wins the game. But this is not a game. This is a question of ultimate truth. Therefore, he who adopts the wrong rules for evaluating evidence, loses the truth. And he who loses the truth about Jesus, loses eternal life (John 8:24; 17:3).

TESTING FOR TRUTH IN HISTORY

(William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith, pp182-184).

Since the historian cannot perform experiments like a scientist, how can he test the truth of his theories? Because we cannot travel in time & have direct access to the data of historical events we need criteria to test the veracity of historical hypotheses. The historian's hypotheses are to be tested for their systematic consistency. If a historical reconstruction is logically consistent and provides the best explanation of the evidence, then it ought to be accepted.

The problem arises as to how to apply this test in history. Whatever model of explanation one adopts in the sciences will do nicely for history as well.

- 1) One popular model is the HYPOTHETICO-DEDUCTIVE MODEL. The scientist invents a hypothesis to provide a systematically consistent explanation of the facts, and then he deduces from the hypothesis, specific conditions that would either confirm or disprove his hypothesis. Then he performs certain experiments to see which conditions obtain (i.e. conform to the state of affairs).

The historian can follow the same procedure. He reconstructs a picture of the past. This is his hypothesis. Then he deduces certain conditions from it that will confirm or disprove his hypothesis. He then checks to see which conditions exist. He does this not by experiments, as the scientist does, but by historical evidence. As Collingwood says, "The historian's picture of the past stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence. The only way in which the historian can judge of its truth is by considering this relation."² Collingwood is saying that the historian's hypothesis must be corroborated by the evidence, for example, archaeological evidence. "By treating coins, pottery weapons, and other artifacts as evidence," one historian writes, "the historian raises his study to the level of a science. What happened in the past is what the evidence indicates as having happened."³

- 2) Alternatively, one may employ the more recently developed model of INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION. According to this approach, we begin with the evidence available to us and then infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence. Out of a pool of live options determined by our background beliefs, we select the best of various competing potential explanations to give a causal account of why the evidence is as it is rather than otherwise. The scientist can test his proposed hypothesis by performing experiments; the historian will test his hypothesis by seeing how well it elucidates the historical evidence. The process of determining which historical reconstruction is the explanation will involve the historian's craft, as various factors will have to be weighed.

² R. G. Collingwood, "*The Idea of History*," .246.

³ William Debbins, "Introduction," in "*Essays in the Philosophy of history*," p. xiv. See also Dray, "Comments," p.182.

In his recent book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*⁴ C. Behan McCullagh lists the factors which historians typically weigh in testing historical hypothesis: (Emphasis Mine).

1. The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.
2. The hypothesis must have GREATER EXPLANATORY SCOPE (that is, imply a greater variety of observable data) than rival hypotheses.
3. The hypothesis must have GREATER EXPLANATORY POWER (that is, make the observable data more probable) than rival hypotheses.
4. The hypothesis must be MORE PLAUSIBLE (that is, be implied by a greater variety of accepted truths, and its negation implied by fewer accepted truths) than rival hypotheses.
5. The hypothesis must be LESS AD HOC (that is, include fewer new suppositions about the past not already implied by existing knowledge) than rival hypotheses.
6. The hypothesis must be DISCONFIRMED BY FEWER ACCEPTED BELIEFS (that is, when conjoined with accepted truths, imply fewer false statements) than rival hypotheses.
7. The hypothesis MUST SO EXCEED ITS RIVALS in fulfilling conditions (2)-(6) that there is little chance of a rival hypothesis, after further investigation, exceeding it in meeting these conditions.

Since some reconstructions may fulfill some conditions but be deficient in others, the determination of the BEST EXPLANATION requires skill and can often be difficult. But if the STRENGTH AND SCOPE of any explanation are great, so that it explains a large number and variety of facts, many more than any other competing explanation, then, advises McCullagh, it is likely to be true.

In his process of formulating and testing hypotheses the historian is much like the scientist, especially the geologist, who also lacks direct access to his data and the opportunity of lab experiments on past events. Collingwood gives the conclusion: "The analysis of science in EPISTEMOLOGICAL terms is identical with the analysis of history and the distinction between them as separate kinds of knowledge is an illusion."⁵

One final point needs to be made. The goal of HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE is to obtain PROBABILITY, not MATHEMATICAL CERTAINTY. An item can be regarded, as a piece of HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE when it is related to the evidence in such a way that any reasonable person ought to accept it. This is the situation with all of our INDUCTIVE KNOWLEDGE: we accept what has SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE to render it probable. Similarly, in a court of law, the verdict is awarded to the case that is made most probable by the evidence. The jury is asked to decide if the accused is guilty-not beyond all doubt, which is impossible-but BEYOND ALL REASONABLE DOUBT. It is exactly the same in history: we should accept the hypothesis that provides the MOST PROBABLE EXPLANATION OF THE EVIDENCE.

⁴ C. Behan McCullagh, "*Justifying Historical Descriptions*," 19.

⁵ R. G. Collingwood, "Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?" in "*Essays in the Philosophy of History*," p.32

To summarize, then, we test for truth by systematic consistency, and the method of applying this test is the same in history as it is in science. The historian should accept the hypothesis that best explains all the evidence. Thus, the supposed lack of direct access to the data is no stumbling block to testing for truth in history and so gaining an accurate knowledge of the past.

FALSIFIABILITY CRITERIA:

Paul's testimony in 1 Cor 15:3-8 which predates any New Testament book is the strongest evidence for the resurrection. In this passage Paul talks of a pre-Pauline creed, which even the most skeptical scholars date as being received by Paul from Peter & James in the mid 30's. It ties the reports of the resurrection appearances to the earliest eyewitnesses based on Paul's testimony plus his contact with the apostles Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and John, also at a very early date, in Gal 1-2. Although Paul wrote the passage, it is not his material, but is actually much a much older creedal tradition. Consequently, Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff is an invaluable report of the original eyewitness' experience. Hengel calls this "a highly compressed historical account."⁶ O'Collins thinks that this material "incorporates resurrection formulae which stem from the thirties"⁷ John Drane states, "The earliest evidence we have for the resurrection almost certainly goes back to the time immediately after the resurrection event is alleged to have taken place. This is the evidence contained in the early sermons in the Acts of the Apostles." He adds "But there can be no doubt that in the first few chapters of Acts its author has preserved material from very early sources."⁸ Critics, including even the Jesus Seminar and atheist New Testament scholar Gerd Ludemann⁹ place the material in 1 Cor 15:3ff. at about 32AD!!

Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide asserts that the tradition quoted by Paul, "may be considered as a statement of eyewitness."¹⁰ Atheist philosopher Michael Martin admits that Paul's testimony was a contemporary eyewitness account of a postresurrection appearance of Jesus.¹¹ Jesus Seminar member Roy Hoover explains why Paul's account is the proper place to begin: "The reason for starting here is simple and compelling: Paul's testimony is the earliest and the most historically reliable evidence about the resurrection of Jesus that we have."¹² Other skeptics also agree on the crucial nature of Paul's witness.¹³

⁶ "The Atonement," 37.

⁷ "Interpreting Jesus," 109-110.

⁸ "Introducing the New Testament," 99

⁹ "The Resurrection of Jesus," 38.

¹⁰ "Resurrection of Jesus", 99.

¹¹ "The Case against Christianity," 81, 89

¹² "A Contest between Orthodoxy and Veracity" in "Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?" 129.

¹³ Ludemann "What really Happened to Jesus, 4; Funk, *Honest To Jesus*," 36, 40; Marcus Borg, "Thinking About Easter, " *Bible Review*" 10, 1994: 15; Perrin, "Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark and Luke," 80, 83; John Shelby Spong, "Resurrection: Myth or Reality?", 47; Grant, "Saint Paul," 104.

In fact there is ample evidence that the entire New Testament is the BEST ATTESTED DOCUMENT OF ANCIENT HISTORY and contains historically reliable data. For more information on the historicity of the New Testament see Craig Blomberg, *The Reliability of the Gospels*; F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents are they Reliable?*; F.F. Bruce *Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*; F. F. Bruce, *The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament*; Howard Clark Kee, *What can we know about Jesus?*; Paul Barnett, *Jesus & the Logic of History*.)

Not only is there data for the verifiability of the veracity of Christianity there is also criteria for its falsification. Paul hangs the veracity of Christianity on an EVIDENTIAL thread, - the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor 15:12ff which is the earliest New Testament document (55AD) Paul sets the entire STRUCTURE of Christianity on a TRUTH QUESTION by which Christianity could be proven FALSE (if you can muster enough evidence). The RESURRECTION is the crucial element, and this is unlike any other religion in that it makes it feasible to RATIONALLY prove Christianity false using REASON AND EVIDENCE. You could thus prove one religion (Christianity) true (and another less true) OR false. If you want to invent a religion you do not want to be like Paul unless you can pull it off & prove it's true. You do not want to hinge your religion on something you CAN TEST OBJECTIVELY! Other religions cannot make such a case.

Some of the most intelligent yet skeptical people became believers after examining the evidence with an unbiased mind. Among them was:

1. FRANK MORRISON an English barrister who made it His mission to disprove Christianity by disproving the resurrection of Jesus. In the process of investigating the historical evidence, he became a Christian and wrote a book 'Who moved the Stone?'
2. Dr. Simon Greenleaf was the famous Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University. He produced his famous three-volume work, 'A Treatise on the Laws of Evidence', which is still considered one of the greatest single authorities on this subject in the entire literature of legal procedure. He was a Jew and disbelieved on Christ and the resurrection. He was challenged by his students to apply the same laws of evidence to the resurrection of Christ. After examining the New Testament documents he recorded his findings in his book, 'An Examination Administered in the Courts of Justice'. He came to the conclusion that, according to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.

If you want to disprove Christianity, it's simple. All you have to do is disprove the resurrection. Many have tried and failed, becoming believers in the process.

THE DATA:

12 UNDENIABLE KNOWN BEDROCK AUTHENTIC HISTORICAL FACTS CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION EVENTS AND THAT ALL CRITICS AGREE ON: (Sources: Gary R. Habermas & J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death*, pp127-128 & Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 17-26). (Emphasis is mine).

Even Anthony Flew the famous British atheist¹⁴ agreed on these 12 facts in his debate with Gary Habermas on the resurrection.

1. Jesus DIED due to the rigors of crucifixion.
2. Jesus was BURIED.
3. His disciples DOUBTED AND DESPAIRED because Jesus' death challenged their hopes.
4. The tomb in which Jesus had been buried was discovered to be EMPTY just a few days later. The Jewish leaders not only failed to disprove the proclamation that the tomb was empty but their counterpolemic (Mat 28:11-15) actually admitted the fact. This enemy attestation is another indication favoring the empty tomb, since the Jewish leadership could not eliminate this physical element of the early proclamation. The gospels are unanimous in their claim that women were the earliest witnesses to the empty sepulcher (Mat 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-2). This is a powerful indication of the authenticity of the report, since women's testimony was generally disallowed in a law court, especially on crucial matters. To use women as the central witnesses in such a case would be intellectual suicide, unless they really were the first witnesses.
5. The disciples had REAL EXPERIENCES that they BELIEVED were ACTUAL APPEARANCES of the risen Jesus.
6. The disciples were TRANSFORMED and were even willing to DIE for the truth of these events. Critical scholars acknowledge, as Grant explains, that it was the disciples' belief that the resurrection happened that transformed their lives.¹⁵
7. This GOSPEL message was the very CENTER of preaching in the early church. Critical scholars readily admit the central role played by Jesus' resurrection. Elliott asserts, "Without this belief the sect of Nazarenes would have generally died out just as the other Messianic groups had disappeared."¹⁶
8. The GOSPEL was even proclaimed in JERUSALEM, the city where Jesus had died. The city of Jerusalem is absolutely the last geographical location the disciples would preach the resurrection if Jesus' grave was still occupied.
9. The Christian CHURCH was firmly established by these disciples.
10. The primary day of worship was SUNDAY-the day Jesus was reported to have risen.
11. JAMES, Jesus' previously SKEPTICAL brother, was converted when he believed he saw the resurrected Jesus. Critics draw their conclusion regarding James's prior unbelief not only from the multiple independent sources that attest this, but also based on the embarrassment that such unbelief would have caused. It is highly unlikely that the early church would include these comments about one of its chief leaders, and one of Jesus' own family members as well, unless they were true. (Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:70).
12. PAUL a leader in the persecution of the churches was also converted by a REAL EXPERIENCE that he BELIEVED to be the risen Jesus.

¹⁴ Last year (2005) at the age of 81 he became a theist. See <http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/>.

¹⁵ Michael Grant, "*Saint Peter: A Biography*," 96.

¹⁶ Elliott, "The First Easter," 210.

Another consideration not listed above is the failure of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to disprove the resurrection, even though they lived precisely where Jesus had died and been buried just a brief time before. These ancient scholars were in the best position to expose any error, both because they strongly opposed His teaching and because their location allowed thorough inspection. These leaders had a motive, great location, and a method, but even as the resident skeptics, they did not refute the evidence. As Dunn mentions with the exception of the weak claim in Matthew 28:13-15, there is an “absence of any such counter claim in any available literature of the period.”¹⁷ Cranfield says: “There is also the highly significant fact that neither the Jewish nor the Roman authorities ever produced evidence to disprove the claim that Jesus had been raised. The Jewish authorities, in particular, had every reason to want to do so, and they must surely have been in a position to interrogate and search thoroughly.”¹⁸

There are only a FINITE number of THEORIES, which could account for these facts! A good scientific theory accounts for the facts and there is a perfect fit of theory with facts/data. Let’s analyze the facts:

I) The Tomb of Jesus was either

Occupied (He did not rise from the dead) or
empty (He did rise from the dead).

A) NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS FOR AN OCCUPIED TOMB:

- 1) The tomb was unknown to the apostles.
PROBLEM: This does not account for facts #4-12.
- 2) The women came to the wrong tomb.
PROBLEM: This does not account for facts #5-12.
- 3) It was a legend i.e. the resurrection was a fabrication.
PROBLEM: This is the worst theory yet the most prevalent for it does not account for any of the facts # 1-12
- 4) Jesus had a twin.
PROBLEM: Best theory so far but it does not account for facts #4 & 11. The tomb could have been checked and how do you explain James’ conversion?
- 5) Hallucination theory.
PROBLEM: This accounts for the life transformation of the apostles but not for facts #5,11 & 12. Also hallucinations are an individual phenomenon and never a mass hallucination (Jesus appeared to 500 at one time). In addition even on an individual basis it was not in the expectations of the apostles to project a risen Jesus. The only resurrection they expected was the eschatological one at the end of the ages. In addition the

¹⁷ Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 67. also in agreement are Robinson, *Can We Trust*, 123; Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, 200; Paul Maier, “The Empty Tomb as History,” *Christianity Today* 19 (1975):4-6.

¹⁸ Cranfield, “*The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*,” 170.

resurrection claims could easily have been checked out by skeptics because the apostles were making objective claims- that something objective had occurred, something that could be publicly verified. Furthermore the hostile Jewish enemies could point to the occupied tomb.

- 6) Existential Resurrection –Jesus has risen experientially in my heart and he lives in my heart.
PROBLEM: But this does not account for facts # 4, 5, 11 & 12.
- 7) Spiritual Resurrection – He came back as a spirit.
PROBLEM: This does not account for facts #4,5,11 or 12.

B) IF THE TOMB WAS EMPTY, then it can be explained:
Naturally or
Supernaturally

1) NATURAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE EMPTY TOMB :

- (a) The disciples stole the body.
PROBLEM: This does not explain facts # 5,6,11 & 12.
- (b) The authorities hid the Body.
PROBLEM: But why would they do this? This does not explain facts # 5-12.
- (c) The Swoon Theory – Jesus almost died but resuscitated.
PROBLEM: But this kind of Jesus couldn't transform the disciples' lives. It does not explain facts #1 & 6.
- (d) Passover Plot.
PROBLEM: But this does not explain facts # 5,6,11,12.
- (e) Jesus was an alien.
PROBLEM: All the data fits this theory but it fails the criteria for Inference to the Best Explanation.

2) SUPERNATURAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE EMPTY TOMB:

- (a) Bodily Resurrection of Jesus.
PROBLEM: There is no problem & all the data fits and satisfies all the criteria for Inference to the Best Explanation.

CONCLUSION:

Thus it is reasonable to believe that Jesus arose from the dead validating that He was indeed the God-man - God the Son, the second person of the triune Godhead who entered the time space continuum by being supernaturally conceived in the womb of Mary without the agency of a man thus taking on a human body with a full human nature. And because He is God, His teachings are true. The very fact that some of the teachings of the Bible are paradoxical mysteries that can be apprehended but cannot be fully comprehended by the finite human mind only shows that they have not been invented by men.

Even if one rejects the Scripture verses that have been quoted, each of the cases for the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ can be established by historical facts held in common between both believers & skeptical scholars. Therefore, these items can be established via the normal historical method, without assuming either the inspiration or the reliability of the Bible.

Wise men sought Him at His birth & wise men still seek Him today. Yet there are people who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7) and who “have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with (true) knowledge.” (Rom 10:2b). When Jesus asked Peter, "But who do you say that I am?" he answered "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Mat 16:15-17). In other words, these paradoxes/mysteries are supernaturally revealed & their source is not flesh & blood (they are not the inventions of finite men).

Jesus asks each of us that same question, “who do you say that I am?” The question is, do you have the intellectual integrity, courage and will to weigh the evidence with an open mind & forsake your preconceptions, prejudices & biases in light of the truth?

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