

THE RESURRECTION, TWO SCHOLARS, AND HISTORICAL METHOD

by J. Steve Lee¹⁵²

Christian apologetics has had a long history in defending the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Given the nature of the event the truth of the Christian religion is situated in history. George Ladd writes, “The uniqueness and the scandal of the Christian religion rest in the mediation of revelation through historical events.”¹⁵³ In short, Christianity is a religion based on historical events: the life of Jesus, his teachings, the crucifixion, and, most importantly, his resurrection. William Lane Craig, well known Christian apologist, elaborates:

To some this is scandalous, because it means that the truth of Christianity is bound up with the truth of certain historical facts, such that if those facts should be disproved, so would Christianity. But at the same time, this makes Christianity unique because, unlike most other world religions, we now have means of verifying its truth by historical evidence.¹⁵⁴

This dependence or connection with history leads to the question: how does one know what occurred in the past? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for establishing historical truths? It would seem critical that a philosophy of history must be fleshed out in order to establish what can and cannot be established in order to claim with any degree of probability that Jesus rose from the dead. A sampling survey of leading evangelical apologetics reveals that much care and thought has lead to a careful assessment concerning philosophy

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¹⁵³ George Ladd, “The Knowledge of God: The Saving Acts of God,” In *Basic Christian Doctrines*. ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 7-13.

¹⁵⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 157.

of history. Two such samples are William Lane Craig, research professor at Talbot School of Theology, and Gary Habermas, distinguished research professor at Liberty University. Each has established themselves as leading experts and defenders of the resurrection of Jesus. A careful examination of how each utilize their respective philosophy of history in defending the resurrection is followed by an analysis of their method in which similarities as well as their strengths and weaknesses are assessed.

Philosophy of History

The “past” in this paper will reference *all* events that have taken place prior to the present. Obviously, not all events of the past can be established. Only a certain amount of past events are available to historians. These events, the ones that are establishable, will be referenced as “history.” History is the events that can be or are established about the past. For example, it is a historical fact (an established event) that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. A past event that we do not know, and is very unlikely that we will know, is the thoughts of Lincoln the split second before his assassination. One could speculate on what he was thinking, but it is just that, speculation, not knowledge. History is concerned with those events that we can establish. How does a historian “establish” certain events about the past?

Generally, there are two views concerning history: Historical Realists and Historical Relativists.¹⁵⁵ Historical realists believe that history is what historians discover: what occurred in the past is generally establishable. Historical relativists believe that history is what historians create: what occurred in the past is not accessible. History for the historical relativist is constructed, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the practice of the method of history. A longer critique could be provided¹⁵⁶ but historical relativism is unfounded, self-

¹⁵⁵ Historical Relativists are also termed Historical Constructionists.

¹⁵⁶ See chapter 5 “The Problem of Historical Knowledge” in *Reasonable Faith*

refuting, and incoherent, thus this study will assume a historical realism.

William Lane Craig

William Lane Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, California. Dr. Craig pursued his graduate studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (M.A.; M.A.), the University of Birmingham (England) (Ph.D.), and the University of Munich (Germany) (D.Theol.). He has authored or edited over thirty books, including *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*; *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy*, and *Reasonable Faith*, as well as over a hundred articles in professional journals of philosophy and theology. He has traveled the world debating scholars on the issue of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, two of which have been published: *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* a debate with John Dominic Crossan and *The Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* with Gerd Lüdemann.

Historical Facts

William Lane Craig utilizes a two step approach in defending the bodily resurrection of Jesus: 1) establishing four¹⁵⁷ independently established historical facts, and 2) inferring the most plausible explanation for the historical facts. The four established historical facts are Jesus' burial, the discovery of the empty tomb, his postmortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection.¹⁵⁸ The details of Craig providing the particular evidence to establish these facts is

by William Lane Craig, *In Defense of History* by Richard J. Evans, or *The Killing of History* by Keith Windschuttle.

¹⁵⁷ Earlier writings of Craig included only three established historical facts collapsing the burial into the empty tomb fact.

¹⁵⁸ See *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?*, 32-39, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, 25-32, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 45-134, and *Reasonable Faith*, 272-293.

beyond the scope of the study, but what criteria he uses to determine if an account is a historical fact is of interest.

A detailed look at the corpus of his work reveals that there seem to be four criteria needing to be met in order to establish a historical fact. The past is knowable history if 1) it is recorded in an early source, 2) it is found within multiple independent sources, 3) the event lacks any legendary development, and 4) there is no other compelling and competing story.

The first criterion is common sense: an early source. In order to claim that an event took place in the past you need to have an early source. Early sources are preferred to later sources. For example, suppose two of my students took notes of my lecture, but one took notes *during* the lecture and the other took notes five years *after* the lecture based on his memory. Obviously the notes of the student who took notes during my lecture are to be preferred over the notes of the student who took notes five years after my class, because the earlier note-taker is more likely to accurately reflect the content of the lecture. Memory fades over time.

The second criterion, multiple independent sources, is similar to the journalist principle. In the movie *All the President's Men* recall how the journalist Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward had to locate two independent sources to corroborate a story before they could go to print. Craig's criterion of multiple independent sources or attestation is similar. Simply, if two sources, independently of one another, corroborate the story, then this increases the probability of knowing the event as historically accurate. Marcus Borg, no friend of the bodily resurrection, explains, "The logic is straightforward: if a tradition appears in an early source *and* in another independent source, then not only is it early, but it is unlikely to have been made up."¹⁵⁹

The third criteria for establishing a historical fact is the source must lack legendary development. For a source to lack

¹⁵⁹Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollings, 1999), 12.

legendary development the narrative has to have a ring of truth to it or for the narrative to not have obvious embellishment. Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most skeptical New Testament scholars, confirms the burial story of Jesus in light of this criterion: “This is a historical report which makes no impression of being legendary.”¹⁶⁰ The Gospel of Peter is an obvious example of a source containing legendary embellishment.¹⁶¹

The last criterion, that of no other compelling and competing story, indicates that the absence of any opposing evidence supports the original narrative as historical. “One might contrast here the competing myths/legends about what happened to the bodies of such pagan figures as Osiris and Empedocles.”¹⁶² Craig goes on to explain, “That in the absence of any check by historical facts, alternative legendary accounts can arise simultaneously and independently.”¹⁶³ What would make a competing story compelling is the competing story’s having the attributes of the first three criteria mentioned: early source, multiple sources, independent sources, and lacking legendary embellishment.

Note that Craig, in his work on the historicity of the resurrection, utilizes these four criteria to establish four historical facts:

¹⁶⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 2d ed., Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und neuen Testaments 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 296.

¹⁶¹ The Gospel of Peter inserts between Jesus’ burial and the discovery of the empty tomb by the women how not only were Roman guards around the tomb, but the Pharisees and elders and a multitude from the countryside. They witnessed two men descending from heaven, roll back the stone of the tomb to enter, come out of the tomb with a third man. The heads of the two men from heaven reach up to the sky, while the head of the third man reaches up beyond the clouds. A cross follows them out of the tomb, and a voice from heaven asks, “Have you preached to them that sleep?” And the cross answers, “Yes.”

¹⁶² William Lane Craig, *Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 172.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

1. Jesus was buried after his crucifixion by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb
2. The tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers
3. On multiple occasions and under various circumstances different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead
4. The original disciples believed that Jesus had risen from the dead despite their having every reason not to.¹⁶⁴

For example, the first fact, that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, is 1) confirmed by the early sources of 1 Corinthians 15.3-5, 2) is found in multiple sources, namely 1 Corinthians 15 and the Gospel of Mark, 3) lacks any sign of legendary embellishment, and 4) is met with no other compelling, competing story.¹⁶⁵ The other historical facts are likewise supported in a similar fashion.

The Best Explanation

While Craig believes that one has good historical grounds for affirming these four historical facts, the question still remains: How do you best explain these facts? Craig turns to historian C. Behan McCullagh and his work *Justifying Historical Descriptions*. McCullagh lists six tests used by historians to determine the best explanation for an given historical facts:¹⁶⁶

1. The explanation must have great explanatory scope (that is, involve a greater variety of observable data).
2. The explanation must have great explanatory power (that is, make the observable data more probable).

¹⁶⁴See "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" *Jesus Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 146-162, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1981), 45-134, and *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 255-298.

¹⁶⁵ Craig, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?*, 32-33.

¹⁶⁶ C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), 19.

3. The explanation must be more plausible (that is, be implied by a greater variety of accepted truths, and its negation implied by fewer accepted truths).
4. The explanation must be less ad hoc or contrived (that is, include fewer new suppositions about the past not already implied by existing knowledge).
5. The explanation must be in accord with accepted beliefs (that is, when conjoined with accepted truths, imply fewer false statements).
6. The explanation far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting conditions 1 through 5.

The explanation “‘God raised Jesus from the dead’ passes all these tests,” according to Craig.¹⁶⁷ The explanation has greater explanatory scope (test 1) because it explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw postmortem appearances of Jesus and why the Christian faith came into being. It has greater explanatory power (test 2) because it explains why the body of Jesus was gone, the people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite every predisposition¹⁶⁸ to the contrary. It has greater plausibility (test 3) because the historical context of Jesus’ own life and claims, the resurrection serves as a divine confirmation of those claims. It is not ad hoc or contrived (test 4) because it only requires the additional hypothesis that God exists, which may not be an additional hypothesis if one already concludes from the arguments in natural theology that God exists. It is in accord with accepted beliefs (test 5) because the explanation “‘God raised Jesus from the dead’” is in accord with the widely accepted belief that dead people do not *naturally* rise from the dead. It outstrips any rival explanation in meeting tests 1-5 because those various attempts – [conspiracy theory, apparent-

¹⁶⁷ Craig, *Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment?*, 36-37. Also see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 182-184 and 295-298.

¹⁶⁸ Jewish eschatology precluded anyone resurrecting before the general resurrection of the dead of all people at the end of the world. Also, Jesus was defeated by the crucifixion both politically and religiously. Politically because the disciples leader is dead and religiously because Jesus is being cursed by God as expressed in Deuteronomy 21:23.

death theory, hallucination, and the wrong tomb explanation mentioned earlier] – have been soundly rejected by contemporary scholarship almost universally. All naturalistic explanations have lacked the explanatory power and scope of the resurrection.¹⁶⁹

Gary Habermas

Gary Habermas, Distinguished Research Professor and Chair in the department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University, is the author or co-author of over 30 books and 100 articles including *Resurrected? An Atheist & Theist Dialogue* with Anthony Flew, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, and *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*. He holds a Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Religion from Michigan State University as well as an M.A. in Philosophical Theology from the University of Detroit.

History 101

Gary Habermas in his work *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* briefly defines historical inquiry or the historical method as the process of combing through the data, considering all the possibilities, and seeking to determine which scenario best explains the data.¹⁷⁰ The criterion or principles used to search through the data help establish whether a particular report is reliable.¹⁷¹ While Habermas lists five historical principles utilized by the historian, this is not to imply that there are not other principles or that they are “hard rules for evidential proof” rather they are to “guide the historian in assessing an account of the past.”¹⁷²

The five principles that support historical claims are:

¹⁶⁹ Craig, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?*, 36-37.

¹⁷⁰ Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 32.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

1. Multiple, independent sources – “When an event or saying is attested by more than one independent source, there is strong indication of historicity.”
2. Attestation by an enemy – “If testimony affirming an event or saying is given by a source who does not sympathize with the person, message, or cause that profits from the account, we have an indication of authenticity.”
3. Embarrassing admissions – “An indicator that an event or saying is authentic occurs when the source would not be expected to create the story, because it embarrasses his cause and ‘weakened its position in arguments with opponents’”
4. Eyewitness testimony – “Eyewitness testimony is usually stronger than a secondhand account.”
5. Early testimony – “The closer the time between the event and testimony about it, the more reliable the witness, since there is less time for exaggeration, and even legend, to creep into the account.”¹⁷³

These criteria are considered “common-sense principles” in determining the probability of a historical event.¹⁷⁴

The Minimal Facts Approach

One of the most curious methods in arguing for the historicity of the resurrection is Habermas’ method titled “the minimal facts approach.” In his own words:

I employ only those data that satisfy at least two major standards. Each event or saying must be 1) exceptionally well-attested on multiple grounds, which might be indicated, for example, by authenticity criteria . . . Further, 2) the event or saying must be recognized as historical by the vast majority of scholars who treat this subject, especially when they oppose the conclusion that they think is nonetheless warranted.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 36-39.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

Of these two standards, the initial one is clearly the most significant. Strong confirmation of events and sayings, each for multiple reasons, places the emphasis directly on the factual claims themselves. While the second standard, recognition by a strong majority of critical scholars, is still very helpful, this can change more readily over time, sometimes without reference to the data itself. As a chief method of investigation, this approach allows one's best historical data to be showcased in order to make the strongest case available.¹⁷⁵

In short, the minimal facts are the most significant historical events that meet two characteristics: 1) The historical events are strongly evidenced by the five historical principles cited above, and 2) the historical events are well recognized as plausible by a large majority of critical scholars who study the resurrection, especially those that do not adhere to the resurrection. This apparently avoids debates over the inspiration of the Bible and does not require a general trustworthiness of the Bible.¹⁷⁶

Habermas reports that this provides twelve historical facts that are well attested by the historical principles and are generally accepted by a large majority of critical scholars, but he limits his discussion to just six "minimal facts" in *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. The disciples had experiences that they thought were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
3. The disciples were thoroughly transformed, even being willing to die for this belief.
4. The apostolic proclamation of the resurrection began very early, when the church was in its infancy.

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http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_recentperspectives/crj_recentperspectives.htm#_edn40. Accessed May 5, 2008.

¹⁷⁶ Gary R. Habermas, "An Evidentialist's Response," *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 187.

5. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic, became a Christian due to an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.
6. Saul (Paul), the church persecutor, became a Christian due to an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

In his more apologetic work, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Habermas lists four facts that meet the “minimal facts approach.”¹⁷⁷ The first fact is Jesus died by crucifixion. Second, Jesus’ disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them. Third, the church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed, and fourth, the skeptic James, the brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.

Interestingly, a fifth fact, that does not meet the minimal facts approach, is discussed by Habermas in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*: the empty tomb. The empty tomb fact is not accepted by as many scholars as the minimal facts themselves. Yet, it is included because “there is strong evidence for it, and it is accepted as a fact of history by an impressive majority of critical scholars. Gary Habermas discovered that roughly 75 percent of scholars on the subject accept the empty tomb as a historical fact.”¹⁷⁸ The twelve historical facts (of which six are discussed in *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, and four are discussed in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*), along with the empty tomb are a result of a two year study performed by Habermas. He researched most of the published sources on Jesus’ resurrection written in German, French, and English from 1975 to 2003 which included more than fourteen hundred scholarly texts.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ He also states that there are twelve facts that meet the criteria of strongly evidence and widely accepted by scholar, but limits his focus to these four.

¹⁷⁸ emphasis in original, Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004), 70.

¹⁷⁹ Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), vii. The twelve minimal facts are: 1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion. 2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb. 3. Soon afterward, the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope. 4. Jesus’ tomb was found empty very soon after his interment.

Comparison of Methods

These two leading defenders of the bodily resurrection have greatly set the course for future Christian apologists.¹⁸⁰ A careful comparison of each apologist's philosophy of history in defending the resurrection reveals several similarities along with key differences. A notable discussion on the empty tomb is also of vital concern for each apologist.

Similarities

Both William Lane Craig and Gary Habermas affirm in their philosophy of history that a historical fact must derive from an early source. Habermas explains, "Obviously, the ideal is to have firsthand accounts that were recorded soon after the events being studied."¹⁸¹ He goes on to explain, "Since the

(This empty tomb fact is not as widely accepted, only 75%, as the other facts on this list, but is still accepted by a majority of contemporary scholars.) 5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus. 6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed, even being willing to die for the belief. 7. The proclamation of the resurrection took place very early, at the beginning of church history. 8. The disciples' testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before. 9. The Gospel message centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus. 10. Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshipping. 11. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic, was converted when, he believed, he saw the risen Jesus. 12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus. from Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ In fact Gary Habermas' protégé Michael Licona has taken up the mantle of his former teacher in such works as *Paul Meets Mohammed: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection* (Baker Books, 2006) as well as co-authoring with Gary Habermas *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* and is the founder of Risen Jesus Ministries with the goal of equipping 100,000 Christians to share their faith using the evidence for Jesus' resurrection.

¹⁸¹ Gary Habermas and Michael Licona *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 39.

historian does not have a certified video record of what occurred in antiquity, these principles are commonsense guides for evaluating the written record of something that is alleged to have happened.”¹⁸² Craig elaborates on the advantages of an early source by citing the Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White. According to Sherwin-White “even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core of oral tradition.”¹⁸³ Interestingly, the *Gospel of Peter* is more than two generations removed from the event, thus the obvious embellishment of flying and speaking crosses.

Likewise Craig and Habermas utilize the historical principle of multiple-independent sources to establish historical truths. As Marcus Borg has reiterated, “if a tradition appears in an early source *and* in another independent source, then not only is it early, but it is unlikely to have been made up.”¹⁸⁴ If two or more separate sources concur on the event it is highly likely that the event took place.

Craig’s criterion of lacking legendary development or embellishment is congruent with Habermas’ principles of embarrassing admissions and attestation by enemy. Essentially the principle of reporting embarrassing detail implies that one is reporting the event accurately because if one was embellishing the story, one would not tend to contrive embarrassing details. In short, one lies to place themselves in a better light not a worse light. Thus, the inclusion of embarrassing detail indicates that one is not embellishing the story but accurately recording the event.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, an enemy’s affirming an event or saying is a sign of veracity, thus not legendarily embellished.

¹⁸² Ibid, 39-40.

¹⁸³ William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” *Jesus Under Fire* ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 154.

¹⁸⁴ Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999), 12.

¹⁸⁵ An example of embarrassing detail includes the finding of the empty tomb by women given the status of women in the first century Jewish culture.

Differences

A noticeable difference in historical methodology for establishing the resurrection is Habermas' "minimal facts approach," especially the second half. Again, Habermas explains, "While the second standard, recognition by a strong majority of critical scholars, is still very helpful, this can change more readily over time, sometimes without reference to the data itself. As a chief method of investigation, this approach allows one's best historical data to be showcased in order to make the strongest case available."¹⁸⁶ This is much more for rhetorical apologetical strategy, rather than a historical principle. Of course, it is legitimate to base much belief on a qualified authority, but truth is not determined by how many experts believe it. This would result in committing *argumentum ad numerum*. That being understood, Habermas does not commit such said fallacy: "Of these two standards, the initial one [historical principles] is clearly the most significant. Strong confirmation of events and sayings, each for multiple reasons, places the emphasis directly on the factual claims themselves."¹⁸⁷

Another noticeable difference in the presentation of the empty tomb historical fact is found in comparing Craig and Habermas. Craig, in many of his works,¹⁸⁸ leads his examination of the historicity of the resurrection with an extended look at the evidence of the tomb of Jesus being found empty. He tends to always conclude the examination with the following: "Jacob Kremer, a German scholar who has specialized in the study of the resurrection," states that, "'by far most exegetes . . . hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements over the empty tomb.' And he [Kremer] lists twenty-eight prominent scholars in support: [list of 28 scholars names]. I [Craig] can think of at least sixteen more names that he

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http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_recentperspectives/crj_recentperspectives.htm#_edn40. Accessed May 5, 2008.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 45-90 and *Reasonable Faith*, 272-280.

neglected to mention: [list of 16 other scholars names].”¹⁸⁹ Mind you, this is not a brute appeal to number, but a list of prominent New Testament scholars who adhere to the historicity of the empty tomb after Craig has detailed ten different lines of evidence that support the empty tomb narratives.

Habermas, with the use of his minimal facts approach, seemingly demotes the veracity of the empty tomb narrative. Recall that Habermas’ method employed first, strong historical evidence for support of an event and second, the historical fact is recognized by nearly all scholars who study the subject. Of the facts examined by Habermas, the empty tomb narrative only garners 75% of critical scholar support for its veracity. Thus, in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Habermas presents the empty tomb narrative as an attachment or add-on with the other historical facts:

All four [death by crucifixion, disciples believed he rose and appeared to them, the church persecutor Paul became a believer, the skeptical brother of Jesus James was changed] meet our ‘minimal facts approach’ criteria. They are backed by so much evidence that nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones, accepts them. A fifth fact will be *added* that enjoys acceptance by an impressive majority of scholars, *though not by nearly all*.¹⁹⁰

He even titles the chapter “4+1.” Four facts that meet his criteria and one, the empty tomb, that does not.

Craig seems to put much more substance and support behind the empty tomb narrative, which seems quite necessary to be established in order to argue for the historicity of the resurrection. While Habermas is not implying that the empty tomb narrative is not supported, either by historical investigation or critical scholarship, the nature of his rhetoric could be mistakenly construed to be a weakness when it is not. The veracity is not at issue, but it is rather a psychological issue

¹⁸⁹ Craig, *The Son Rises*, 84-85.

¹⁹⁰ Habermas, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 48.

of comparing 90% to 75%. One could mistakenly believe that the empty tomb narrative does not have the support for historical veracity given the high consensus for the other historical narratives.¹⁹¹ This is unfortunate given the fine job Habermas actually does in supporting the empty tomb narrative. In fact, the minimal facts approach seems to not only present strong evidential support for the relevant historical facts, it makes belief in those facts exceedingly compelling, which he obviously intended.¹⁹²

Conclusion

The contemporary Christian scholars arguing for Jesus' resurrection has certainly raised the bar in their use of philosophy of history as demonstrated by William Lane Craig and Gary Habermas. Other scholars have done exceptionally as well in their historical approach in supporting the historicity of the resurrection. A brief mentioning would include N. T. Wright and his proposed six volume work utilizing the method of "Critical Realism"¹⁹³; Stephen T. Davis, the Russell K Pitzer

¹⁹¹ Dr. Habermas was kind enough to preview this paper and provided a more up to date historical research he has collected for the veracity of the empty tomb narrative. A portion of that correspondence is provided: Even the source you use there ("*Risen Jesus*," pp. 23-24) provides six reasons for the empty tomb (although you couldn't know this yet, I am working on a manuscript that contains almost two dozen historical considerations favoring the empty tomb). As you note, it is called "+1" in "*Case for the Resurrection*" not because the evidence is weak, but because it doesn't have the high range of support (say, 95% or more) that each in the other short list of facts enjoys. In other words, it is the current state of the scholarly agreement (criterion #2) that causes my slight differentiation rather than the historical evidence in its favor. As a matter of fact, my list of scholars who agree with the empty tomb is far longer than the list Bill includes, so I am far from downgrading the event in terms of the evidence itself or even the overall amount of scholars who endorse it. As I said, it is simply due to current scholarship not reaching the levels of the other facts in the list. But my chief concern here is that you not think that I doubt the empty tomb or think others should, too. (From personal email correspondence, April 16, 2010.)

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 44.

Professor of Philosophy of Claremont McKenna College¹⁹⁴; and Richard Swinburne, the emeritus Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion of the University of Oxford and his use of the Bayesian Theorem of probability.¹⁹⁵ Christian scholars defending the historicity of the resurrection are doing anything but appealing to simple blind faith.

¹⁹³ *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress, 1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress, 1997), and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress, 2003).

¹⁹⁴ *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Eerdmans, 1993).

¹⁹⁵ *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford University Press, 2003), *Was Jesus God* (Oxford University Press, 2008).