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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Some Outstanding New Testament Problems.

III. The Problem of the Resurrection Narratives.

BY THE VENERABLE ARCHDEACON J. W. HUNKIN, D.D., RUGBY.

THE New Testament is aglow with the assurance that Jesus the Christ, once crucified, is alive and triumphant. In studying early Christian belief on the subject two problems confront us at the outset: first, what form did the conception of the Risen Christ take? and second, on what ground did the belief rest?

Our earliest sources are the Epistles of St. Paul, and the main passage we have to study is 1 Co 15. We will examine it with our first question in mind, and seek to gather what we can as to the exact form the conception of the Risen Christ took in the minds of St. Paul and his readers.

On his own testimony St. Paul was well-grounded in Judaism before he became a Christian. 'Ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion,' he writes to the Galatians, 'how that . . . I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers' (Gal 1^{13, 14}). Now we must remember that 'the Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body and not an incarnated soul,'¹ and the Jews believed in the resurrection of the body rather than in the immortality of the soul. One of the earliest surviving explicit statements of this belief is that found in Dn 12^{2, 3}. 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' The language almost suggests not merely a resurrection upon earth but an ascension into heaven. Elijah was held actually to have been caught up bodily into heaven in a chariot of fire. Moses, according to Dt 34⁶, was buried by God but no man knew of his sepulchre, and there was a widespread belief, attested by Josephus,² that he had passed out of this life in some supernatural way: 'As he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua, and was still discoursing with them, a cloud stood over him on the sudden, and he disappeared in a certain valley,

although he wrote in the holy books that he died, which was done out of fear lest they should venture to say, that because of his extraordinary virtue he went to God.'

It accords with the view that the bodies of Moses and Elijah were not asleep in the dust of the earth that they are described as appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration. The strange story in St. Matthew's Gospel of the earthquake at the moment when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, which rent rocks and opened tombs, has a similar Jewish background. 'Many bodies,' we are told, 'of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many' (Mt 27^{52, 53}).

Bearing all this in mind, then, we read what St. Paul says about the resurrection of Christians. To answer the question 'How are the dead raised? and with what body do they come?' he points to the analogy of the seed: 'that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; but God giveth it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own' . . . (1 Co 15³⁶⁻³⁸) . . . 'So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.' The resurrection of all Christians will take place simultaneously: 'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality' (vv. 51-53). The physical body, therefore, whether alive or dead will without residuum be changed into a spiritual body, as the seed is replaced by the new plant.

Now we gather that this applies to Christ Himself: for in St. Paul's view He is 'the first fruits of them that are asleep.' The inference is that if St. Paul was assured—as he was—that Christ had

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, 'Hebrew Psychology,' in *The People and the Book*, 362.

² *Antiquities*, iv. viii. 48 (326).

really appeared to certain people and was really alive he would at once assume, unless there was strong evidence to the contrary, that the Lord's physical body had disappeared from the earth. Belief in 'the empty tomb' followed at once from belief that our Lord had recently presented Himself alive to His disciples. It did not depend on the evidence of the women who went to the tomb. The report of their discovery on Easter morning does not actually find a place in the earliest strata of surviving Christian writings. St. Paul does not mention it here. But at the earliest point to which we can penetrate we seem to detect the belief in 'the empty tomb' whether based on direct evidence or only on inference.

We pass on now to our second question: what exactly is the ground on which the early belief in Christ's resurrection rests? The real support of the belief seems to be a twofold one¹: first, the testimony of a number of people who said that they had actually seen the Risen Christ; and secondly, the religious experience of others who without having seen Him, yet were conscious of moral and spiritual power which they attributed to His continued activity. The latter experience was to a greater or less degree shared by Christians generally and was felt to be a corroboration and confirmation of the direct evidence of the comparatively few who claimed to have seen Christ alive from the dead with their own eyes.

It is to such direct positive evidence that St. Paul refers at the beginning of this chapter:

'I delivered to you in chief that which had also been delivered to me, that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures had said; and that he was buried; and that on the third day, as the Scriptures had said, he was risen, and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the Twelve; after that he appeared to more than five hundred disciples at the one time, most of whom are still alive, though a few are dead: after that he appeared to James; then to the Apostles in a body; and last of all as to one whose life as an apostle began in what was almost a supersession of nature, he appeared to me also.'²

The kind of evidence offered to the Christian convert, therefore, was the evidence of isolated incidents, of appearances of Christ to individuals and groups, who subsequently reported their experiences to other Christians, and the reports circulated round the Christian communities. No

¹ Cf. M. Goguel, *La Foi à la Résurrection de Jésus dans le Christianisme Primitif* (1933), briefly reviewed in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, June 1934, p. 426.

² W. G. Rutherford's translation.

attempt was made at first to draw up a continuous historical record of the events which took place during the period immediately subsequent to the Crucifixion, and when, later on, the compilers of the Gospels addressed themselves to such an undertaking they were apparently unable to collect the necessary material.³ It is to their narratives that we must now turn.

One or two preliminary questions at once present themselves. Is there any other source for these narratives which should be placed alongside the Canonical Gospels?

There is, I think, only one such document which needs serious consideration, and that is the *Gospel of Peter*. In the *Journal of Theological Studies* (1925-1926), xxvii. 255 ff., 401 ff., Mr. P. Gardner-Smith has maintained that the evidence for the dependence of the *Gospel of Peter* upon the Canonical Gospels has been greatly overestimated, and, on the other hand, not enough has been made of the independent features of the Petrine narrative, which, in Mr. Gardner-Smith's view, are difficult to explain on the hypothesis of literary dependence. In spite of the force and ability with which Mr. Gardner-Smith presents his case I cannot feel that the arguments which he brings forward are sufficient to overcome the general impression of tendentious romancing which the *Gospel of Peter* makes upon the reader. It may be that two or three genuine reminiscences are preserved in its material, e.g. the name of the centurion (Petronius) and the accusation that the disciples intended to set fire to the Temple. But the most probable view of the book remains that advocated by the late Professor C. H. Turner (*Journal of Theological Studies* [1913], xiv. 162 ff.), namely, that it represents the earliest attempt to rehandle the documents of the Christian tradition in the Gnostic interest, and that it adds little or nothing itself to the witness of the earliest tradition of the Resurrection.

We are left, therefore, with St. Mark, St. Matthew, and St. Luke, and finally St. John.

When we turn to St. Mark we are immediately faced with the problem of the original ending of the Gospel.

Did St. Mark's autograph end at v.⁸ with ἐφοβούντο γάρ? Parallels to sentences ending with γάρ are not wanting, e.g., in the LXX Gn 18¹⁵ 45³, Is 29¹¹. But though there may be no fatal grammatical objection to such an ending, yet is it conceivable that a writer who began his account of Jesus with a flourish—albeit a modest one—

³ Cf. V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, 171.

'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,' should have allowed it to peter out in this way? There can be no question that he believed that Jesus had risen: the whole tone of his Gospel proves it beyond a doubt. It is very striking, too, how much more detailed his narrative becomes when, in ch. 11, he reaches the last week of Christ's life. Even if he did not intend to give anything like the full story of a Resurrection appearance or appearances, he would hardly be content to do less than round off his account by mentioning one or more of them, perhaps in some such a way as St. Luke deals, at the end of his Gospel, with the story of the Ascension. It may be, indeed, that the opening phrase of the Gospel ('*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ*') marking an anterior limit hints also at a posterior limit to the narrative. And the natural posterior limit to a record with this as its anterior limit is the Ascension: as St. Luke himself suggests in his summary (Ac 1²²) of the personal knowledge of Christ which was a necessary qualification for apostleship—'*beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us.*'

Professor J. M. Creed (*Journal of Theological Studies* [1930], xxxi. 175 ff.) argues that there was no continuation of the narrative, because any continuation would have been branded with inconsistency. There is latent incoherence, he maintains, in the narrative as it stands, but if it had gone further the incoherence would have become intolerable. 'Any conceivable conclusion is faced with the alternatives either of leaving the angel's message hanging in the air, or else of introducing at some point a cumbersome explanation as to why the message was not delivered.' But need the statement οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπεν mean more than that the women were for a time dumb-founded? May not the story have gone on to tell how later, through an appearance of Jesus Himself, or by some other means, the women regained their self-possession and then delivered the message with which they had been entrusted?

Professor Creed's view that St. Mark intended to explain why the tradition of the Empty Tomb had not won its way from the first deserves careful consideration, but it still leaves the Gospel with too indecisive and apologetic an ending. St. Mark is surely working up to something more positive and triumphant than this. Moreover, if 16⁷ is an interpolation, as Professor Creed follows E. Meyer in thinking, by Mark into his source, is 14²⁸ an interpolation too ('Howbeit, after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee')? The

earlier passage in itself would lead us to look for at least a mention of some appearance in Galilee after the Resurrection. It still remains quite uncertain, however, how much more the Gospel originally contained or was intended to contain—supposing that some unforeseen circumstance prevented the writer from ever finishing his work.

Professor Turner conjectures (*A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Bp. Gore; N.T., 124) that it included an appearance of Jesus to one or more of the women, an appearance to the Eleven probably in Jerusalem, and if so another appearance in Galilee, and also an appearance to Peter alone (before that to the Apostles). Professor Burkitt seems to favour the conjecture that 'Mark may have lost about a third of its original contents, and that the work once dealt with the period covered by Ac 1-12, including, for instance, the story of Rhoda, Mark's mother's maid.'¹

What, then, is our net result as far as St. Mark is concerned? We are left with the women's story of the Empty Tomb, with one reference, if not two, to an appearance of Jesus in Galilee; and also, as the text stands, a reference to an appearance to Peter alone. And even if Mk 16⁷ is an interpolation, it is (in Professor Creed's view) an interpolation by St. Mark himself into the story he is re-telling. In other words, it is part of one tradition here combined by St. Mark with another.

It seems probable that the Gospel of St. Mark as used by St. Matthew and St. Luke was no longer than it is at present. St. Matthew adds the briefest mention of Christ's appearance to the women, the story of the Guard, and a short record of a further appearance to the Eleven on the hills in Galilee. All these additions, in their present form at all events, seem to belong to a later stratum of tradition and may be compared with the story peculiar to this Gospel, already referred to, of the bodies of the saints which arose from their tombs. On one point St. Matthew's testimony may be noted as agreeing with St. Mark's in locating the appearance to the Eleven in Galilee, and not in Jerusalem. Here the two stand together over against St. Luke. St. Luke definitely places all the appearances which he records near Jerusalem. Instead of Mk 16⁷, 'He goeth before you into Galilee,' he has 'remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee.' It certainly looks as though St. Luke knew of no appearances in Galilee. It does not, of course, follow that no appearances whatever actually took place there, but only that

¹ *Christian Beginnings* (1924), 83.

St. Luke himself knew of none. And, on general grounds, the probability is that at least the first and main appearances were associated with Jerusalem. As Professor Burkitt points out, we have no evidence that 'Christians were established in Galilee till the days when Christians were to be found in every corner of the Empire. As soon as we know anything about the earliest Christians, we find them in Jerusalem and nowhere else.'

In this connexion Professor Burkitt makes the interesting suggestion that Peter, about to go back to Galilee, saw the Lord on the way before he had got far from the Holy City, and that this may be the historical foundation of the well-known story of *Domine quo vadis*?

The appearance to the five hundred brethren at once, mentioned in 1 Co 15⁶, is sometimes assumed to be in Galilee. Thus the late Professor Swete writes: 'it seems certain that an appearance to so large a body of disciples at one time could only have taken place on the Galilean hills,'¹ and he is inclined to connect it with St. Matthew's record of the appearance to the Eleven in Galilee (Mt 28¹⁶⁻²⁰). Professor Burkitt, however, suggests that the appearance to the five hundred brethren at once is 'the same event that is related in the second chapter of Acts.'

However that may be, St. Luke confines himself to appearances in or near Jerusalem. Whatever sources he may have had at his disposal, the stories which he gives us are so clearly and thoroughly his own composition that we are quite unable to get behind them. In his inimitable picture of the Walk to Emmaus we have no criterion as to how much of the colouring is due to his own imagination and artistic skill. But we must note his abstention from putting into the mouth of the Risen Christ utterances like those we find attributed to Him in such writings as the recently discovered *Epistola Apostolorum* (of the second half of the second century and apparently orthodox).

The extraordinary detail given in 24^{42, 43}, 'And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish. And he took it, and did eat before them,' need not be pressed to mean more than 'It was the real Jesus and not a ghost.'²

And lastly, it is significant for a study of St. Luke's literary style and historical method to note

¹ H. B. Swete, *The Appearances of our Lord after the Passion*, 82. For sympathetic sifting of the evidence on conservative lines, this little book with its finished scholarship and grace of expression is still unrivalled.

² Burkitt, *op. cit.* 95.

how he telescopes the narrative in the last paragraphs of his first volume in such a way that an unwary reader might suppose that the Ascension took place on the night of Easter Sunday. Presumably he is doing no more than rounding off a narrative which he is about to resume in volume ii.

The Resurrection narratives in the Fourth Gospel cannot fruitfully be studied until we have made up our minds, at least to some extent, as to the general character of that Gospel as a whole. In any case it can hardly be regarded as a primary authority for pure and simple history. The problem is much too large to be raised here. It must suffice to call attention to two points only. The first is that the story of the appearance to the seven disciples by the lake, a story which may conceivably be some kind of doublet of that recorded in Lk 5¹⁻¹¹, reminds us of the tradition, preserved in St. Mark and St. Matthew, of some appearance of the Risen Lord in Galilee. The second is that those who on other grounds are convinced that Christ's body mysteriously disappeared from the earth will feel that the language used by St. John is very appropriate to such a dematerialization³: 'he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself' (Jn 20⁷).

And so we come back again to Easter Day itself. The evidence points decisively to the fact that something then happened or began to happen. The phrase 'raised the third day' or 'after three days' (both expressions are used and they mean the same) expresses a belief found in the earliest stratum of our evidence (1 Co 15⁴), and it is not sufficiently accounted for as an after-thought based upon the supposed fulfilment of some passage of Scripture. 'After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him' (Hos 6²), plainly refers to Israel. It might, after the event, be applied to Christ, but it would never in itself have *originated* the belief that He rose the third day. And from the earliest times the first day of the week (1 Co 16²) has been kept in honour of His resurrection. Something happened—but what? The evidence seems to me conclusive that the conviction that Christ was indeed alive dates from that day. On that day some person or persons were convinced that they

³ And see further J. Armitage Robinson, 'The Resurrection Appearances,' *Journal of Theological Studies* (1913), xiv. 196 ff.; cf. also C. H. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection of Christ*, 12 ff.; Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 144 ff.

had actually seen Him : Peter at least (1 Co 15⁵) : very likely the Eleven (*ibid.*). But what are we to say of the story of the Empty Tomb ?

The accounts, of course, are not in detail quite consistent with one another. For an ingenious attempt to fit them together as well as possible, reference may be made to Professor N. P. Williams's little book *The First Easter Morning* (1920). It is clear that the inconsistencies are no greater than would be expected from untrained witnesses placed in such extraordinary circumstances. Minor discrepancies in reports do not disprove that an alleged event happened. An example was given in *Punch* (20th April 1927, p. 421), where two paragraphs referring to one of Mr. Churchill's Budget speeches were printed together :

Morning Paper.—'Every little while he (Mr. Churchill) refreshed himself from a flask of what, without more definite knowledge, I can only describe as an amber-coloured liquid which barely lasted out his speech.'

Evening Paper.—'One small detail is worth recording. Mr. Churchill took only one sip from his glass during the whole of the hundred and fifty minutes.'

Yet the reader of both papers need not harbour the smallest doubt that Mr. Churchill made a long speech on the occasion referred to.

The naïveté of the accounts—especially St. Mark's—is strongly in their favour. Evidence that the women found the tomb empty cannot be ignored. Either, then, Christ's body was really, by some process beyond our present comprehension, dematerialized, or else we must look for some other alternative. Of the various conjectures which have been from time to time proposed the two least unsatisfactory are :

(a) The hypothesis that the women went to the wrong tomb¹; (b) Reville's theory² that the Jewish authorities by private arrangement themselves removed the Body for fear that the disciples might make some use of it, and that this is the fact which lies behind St. Matthew's story of the Guard.

For the Christian faith the solution of this problem is not of vital importance. Even for St. Paul the whole question of the form of the resur-

¹ See Kirsopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1912), 250 ff.

² See C. H. Robinson, *Studies in the Resurrection of Christ* (1911), 69.

rection body lost its urgency. After the severe illness to which he refers in 2 Corinthians he pictured himself after death not waiting for anything to happen to the corpse he had left on earth but immediately with Christ. 'To be absent from the body' is 'to be at home with the Lord' (2 Co 5⁸). 'To depart' is 'to be with Christ—which is far better' (Ph 1²³).

And for ourselves perhaps it is not unreasonable to suspend judgment and see whether the work of the Society for Psychical Research will throw some further light on the connexion between personality and what we call matter. If it does, the result may be that our minds will have to approach our present problem from a different point of view, a point of view which we are not now capable of adopting without further evidence.

What really is of importance for Christian belief—of first importance—is the question whether Christ (whatever happened to His body), is or is not triumphantly alive. The first Christians were absolutely convinced that He was. This conviction could never have arisen from an invention on their part. If they themselves had rescued Him in a half-dead condition and concealed Him in His weakness and distress, that would never have given them this overwhelming impression that He was the Prince of Life. Their conviction was of such a kind that it could only have arisen out of some decisive experience. The appearances of Christ enumerated by St. Paul and attested with such tantalizing brevity in the New Testament cannot be dismissed as mere illusions. Something must really have happened or the Church would never have been born. The Crucifixion itself would have been the end. It was not the end simply because the Lord did give to His disappointed and despairing followers a real signal of assurance from the other side.

Appendix.—Professor Kirsopp Lake, in the work already referred to, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1912), gives a list of 'Books on the Resurrection' (Appendix C). Among books published since, in addition to those named in the footnotes to this paper, mention may be made of the following: W. J. Sparrow Simpson, *The Resurrection and Modern Thought* (1911); P. Gardner-Smith, *The Narratives of the Resurrection* (1926); F. Morison, *Who moved the Stone?* (1930) [popular].