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129 123rd Street
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“The Women Were Right - ‘On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead’”

David P. Scaer

Into the Past: Biblical Hermeneutics in the 1960 and 70s

Invitations to two Reformation conferences at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, one as a respondent and another as an essayist, opened new horizons for me in introducing me to topics to which I had not given much attention before. The first was a response to an essay by the late Professor Friedrichs of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in connection with the 200th anniversary of our nation,¹ in which I defended the legitimacy of the Revolutionary War. Lutherans hold that governments are God ordained and hence Christians are to submit to their authority. By the eighteenth century royal authority had been diffused from the king to the parliament and so in declaring their independence from Great Britain, the American colonists were exercising their common British rights.² In 1980 an invitation came with an explicit assignment for three essays on Luther’s doctrines of prayer, *Anfechtungen* and the resurrection.³ His doctrine of the *Anfechtungen* stands in stark contrast to the popular American Evangelicalism that faith guarantees a confident, prosperous Christian life. It doesn’t. Just the opposite is so. The Beatitudes have a different message: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake” and “Blessed are you when you are persecuted on account of me.”⁴ (Mt 5:3,10). For Luther prayer is where the Christian engages in hand-to-hand combat with God and he came close to calling it a means of grace and in a certain sense it was.⁵ The assignment on the resurrection came when the hermeneutical controversies, which plagued the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) and were centered at Saint Louis seminary, belonged to recent memory. The historical character of the miraculous events recorded in the Bible began to be questioned as early as the 1950s leading up to the seminary faculty walkout in February 1974. This was not an incidental matter, since the demythological approach of Rudolph Bultmann, which was the

¹David P. Scaer, “Is It Lutheran to Celebrate the American Revolution?” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1975): 66-78.

²A revision version of the essay ended up under another title. “Civil War of 1776,” *Christianity Today* 20 (July 2, 1976), 12-14.

³“The Concept of Anfechtung in Luther’s Thought.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47 (January 1983), 15-29. “Luther’s Concept of the Resurrection in His Commentary on I Corinthians 15.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47 (July 1983), 209-24. “Luther on Prayer.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47 (October 1983), 305-16.

⁴ See David P. Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church’s First Statement of the Gospel* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 75-95

⁵ David P. Scaer, *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace*. *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* 8 (Saint Louis: Luther Academy, 2008), 179-83.

1 driving engine behind the new thought, saw the resurrection of Jesus as proclaimed myth rather
2 than historical event. Jesus' resurrection is part of today's assignment, "The Women Were
3 Right - 'On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead.'"

4 According to Bultmann the gospel as the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins is not
5 dependent on a particular history. Biblical historical data could be challenged without affecting
6 the gospel's faith creating power and authority. The word was efficacious apart from the history
7 which may or may not have been behind it, an approach which characterized neo-orthodoxy in
8 general. Gospel reductionism became the shorthand description for this theology as it appeared
9 in the Saint Louis seminary. Seminex students, who left the LCMS institution for the Seminary-
10 in-Exile, the breakaway institution, were sent out to promote the new theology. They typically
11 introduced themselves to congregational assemblies as theologically conservative and only then
12 expressed their concerns about the historical character of Jonah's three-day stay in the large fish.
13 Implied was that the book of Jonah was so short as to be inconsequential and so its historical
14 character could be questioned without damaging the divine character of the rest of the Bible.
15 Jonah was only a stalking horse for the more fundamental problem of showing that it was
16 possible to proclaim the gospel even where the historical certainty about the events in Jesus' life,
17 especially his resurrection, might not be substantiated. This issue more than any other was the
18 most destructive in the course of Lutheran history in America.⁶

19 In setting forth the proclamation of salvation, Bultmann took the New Testament at its
20 face value and hence his *Theology of the New Testament*⁷ and his *The Gospel of John: A*
21 *Commentary*⁸ can be valuable in examining the biblical texts. At another level his method was
22 an extension of the nineteenth century liberal tradition which had whittled down the biblical
23 history to a bare minimum. In that century David Friedrich Strauss, Albert Schweitzer and
24 Adolph von Harnack led the way in dismantling the Bible. Strauss dismissed all as fiction.
25 Hegenstenberg accepted all as fact. Both agreed that the biblical texts could not be dismantled.
26 Though Bultmann's demythologizing dismantled the biblical texts, his theological approach kept
27 it largely in tact.⁹ He had the best of both worlds - to express it another way; he ate his cake and
28 kept it. Coming to the edge of historical agnosticism, Schweitzer, renowned as a specialist in
29 Bach organ music and medical philanthropy in Africa, conceded that Jesus was an apocalyptic
30 prophet, a view which today enjoys wide popularity.¹⁰ Von Harnack's, who's *What is*
31 *Christianity?* Bultmann edited for republication, saw Christianity's basic message as love of
32 God and the neighbor. There was something to this, but that was all he saw. In any event, he did

⁶See Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (Saint Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

⁷Trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-550).

⁸Trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray et a. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971).

⁹ Gordon H. Clark, "Bultmann's Historiography," *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966). 215-23. Henry, the founding editor of *Christianity Today* and friend of Robert D. Preus, was one of the first Evangelical theologians to tackle the new hermeneutic. The sixteen essays in this book addressed the relationship of biblical history to the gospel. Note the date: 1966.

¹⁰ "There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus." Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of the Progress from Remarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (2nd printing; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962).

1 not include in his definition of divine love in Christ's crucifixion as an atonement. Like his
2 predecessors, the resurrection was explained away and the atonement as sacrifice was replaced
3 by the exemplar theory.¹¹ Bultmann along with Martin Dibelius developed form criticism. Bits
4 and pieces of the sayings and deeds of Jesus dribbled down from those Jewish communities,
5 which had a memory of him, into Hellenist ones, but no one stage of this evolution could be
6 equated with what Jesus really said and did. Jesus as an historical figure was inaccessible, a
7 view which originated with Gottfried Lessing in the eighteenth century and still predominates
8 New Testament studies. Historical fact remains at arms length from the researcher. An
9 unadorned 'protestant' religion in the Jewish communities was the first accessible theology. It
10 then evolved within the Hellenistic communities into a theological, dogmatical and
11 organizational 'catholic' Christianity. Here his view comes close to the still current traditional
12 Reformed view that Luther's reforms contained Catholic remnants, because they did not go back
13 far into the earliest simple 'Protestantism' of apostolic era, the kind the Reformed see as
14 revisions. Bultmann offered the method of demythologizing to sift out Jewish forms from the
15 Greek ones within the New Testament documents with the understanding that the Jewish forms
16 were closer to what Jesus did and taught. In the second stage of development, miraculous
17 elements were added to the gospel by Hellenistic communities in which pagan myths about
18 miracles, virgin births and resurrections flourished. Within this context baptism as a burial with
19 Christ arose - the Lutheran view.

20 Bultmann's form critical and demythologizing methods were based on a thesis that the
21 population at the time of Jesus and the earliest Christian communities in Judea and Galilee were
22 essentially Jewish. This presupposition may be open to assessment. Even before Alexander's
23 conquest in 325 B.C., the Greeks had established trading colonies. An Edomite by birth, a
24 Syrian in upbringing, a Greek by culture and a Roman by education, Herod built a temple in the
25 port city of Caesarea in honor his patron Caesar Augustus and erected a hippodrome in
26 Jerusalem. Classical Hebrew was reserved for the temple and synagogue, but Aramaic, a
27 Hebrew dialect, was the common language (cf. Mk 15:34). Official discourse was in Greek.
28 This would also be true of the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. Latin was also known (Jn
29 19:20).

30 It would difficult to find a current prominent scholar who uses Bultmann's method of
31 demythologizing in ridding the New Testament of its Hellenist accretions. One reason for its
32 decline was practical. A Bible stripped of the miracles and the resurrection was of little help in
33 preaching. Narrative and redaction criticisms have come in their place. These approaches
34 ignored historical questions and took the biblical texts at face value. As with many, or should we
35 say all, critical approaches to the Bible are here today and gone tomorrow. New ones often turn
36 out to be recycled versions of older ones, but they do force us to look at the biblical documents
37 from another perspective. Though Bultmann's demythologizing program is no longer in vogue

¹¹David A. Brondos provides a helpful overview of various theories of the atonement from the Old Testament to the present and comes out favoring the exemplar theory. *Salvation and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). His chapter 11, "Rudolf Bultmann and the Proclamation of the Word of the Cross," 130-41, surveys this influential theologians position.

1 in New Testament scholarship, his conclusion that Jesus' resurrection cannot be an object of
2 historical investigation remains in place. Now popular forms of criticism determine the meaning
3 of the text from the perspective of the reader. For all of Bultmann's missteps and those of the
4 classical nineteenth century liberal scholars, they saw a real history behind the biblical texts,
5 even if it could only be partially recovered, if at all. Current methods are less likely to care about
6 whether anything happened "on the third day" at all.¹²

7 **Apologetics as an Alternative**

8 In the face of a method that could eventually destroy the faith, many were attracted by
9 apologetics, which remains the staple for Evangelicals for whom it plays a different role than it
10 does for Lutherans - or it at least should. Those brought up on Francis Pieper's *Christian*
11 *Dogmatics* know that the Reformed hold that the assurance of salvation is given not in the word
12 and sacraments, but in internal experiences or emotions that are regarded as the testimony of the
13 Holy Spirit.¹³ Other proofs of salvation are physical and financial prosperity and marital
14 happiness, which become central in sermons of the television evangelists. For Evangelicals, a
15 contemporary expression of the Reformed faith, apologetics as proof for faith corroborates the
16 Spirit's internal witness and, not surprisingly, it a staple in their college and seminary curricula
17 as much as philosophy is, a constituent ingredient in the Catholic diet. Without conceding a
18 role to apologetics in creating and confirming faith, Christians cannot ignore but must respond to
19 attacks on the faith. Though Lutherans, the Reformed and Catholics are separated by how we
20 understand the biblical message, we recognize that our origins are in a common biblical history.
21 An assault on historical credibility of the Bible affects us all. Doubting the common foundation
22 of Christ's resurrection puts into question God's unique participation in history through Jesus.
23 Without the incarnation Christianity deteriorates into the spirit religion resembling ancient
24 Gnosticism.¹⁴

25 In the face of the Jewish rejection of Jesus' messiahship, virgin birth and resurrection, the
26 evangelist Matthew offers the most strident apologetic. He locates Jesus' birth in the lifetime of
27 Herod the Great (2:1) and tells his hearers they can still find a cemetery for the burial of
28 strangers called the field of blood. Its name is derived from the blood money Jewish leaders paid
29 Judas Iscariot to lead them to Jesus (27:8). All this belongs to common knowledge. One does

¹² Current critical methods may be divided into three kinds. A. Historical criticism includes literary source criticism; form criticism and redaction criticism. B. Structural criticism looks at how the text is organized, looks for its symbolical meaning and mythical meaning, what lies at the bottom. C. Reader response criticism emphasizes the relationship between the text and the reader. Narrative criticism is a subcategory. Meaning in reader response criticism is given ultimately determined by the reader. This has spawned liberation theology, feminist criticism, lesbian, gay and queer criticism, post-colonial criticism and African American criticism.

¹³ Charismatic or Pentecostal phenomena, especially speaking in tongues, are regarded as the Spirit's testimonies for those groups practicing them. See David P. Scaer, "An Essay for Lutheran Pastors on the Charismatic Movement." *Springfielder* 37 (March 1974), 210-23.

¹⁴ Gnosticism is not completely unknown to us, even if it is not adorned with the bizarre elements of the second and third century Gnosticism. A nascent form was afloat among Corinthians and Colossians and provided Paul with reason to write an epistle to them. It appears in nineteenth century New England transcendentalism from which the religion of Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy emerged.

1 not have to be a Christian to know this. Matthew also tackles claims of the Jewish leaders that
2 the tomb of Jesus is empty not because of the resurrection, as the women report (28:10), but
3 because his disciples stole his body (28:11-15). At issue is not that the tomb is empty, but why.¹⁵
4 With a milder apologetic, Luke places salvation history within the reigns of Caesar Augustus
5 (2:1) and Tiberias Caesar together with an assortment of minor rulers and high priests (3:1-2), a
6 theme carried through in Acts by listing of the rulers before whom Paul appears (25:13- 26:32).
7 Apologetics looks for parallels for the biblical record in non-biblical accounts and also make use
8 of archaeology. Anyone visiting the Holy Land soon discovers the Sea of Galilee and that the
9 road from Jerusalem to Jericho in the story of the good Samaritan really does go down - and then
10 some. These places do exist.

11 **Critical Method**

12 When scholars claim that scientific methods cannot be applied to the history recorded
13 in the Bible, it should be added that these methods cannot be applied to any kind of history at all.
14 Unlike laboratory experiments, history cannot be replayed. Subjectivity belongs to every report
15 of an historical event. Each of us sees an event and then remembers and reports it in a unique
16 way. Our judicial system attempts to get more than one witness to attest to an event. Eyewitness
17 testimony is open to challenge, but hearsay is unacceptable as evidence. It may be for this
18 reason that Paul requires that before Timothy receives a charge against a pastor, three witnesses
19 must corroborate it (1 Tim 5:19). In regard to past events, we work with probability. With a
20 higher degree of probability, we approach absolute certainty. The gospel accounts of the
21 resurrection reflect the different encounters with the resurrected Jesus. They were influenced by
22 how they were remembered and reported. Cleopas and another disciples encounter the
23 resurrected Jesus before the Eleven do who assumably have heard about it from Peter (Lk 24:24;
24 33-34). Also involved is how these things were heard, remembered and preached by the first
25 followers. From their witness, memories, and the preaching of these things in the church the
26 evangelists wrote the gospels. Their sources were multiple and complex with each informing
27 and shaping the others. Lack of a monolithic report of Christ's resurrection is not an
28 embarrassment to the historical character of Christian faith, but the diversification attests to its
29 veracity and provides more avenues of appropriating this event.

30 Hermeneutical methods are not as objective as its practitioners pretend, and caution
31 should be used in speaking of *the* historical-critical method. An approach used by one scholar is
32 not used or even rejected by others. Not allowing for supernatural intervention into ordinary
33 events is an aspect common to most but not all methods, but this assertion is itself an unproven
34 bias. Consider Bart D. Ehrman.

35 "I should emphasize that historians do not have to deny the possibility of miracles
36 or deny that miracles have actually happened in the past. Many historians, for example,
37 committed Christians, observant Jews, and practicing Muslims, believe that they have in
38 fact happened. When they think or say this, however, they do so not in the capacity of

¹⁵ See David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 79.

1 the historian, but in the capacity of a believer.”¹⁶

2 For him and other scholars faith and history constitute two different realities, each with
3 its procedures. Jesus’ resurrection can be accepted in the realm of faith and not as historical,
4 because it will probably not happen again. Thus a scholar like Ehrman can trace how belief in
5 the resurrection originated in a Jewish society awaiting for apocalyptic salvation, but he remains
6 agnostic about Jesus’ resurrection as an historical event. By setting a boundary between faith
7 and history, the conclusions of what will be found in the biblical documents is determined before
8 examining them. Assumed but not proved is that Jesus’ resurrection belongs to the realm of faith
9 and not history. This is stacking the deck before the cards are dealt and shows that historical-
10 critical methods contain their own philosophical biases. Like all axioms they are immune to
11 challenge. Current historical-critical methods questioning the historical reliability of the Bible
12 can be traced to the seventeenth century philosopher Baruch Spinoza who dismantled the Old
13 Testament. Eighteenth century Rationalists and the New Testament scholars in the next centuries
14 perfected the art.¹⁷ Historical questions are not so esoteric as one might think. Matters once
15 reserved to scholars have been popularized and are more likely to come to the attention of the
16 laity. A journal like the *Biblical Archaeology Review* addresses biblical history and geography
17 in a positive way and makes for fascinating reading, even for the uninitiated, with this caveat:
18 that even though archaeology operates with the hard evidences of artifacts, the conclusions
19 drawn from them are not necessarily conclusive.

20 **A Bestseller: *The Da Vinci Code***

21 In the last years our lay people have been confronted with reinterpretations of traditional
22 views about Jesus in the forms of books and motion pictures. In spite of its claim to be a
23 fictional story in which only the figures of the Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the disciples are
24 historical, Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* comes across as fact and was a bestseller. In spite of
25 the disclaimer that its plot is fictional, it manages to deceive. A blend of fact and fiction, it had
26 a prurient attraction in holding that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and from their
27 daughter the Merovingian line of kings descended, a tale floating around Europe for some time.
28 Amazingly even the most educated treated the story as if it were real history and welcomed what
29 they saw as a challenge to traditional views about Jesus. From a Christian point of view it
30 demonstrates that even the most unsubstantiated stories can be passed off as true, but this is
31 nothing new. Islam is based on visions to Mohammed incapable of confirmation. Similarly
32 Mormonism, which is widespread in our country where it constitutes a political and financial
33 force, is based on angelic visits to Joseph Smith and golden plates conveniently flown back into
34 heaven. We cannot underestimate the power of lies.

¹⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (2nd. Ed.; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210-12. “As events that do *not* happen all the time? As events that defy all probability, miracles created an inescapable dilemma for historians. Since historians can only establish what probably happened in the past, and the chances of a miracle happening, by definition, are infinitesimally remote, they can never demonstrate that a miracle *probably* happened” (210-10).

¹⁷ For an insightful overview see David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretations of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), esp. 198-260.

1 ***The National Geographic and The Gospel of Judas***

2 Different from the explicit mix of fact and fiction in *Da Vinci Code*, the *Gospel of Judas*
3 was found on a third century parchment. It sprang to prominence when the well-respected
4 *National Geographic* featured an article on its discovery.¹⁸ Adding to the mystery was that it
5 came to light 1500 years after it has written. The article's underlying message was that the
6 church that emerged triumphant at Nicea (325 A.D.), had suppressed Gnosticism as a legitimate
7 form of early Christianity. What came to be understood as orthodox or catholic Christianity
8 resulted from a political victory of one party over another. Contained in the article was a cloak
9 and dagger story of how the document was pirated out of Egypt, offered for \$3 million and then
10 its being placed in a safe deposit box in Hicksville, New York bank. An initial bid of \$50,000
11 was rejected and one for about \$300,000 accepted. Similar murky accounts about the Dead Sea
12 Scrolls are afloat which have been misinterpreted. Finances and politics can be cloaked in
13 scholarship. There is always the fear that an ancient document might challenge Israel's right to
14 Canaan.

15 The *National Geographic* article was entitled "the Judas Gospel" with the byline "An
16 ancient text lost for 1,700 years says Christ's betrayer was the truest disciple." Observe
17 carefully that the article does not categorically say that Judas was "the truest disciple," but that
18 an ancient text says this. Reference to it as "this ancient text" gives it the ring of truth, though
19 ancient texts can be as reliable or unreliable and open to misreading as modern ones. Except for
20 a select group of scholars, readers of *National Geographic* do not have thorough knowledge of
21 ancient Gnosticism and the Gnostic gospels of which the gospel of Judas is one. Gnosticism is
22 such a diverse movement that even scholars who are engaged in it cannot provide a cohesive
23 definition. This provides fertile ground for garnering financial rewards by passing speculative
24 ideas off as if they were true. One expects this from the *National Enquirer*, but not the *National*
25 *Geographic*, whose Brahman origins give its articles the aroma of an *imprimatur*. If it is in the
26 *National Geographic*, it must be true.

27 **The Gospel of Judas: A Market for the Sensational**

28 There is a market for historical and biblical articles and so articles about Jesus predictably
29 will appear in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* around Christmas and Easter
30 Articles about Jesus sell. These articles provide a jumping off point for holiday time sermons,
31 since many of our parishioners have read them or at least are aware of them. A popular theme is
32 that Joseph of Arimathea made his fortune from exporting tin from his holdings in Britain where
33 he took Jesus as a boy and there he learned the mysteries of the Druids. All kinds of stories are
34 possible. The *National Geographic* article raised the specter that the gospel of Judas was an
35 expression of a legitimate form of Christianity that had been excluded from the canon, because it
36 challenged the beliefs of those who held the real power in the church. Except for the
37 skullduggery of the church power brokers who controlled things, the gospel of Judas would have
38 been part of our Bible today along with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. A change in

¹⁸ Rudolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer and Gregor Wurst, with additional commentary by Bart D. Ehrman, "The Gospel of Judas," *National Geographic* (May 2006): 78-95.

1 circumstances and any of these could have been omitted. It was of matter of politics, as the
2 argument goes. Had the group which had prized the gospel of Judas gotten ear of the Emperor
3 Constantine, it, with other Gnostic writings, would have constituted the canon or found a place in
4 the one that emerged. Implied was that its discovery and translation of the gospel of Judas into
5 English opened a long closed window into a form of second century Christianity, which except
6 for political machinations, would have emerged as the orthodox Christianity. Sensationalism
7 will generally find an audience, and one offering pictures of Jesus and the early church differing
8 from the canonical accounts and traditional understandings is no exception. It seems that those
9 who have known Christianity and rejected it find satisfaction in discovering that it may be
10 without foundation. Members looking for an excuse to detach themselves from organized
11 churches now find a reason to do so. Finally, they can claim that their clergy have not given
12 them the real story. Catholic Christianity, the kind found in Nicene Creeds uniting Roman,
13 Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed communions, turns out to be a lie. Should it prove true that
14 no one form of Christianity was normative in the first three centuries, those holding to orthodox
15 Christianity cannot insist that their beliefs are the right ones. Not only can varying and
16 contradictory forms of Christianity exist side by side, as they did in the first three centuries, but
17 taking it one step further, Christianity can no longer claim an exclusive position among the world
18 religions. This was the platform of eighteenth century Enlightenment Rationalism. Thus
19 attempts to secure a place for the gospel of Judas and the other Gnostic gospels along with our
20 gospels is not an essentially new phenomenon. What is new is that with the gospel of Judas we
21 have a real third-century document which was mentioned already in the second century.

22 **The Gospel of Judas among the Gnostic Gospels**

23 There are certain matters about the gospel of Judas on which the scholars are in broad
24 agreement. It is a third-century document coming from the Sethian Gnostic sect and copied from
25 an earlier second century document written in the Coptic (ancient Egyptian) language using the
26 Greek alphabet. The *National Geographic* article in dispute provides this definition of
27 Gnosticism: “Salvation lay in awakening that divine spark within the human spirit and
28 reconnecting with the divine mind.”¹⁹ Gnostic comes from the Greek word to know, *gnosis*,
29 from which our English word know derives. *Gnosis* refers a supernatural knowledge which only
30 “those in the know” have. The gospel of Judas presents him as the only one of the disciples who
31 understood that the message of Jesus was that a life without the body was superior to life in the
32 body. In the translation provided by the *National Geographic*, rather than carrying out a foul act
33 in betraying Jesus, Judas has followed his master’s orders to arrange his arrest so he could die,
34 get rid of his body and enter into a higher form of existence.

35 Problematic is that early church scholars do not agree that this is the right translation or
36 interpretation. This is rendered more complex by the lack of an intact manuscript. Scholarly
37 investigation on the gospel of Judas is still in its initial stages and so what is set forth as hardcore
38 fact is open to revision. Even when photocopies of a reconstructed manuscript are made
39 available, the Coptic language manuscript written in Greek letters will be of use only to those

¹⁹“The Judas Gospel,” 88.

1 few scholars with this competency. Should scholars agree on a translation, which is not assured,
2 they are unlikely to agree on one interpretation. While *National Geographic* presented the
3 discovery of the Judas gospel as world shattering, other gospels from the first three centuries
4 with the same kind of conflicting accounts are already available. Among them are the gospels of
5 Peter, Thomas, Mary and Truth and the Secret Book of John and the Second Discourse of the
6 Great Seth. To this add the infancy gospels which tell of Jesus performing miracles as a child.²⁰

7 If the Gnostic gospels can be traced back into the second century, it can be asked if they
8 were extant already in the apostolic era? When Paul speaks of “another gospel” in Galatians,
9 could he be referring not only to a message different from what the apostles preached but an
10 unauthorized document like those that appeared in the second century?²¹ Documents like the
11 gospel of Judas do not appear out of thin air but have a long pedigree. Putting one’s ideas on
12 papyri, even if they are false, gives them the ring of truth and allows for them to be shared over a
13 wider area and be read on Sundays, especially if they pretend to be authoritative scriptures,
14 which these documents do. All this suggests that competitive documents existed along side of
15 the apostolic ones from the very beginning.

16 In the second century Irenaeus raised objections to a document called the gospel of Judas,
17 which probably is the same one that surfaced in the *National Geographic*. If this document were
18 merely a private one, it is unlikely that Irenaeus would have even mentioned it. We may
19 presume that he voiced his objections when he learned that the gospel of Judas was read along
20 side of the apostolic gospels. Now if false written gospels were circulating in the second and
21 perhaps even the first century, there would be another good reason to suppose that the apostolic
22 gospels which they emulated were earlier - even before 70 A.D., a view with meager scholarly
23 support, but one which should be considered.²²

24 **What is Gnosticism?**

25 Gnosticism presented itself in gospels like the one bearing name of Judas. They
26 mimicked the canonical gospels using the names of New Testament persons, but their imagery
27 was often fantastic. For example, at the resurrection three men emerge from the tomb with two
28 of their heads reaching heaven and holding the head of the third beyond the heavens.²³ At its
29 core however, was Neo-Platonism, the philosophy that the material world was inferior to the
30 spiritual one. Jesus, this or that disciple and his other companions were presented in their
31 writings as the promoters of a religion that was superior to the accepted apostolic faith. Gnostic
32 gospels share such common features as ignoring or downplaying Jesus’ suffering and omitting or

²⁰ For example, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Bart Ehrman provides a paperback anthology of these writings in *New Testament and Other Early Christians Writings* (2nd; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). As the title indicates these writings are placed on the same level as the traditional New Testament writings.

²¹ Gal 1:6-7 “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

²² David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 143-50.

²³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophets of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69.

1 spiritualizing his resurrection. Gnosticism leads its followers into a higher sphere of spiritual
2 existence. Ordinary Christians are bound to laws, but the enlightened Gnostics are not. On this
3 account Gnostic documents were recognized as outside of the mainstream of catholic
4 Christianity and were rejected. Some writings like the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of
5 Hermas were accepted by some churches, but then did not find a permanent place in church life;
6 however, these were not Gnostic writings. Gnosticism existed within and outside the apostolic
7 church and may have been fueled by language found in Paul's epistles, for example, the raising
8 of the spiritual body.²⁴ Second Peter 3:15-16 may allude to a Gnostic misinterpretation of the
9 Christian message by saying that the double minded twist the things that hard to understand in
10 Paul's letters.²⁵ It also appears that the gospel of John with references to light, life and spirit
11 provided a verbal gold mine for the Gnostics.²⁶ This may have been sufficient reason for some
12 churches not to give it the same authority as the gospel of Matthew until the end of the second
13 century. There is a bit of irony in all this, since Paul, in his defense of the resurrection of the
14 body, and John, with his doctrine of the incarnation, may have fact been writing against a
15 nascent Gnosticism that had crept into the church. Consider that 2 John 7 says that the
16 Antichrist is one who denies that Jesus Christ has come into the flesh, a classical Gnostic
17 teaching. Gnosticism rose along side of Christianity and a cross pollination between the two
18 movements was inevitable. Just as the boundaries between the earliest churches and synagogues
19 in Judea were porous, so were the boundaries between Christianity and Gnosticism in the Gentile
20 churches. Every pastor knows that the world and its culture creep into the Christian message at
21 every level often in unusual ways.²⁷ In reverse Christian concepts are found in Islam, Hinduism,
22 Mormonism and even Judaism. The ministry is necessary by divine command, but also for the
23 defense of the faith. In the ancient world where devotion to the old gods was being replaced by
24 philosophies, an amalgam with Christianity to form a Christian Gnosticism was inevitable.

25 ***Et in unam sanctam, catholicam et apostolicum ecclesiam***

26 Our acceptance of the gospels constituting our canon cannot rest solely on their claim to
27 inspiration or to apostolic origins. Documents coming from heretical Gnostic communions make
28 the same claims. Also belonging to the canonical mix is the document's message and the other is
29 a document's place within the church, that is, tradition. In the nineteenth century the New

²⁴1 Cor 15:44: σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν. Εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν. The word spiritual in the New Testament is the adjective for the Holy Spirit, but in the ancient world it could easily be interpreted in the Platonic sense of the world of ideas in contrast to physical things which are shadows of the ideas.

²⁵2 Pet 3:15-16. "And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures."

²⁶ The first known biblical commentary was written by the Gnostic commentator on John by Heracleon around 170 A.D. on John Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 178.

²⁷See David P. Scaer, "Gnosis in the Church Today," *Springfielder* 38 (March 1975):334-44. Presented to a joint meeting of the Saint Louis and Springfield faculties at Springfield shortly after the majority Saint Louis faculty walkout of February 1974, it draws a correlation between recent Gnostic research and LCMS problems.

1 Testament scholar Martin Kahler made the obvious, but up to that time unspoken, observation
2 that Christ's suffering is not only part of our gospels, but constitutes their primary message. He
3 described the gospels as passion narratives with introductions. Unless one reads and understands
4 Christ's suffering, one does not understand the gospels. In the Gnostic writings Jesus' suffering
5 and suffering have no place.²⁸ Gnosticism had other distinguishing marks, though each of them
6 was not necessarily present in every one of its gospels. Among them were charismatic
7 phenomena and women preachers. Their incorporation in the world of the spirit with its
8 subsequent detachment from the physical world allowed the Gnostics to give full reign to bodily
9 desires including licentious sexual practices. Gnostics had the appearance of church. They
10 gathered in assemblies which practiced rites as sacrament. From another perspective Gnosticism
11 was a philosophical movement which existed as easily in non-Christian as it did in Christian
12 forms.

13 **November 18, 2007, 7:00 - 8:30 PM**

14 Discussion on the gospel of Judas at the annual meeting of Society of Biblical Literature
15 (SBL) meeting in San Diego was scheduled for one and half hours on Sunday evening,
16 November 18, 2007, with thirteen speakers, each chosen for having written a book on the
17 subject. Each was limited to five minutes, which was strictly enforced by Michael Williams of
18 the University of Washington, assumably an institution in the Seattle area. He gave exacting
19 attention to his wristwatch placed in his hand to assure that no one committed a temporal
20 infraction. A narrow, elongated room proved too small for the estimated three hundred plus
21 academics. Some were left standing in the hall. This was a hot topic. If the Judas gospel
22 proved to an authentic expression of early Christianity, then the religion that emerged from
23 Nicea, Constantinople and Chalcedon, what we know as catholic Christianity, could no longer be
24 considered the only legitimate expression of Christianity. Anticipation filled the air. Add to this

²⁸ April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 5. "So the barbs in the Gospel of Judas are many, all directed at the theology and practices of apostolic Christians [. . .]. The Sethians who wrote the Gospel of Judas especially found the atonement theology unconscionable. Apostolic Christianity has long defended Jesus' death as a necessary sacrifice made to God the Father for the purpose of atonement, vicariously redeeming humanity from its sins. The Sethian Gnostics found this doctrine morally reprehensible—no different from child sacrifice or murder—and thus not an action that could be condoned by God. The Gospel of Judas is fascinating in this respect, building a very sophisticated response to skewer the atonement. And one figure that they use to do this is the cursed Judas Iscariot, the demon who was responsible for Jesus' death."

1 the unlikely scenario of assembling in one program at one time thirteen world renowned scholars
2 speaking to an academically elite audience, that's at least the way some think of themselves.

3 Now we must wrestle with whether those who inhabit in the ethereal world of academia
4 play fairly in observing the same rules to produce incontrovertible objectivity. In contrast, the
5 church, in the opinion of some scholars, like all religious groups exists in the world of faith.
6 What is believed is governed by religious experiences that are not subject to historical scrutiny, a
7 matter discussed above. Pastors may have confronted college students who have been exposed to
8 this division between religion and fact when they return to their congregations with the newfound
9 knowledge. The boundary between fact and faith may have found support from what was taken
10 as objective, incontrovertible facts in the *National Geographic*, with its long history of
11 distinguished publishers and writers.

12 On that November evening with its discussion on the gospel of Judas, any idea of cold,
13 objectivity, supported by scholarly research, was mortally wounded. One of the first speakers,
14 James Robinson of Claremont Graduate University, alleged that millions of dollars were involved
15 in the *National Geographic* Judas project. Participating scholars for generous stipends had signed
16 on to agree not to give private, unauthorized interviews to the press. This immediately raised the
17 specter that what was reported in the May 2006 article, "The Judas Gospel," was not above
18 challenge.²⁹ That same scholar alleged that the manuscript from which the *National Geographic*
19 team worked may not have been intact.³⁰ Others questioned the reliability of the translation and
20 in the December 2007 *National Geographic's* press release acknowledged that a scholar on its
21 team may not have gotten the translation right.³¹ Judas may have been a culprit after all.
22 Present as panelists that evening were scholars who were involved in the *National Geographic*
23 project and were supposedly financially well rewarded for their work. These allegations dropped
24 like bombshells. *National Geographic* members on the gospel of Judas team who were present
25 were silent. This had all the marks of a cover-up, an opinion which was supported by the
26 *National Geographic's* December press release.

27 During the discussion it was revealed that some of the authors of the commentaries on the
28 gospel of Judas had not laid their eyes on the document itself. Robinson asked how could
29 commentaries be written on a document the commentators had not seen. Bishop N. T. (Tom)
30 Wright of Durham who has acquired well-deserved fame for his defense of the resurrection of
31 Jesus was the next speaker.³² In walking up to the podium Wright quipped "What does this say
32 about Q scholarship in the last century?" (For those not in the know, the majority of New
33 Testament scholars from the end of the nineteenth century until now have held that an alleged but

29 *The Secrets of Judas: The Story of the Misunderstood Gospel and His Lost Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006).

30A German student present at the recent at the gospel of Judas seminar was allowed by the chair person, though she was not included in the program. She identified herself as the author of a reconstructed critical edition of the Judas gospel in which her team had filled in the gaps. Two copies of the edited gospel had been specially sent from Germany for the occasion.

31 <http://nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/12813993.html> Downloaded 1/2/2008.

32 *Have We Missed the Truth of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

1 not extant document called “Q” was the source for materials common to Matthew and Luke but
2 not found in Mark.) An embarrassed laughter broke out from the scholarly crowd. The
3 implications was that if a document is necessary for scholarly research, then “Q” should no longer
4 be a factor in determining the origin of the gospels. Commonly held theories of the origins of the
5 gospels would come down like a house of bricks. Gerd Luedemann, a Lutheran theologian and
6 professor at University of Tuebingen, who no longer believes in the resurrection or in God,
7 claimed that the Greek word commonly translated in the gospels to betray simply means to
8 handover. With this interpretation the canonical gospels support the gospel of Judas that this
9 disciple had not committed a nefarious act.³³ Elaine Pagels of Princeton University and Karen
10 King of Harvard University gave a joint presentation extolling the gospel of Judas for offering a
11 more feminine picture of Christianity as a religion of without violence.³⁴ Simon Cathercole of
12 Cambridge questioned the gospel of Judas as a legitimate Christian document because it does not
13 speak of God’s love.³⁵ Cutting to the heart of the matter was the claim of April DeConick of
14 Rice University that the portions of gospel of Judas in the *National Geographic* were
15 mistranslated. The Greek word *daimon* may mean demon and not a good spirit. Thus Judas was
16 in league with a devil in handing Jesus over to death.³⁶ This challenged the *National Geographic*
17 article that Judas was acting at the behest of Jesus. That evening’s events did not go unnoticed. In
18 a matter of weeks the *National Geographic* on its website on December 21, 2007 explained its
19 “not making full-size, high- resolution copies of the manuscript available to outside scholars for
20 analysis,” with the promise they would be available by mid-January. On the same web page the
21 *National Geographic* seems to reverse its view and suggests that Judas was a traitor after all.

22 “Many of the Sethian [a Gnostic sect] beliefs were at odds with those of what would become
23 mainstream Christianity. The Sethians did not, for example, believe that God would have
24 sacrificed his child, Jesus, to atone for humanity’s sins. The Gnostic text contradicted the Gospel
25 of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John found in the New Testament. As a result, the Gnostic gospels
26 were later denounced by Christian leaders and refused inclusion in the Bible. No scholar of early
27 Christianity seems to believe that the Gospel of Judas provides a historically reliable account of
28 the relationship between Jesus and Judas. Instead, it is seen as the Gnostic interpretation of that
29 relationship.”³⁷

30 Questions about the Judas gospel are more than a matter of scholarly discussion. At issue is
31 whether an alternative form of Christianity existed and can exist along side of the one taken to be
32 the orthodox one. Scholars, such as Bart Ehrman, who was part of the *National Geographic*

33 *Das Judas-Evangelium und das Evangelium nach Maria. Zwei gnostische Schriften aus der Fruhzeit des Christentums* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2006)

34 *Reading Judas: The Gosel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Viking, 2007).

35 *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

36 *The Thirteenth Apostle, What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London: Continuum, 2007). In an endorsement Jane D. Schaber says says the DeConick shows how the Gospel of Judas makes “a sophisticated ironic parody of apostolic Christianity’s atonement-by-sacrifice theology and cultic activity *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126/4 (Winter 2007): 817

37 <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/new/pf/12813993.html> Downloaded 1/2/2008.

1 team, see the gospel of Judas as representing a repressed form of Christianity.³⁸ Elaine Pagels
2 sees the revival of this repressed form as instrumental in reforming a blood and guts Christianity
3 into a softer, gentler kind. At least some scholars want to place gospels like Judas along aside of
4 the traditional ones. Thus some gospel synopses place the gospel of Thomas along those of
5 Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Only in this way, so it is argued, will a more complete picture of
6 early Christianity emerge. The “Q” source, as much as it can be constructed by eliminating
7 materials parallel to Mark from Matthew and Luke, lacks references to Jesus’ death as atonement
8 and the resurrection, characteristics shared with the Gnostic gospels. If “Q” or the Gnostic
9 gospels lack references to what constitutes the second article of our creed, it is difficult to explain
10 why Christians were persecuted.

11 **A Full Time Occupation**

12 From Saint Louis seminary days in the 1950s, when the seeds of neo-orthodoxy were
13 being planted, we were first faced with a different understanding of the Bible as the word of God.
14 After that we had to come to terms to a variety of approaches. Staying current is like judging a
15 chili cookout and trying to remember how the first batch differed from the last. Each scholar
16 perfects a method unique to him/her and then applies it across the board to all the biblical books.
17 A method productive with one gospel may not capture the uniqueness of another. My working
18 with Matthew, which resulted in the publication of *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church’s First*
19 *Statement of the Gospel* and *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* gave me a place
20 from which I could evaluate the uniqueness of Mark and Luke. A bitter note of persecution and
21 death running through Matthew’s nativity account is missing in Luke. Rather than Mark being a
22 short and thus simple gospel, a reason for its being considered the first written gospel, its theology
23 is sophisticated and its presentation dramatic. Mark’s liveliness suggests that the source behind it
24 may have actually observed what it reports. This becomes important in regard to its resurrection
25 account. In the past, objections to historical critical methods could be raised on the grounds that it
26 did not allow for divine intervention in the historical accounts reported in the biblical texts.

27 This impregnable canon has been challenged by such prominent scholars as N. T. Wright,³⁹
28 Simon Gathercole, Richard Bauckham,⁴⁰ Larry W. Hurtado⁴¹ and Richard Hayes. No longer is
29 the resurrection of Jesus out of bounds for historical-critical studies.

30 *Cur alii alii non? Why Some Books Made the Cut*

31 Today some early church scholars are to give equal standing to apocryphal books with the

38 Rudolphe Kasser, Gregor Wurst, Marvin Meyer and Francois Gaudard, *The Gospel of Judas, Critical Edition, Together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007).

39 *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996); *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000).

40 *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006). Bauckham demonstrates the historical reliability of the Gospels from their listing of the witness who actually saw Jesus.

41 *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). Hurtado argues for the deity of Jesus from how the earliest Christians worshiped him as God.

1 canonical ones.⁴² Nineteenth-century liberal scholars or twentieth-century form critical scholars
2 were not likely to do this. In light of the current interest in a canon without boundaries, Lutherans
3 may have to ask how does this relate to their traditional division of the biblical books into the
4 *homologomena*, those accepted by nearly all churches, and the *antilegomena*, those which were
5 accepted by some churches but not all. Unlike Catholic and the Reformed communions, Lutherans
6 view the *antilegomena* historically and so diversity of opinion is allowed to exist. Consider that
7 The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer lists the acceptable
8 biblical books. This is also the case with the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Westminster
9 Confession of Faith (1647). Nothing like this is found in the Book of Concord. This issue is not to
10 be determined by legislative decisions of bishops, synods (conventions) or congregations or in the
11 case of the Reformed by internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ Separating the biblical books into
12 homologomena and *antilegomena* is an historical decision made by observing which writings early
13 congregations actually used. The *homologomena* may be called catholic, because of their wide and
14 in most cases universal usage. For example Matthew has a firmer place than 2 Peter. Those which
15 came to be known as the *antilegomena* were revered as Scriptures by some but not all churches.
16 The *antilegomena* were not rejected by some churches. They were simply unknown. In the second
17 century Matthew provided for the majority of preserved citations. Luke came in a weak second.⁴⁴

18 In my *Discourses in Matthew* I have argued that the writers, because of their apostolic office
19 or connection, saw themselves as vehicles of the Holy Spirit and regarded what they wrote not only
20 homilies addressed to particular historical situations but as Scriptures, that is, documents to which
21 the church would be bound until Christ returned.⁴⁵ Putting together a biblical canon, as we have it
22 now, was no more than recognizing what the churches were reading during the Sunday liturgy.
23 Books that were read in some churches but not others were regarded as antilegomena, but this was
24 not an open door for the inclusion of books that surfaced long after the apostolic period and for
25 which there was no provenance, such as the gospels of Thomas, Judas, and Peter. Provenance has
26 come into vocabulary through the PBS's "Antiques Roadshow." This means that a legitimate
27 antique or ancient artifact has to have a known history. It cannot appear out of nowhere. For
28 example, lacking fragment provenance is the ossuary alleged to be that of James, the brother of
29 Jesus. By extension provenance applies to doctrine. Any doctrine not found in the earliest
30 Christianity or traceable through the church's history is suspect. This principle was also operative
31 for Reformation era Lutherans. Hence the Augsburg Confession is intent in showing that Lutheran
32 teaching is truly catholic and not an innovation.⁴⁶ For a Gnostic writing like the gospel of Judas

42 See again Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings*.

43 Auguste Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Andre Schlemmer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949; reprint ed., 1981), 321.

44 For a thorough discussion of this see Eduard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, 3 vols. (Trans. Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht; ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni; Leuven: Peeters and Macon, Ga.,: Mercer, 1990).

45 *Discourses in Matthew*, 108-14. In a series edited by Robert D. Preus, I offered this position. *Apostolic Scriptures* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).

46 See Johann Gerhard, *Confessionis Catholicae, in qua Ecclesiae Augustanae Confessionis addicti profunder, ex*

1 there is no provenance.⁴⁷ For the *antilegomena* there is provenance but not as extensive as for the
2 *homolegomena*. About the *antilegomena* there are two misunderstandings. The first is that the
3 distinction is no longer valid, because in the course of time, the church has determined that they are
4 authentic. Secondly, all doctrines must be proven by the *homolegomena* and so the *antilegomena*
5 cannot by themselves be a source of doctrine. They can serve only to confirm what is found in
6 *homolegomena*.⁴⁸ If this were true - and it's not—one of the best passages in describing biblical
7 inspiration (2 Pt 1:17) could no long be used. Because of the circumstances in and for which some
8 were written, the *antilegomena* were not as rapidly or widely circulated as the others. James was
9 addressed to Christians fleeing Jerusalem to avoid persecution at the hands of their fellow Jews, a
10 situation not replicated in the Gentile churches. Luther's comments on what he considers James'
11 inadequate doctrine of justification added fuel to the fire.⁴⁹ For similar reasons the Sermon on the
12 Mount could be rejected, but matters are not resolved by seeing it as a pronouncement of the law.⁵⁰
13 Origin of the biblical documents is fascinating, but the Lutheran distinction between *homolegomena*
14 and *antilegomena* was not intended to allow newly discovered writings entrance into the canon or
15 to serve as a revolving door allowing books to go in and out of the canon. By maintaining this
16 distinction, Lutherans were really more catholic than anyone else, because they observed early
17 church liturgical practice and accepted it as it was and did not attempt to correct it, as the Catholics
18 and the Reformed did. In actual practice Lutherans do not differ from Catholics and the Reformed
19 in that we all do our theologies within the historically defined canonical boundaries. By giving the
20 Gnostic gospels equal standing with the traditional ones, these things have changed. Consider again
21 that some scholars argue that decisions on canon were political made by those who controlled
22 church machinery. Had Constantine allowed a different form of Christianity than was emerged at
23 Nicea in 325 A.D., then our canon might have included a gospel like that of Judas. Lutherans may
24 be uncomfortable in allowing into doctrinal discussions the principle of Vincens of Lerinum, "Quod
25 ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est," but in current gospel studies it may prove
26 indispensable.

Romano-Catholicorum Scriptorum suffragiis confirmantur. The rare book collection of
Concordia Theological Seminary contains the 1634 and 1662 Jena editions. Another edition is known to have appeared in
1690. The two volumes of the 1634 edition contains a total 2251 pages.

47 At one time I thought that the discovery of a previously unknown document claiming apostolic origin could be
considered authoritative for the church, but now I hold that a document not used by the church would have to be rejected.

48 Pieper approvingly cites the Baier-Walther *Compendium*. *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia
Publishing House, 1950-53), 1:335-36.

49 After the church moved out of Judea, it would have to deal with pagan practices and philosophies of the Gentile
converts or their being forced to adopt Jewish practices. I have taken exception to how James and the Sermon on the
Mount have been handled as law and not gospel. See my *The Sermon on the Mount and James the Apostle of Faith: A
Primary Christological Epistle for a Persecuted Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983, 1994; Eugene,
Or.: Wipf & Stock, n.d.).

50 Circumstances limited the circulation of some books. Churches could live without Second and Third John and
churches opposed to millennialism might misread the intentions of the Book of Revelation and so there might be good
ignore it. Second Peter is said to be written in clumsy Greek, but its style fits a successful Jewish businessman who
made his fortune in catching and selling fish and was without a formal Hellenist education. More than any other New
Testament book, it points to how scattered apostolic writings emerged into what we call our New Testament.

1 **1 Corinthians 15:3-5**

2 I approached my assignment for the 1980 Reformation Lectures with the prior conviction
3 that in confronting the witnesses listed by Paul, Luther would have engaged in something like the
4 apologetics, a discipline which was catching the imagination then of conservative Lutherans. With
5 the then recent disruptions in the LCMS fresh in memory, it could not have been otherwise. In
6 establishing the truth of Jesus' resurrection Paul did list the witnesses. His ordering of the witnesses
7 may have been as much according to their importance as it was chronological. Uncertain is whether
8 Peter first saw the resurrected Jesus on Easter morning or later. His being listed as the first in the
9 first column of witnesses more likely points to his preeminence among the apostles. James'
10 placement at the head of the second list is fitting for the brother of Jesus, who at the time Paul wrote
11 1 Corinthians was bishop of Jerusalem (ca. 53-55 A.D.) . Remaining in Jerusalem with the
12 followers of Jesus, including the women, James continued to have the benefit of their memory as the
13 first witnesses of the empty tomb and the resurrected Lord. More than anyone else James provided
14 the unifying factor for the church and its teachings, as it expanded from Jerusalem into Asia Minor
15 and into Europe, then Greece and Italy. With a diminishing membership, the Jerusalem church had
16 to rely on contributions from other churches, but it continued to play the determinative role for faith
17 and practice (Rom 15:25-27). Here the salvific events in Christ's life, especially his resurrection,
18 had taken place. In this city the Lord's Supper was instituted and first practiced (1 Cor 11:23) They
19 also did not know of the practice of women preachers, a matter of which the Corinthians had to be
20 reminded (1 Cor 14:33).

21 Conveniently for my approaching the 1980 assignment, Luther's doctrine of the resurrection
22 could be drawn out of his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, which fortunately was one of only two
23 chapters from the Reformer's commentary on that epistle translated into English.⁵¹ In all
24 likelihood, so I thought, Luther would put all the weight for the evidence on Jesus' resurrection on
25 the appearances to Peter, the twelve, the five hundred brothers in the first category and to James, the
26 apostles, that is, the missionaries (apostles) sent by the churches and on Paul himself in the second
27 category.⁵² Since Paul says that some of the five hundred brothers, who had seen the resurrected
28 Jesus, had fallen asleep, that is, they had died, this can only mean that a majority of them were still
29 living and known to the Corinthians by reputation and some may have visited Corinth. They could
30 even check Paul's claims that these men had seen the resurrected Jesus. Citing inaccessible
31 witnesses, especially dead ones, does not advance an argument. If chapter fifteen is anything, it is an
32 argument, an apology, a multifaceted defense of the resurrection. A flaw in the argument would be
33 fatal. Too much was at stake for Paul to be haphazard with his sources. Since Paul mentions that

51 "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15," trans. Martin H. Bertram, *Luther's Works* American Edition, 26, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 28:5-213

52 1 Cor 15:3-8. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

1 some of the five hundred had died, his failure to mention that any of the twelve had died might be
2 taken to be meaning that nearly all were still alive.

3 **Bultmann's Explanation of the Resurrection**

4 Bultmann found the origin of Jesus' resurrection in Jewish Christianity giving way to a
5 Gentile form in which pagan descriptions of their gods performing miracles and being raised from
6 the dead were applied to Jesus. This evolving form of Christianity required that the longest possible
7 time be allowed between the end of Jesus' life and the writing of the gospels. Stories like this do not
8 spring up to become established fact over night. Legends need time to be regarded as historical fact.
9 Thus dates for the writing of our gospels at the end of the first century, rather than the middle, are
10 preferable to scholars. Second century dates would even be better, but by then post-apostolic
11 church fathers are already referencing Matthew, which with its highly developed doctrine, scholars
12 ironically place as the last one written, no earlier than 85 and as late 100 AD. Basic to a late dating
13 of the gospels is that early Christian communities were so isolated from each other that each could
14 develop its own stories about Jesus, which over the years merged with other stories into our gospels.
15 Bultmann's demythologizing no longer holds the prominent place it once did in biblical scholarship,
16 but his explanation that Jesus' resurrection developed in early Christian communities still persists
17 and has found an advocate in Bart Ehrman, whose introduction to New Testament studies is widely
18 used in university religion courses.⁵³ He holds that within scattered communities the belief that
19 Jesus was just another man developed into his being revered as the Son of God.⁵⁴ This view
20 would allow certain communities to have gospels like the Judas one. Ehrman holds that when Paul
21 wrote 1 Corinthians, he believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but this did not necessarily require
22 belief in an empty tomb.⁵⁵ We want to respond to this now.

23 **1 Corinthians 15 and the Empty Tomb**

24 Paul's listing of the witnesses suggests that church did not exist in isolated communities, as
25 scholars like Ehrman hold, but already in the 50s the church was in real sense catholic, that is, a
26 congregation like the one in Corinth knew of Peter, the Twelve, and James - all leaders of the
27 church. Paul may have excluded the names of the Twelve and the other brothers either because of
28 lack of space on the papyrus, literary reasons - overkill -, or because the Corinthians did not know
29 them directly but only by reputation. Compared to Peter, the Twelve, James and Paul himself, the

53 *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. Ehrman holds that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher and that after his death his apocalyptic idea of a general resurrection along with titles like the Son of Man and Son of God were applied to him (253-59).

54 For a detailed presentation, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophets of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). He places the resurrection out of the reach of ordinary experiences and finds little historical support for it and explains how Jesus came to be revered as God (234-45). Albert Schweitzer is credited with view Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. Ehrman holds that the earliest Christians applied Jesus' teaching to him and so created the idea that he had been resurrected.

55 Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 253. "Interestingly, the earliest author to discuss Jesus' resurrection, the apostle Paul, does not mention the circumstance that Jesus' tomb was empty, nor does he name any women among who first believed in Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-8)." The Gospels were written later and hence less historically reliable. Earlier sources, e.g., Paul's epistles take precedence over the Gospels (43-53).

1 five hundred brothers may not have been that significant and we can only speculate who they were.
2 Whatever previous differences Paul may have had with Peter and James, the Lord's brother (Gal
3 2:11-12), he puts them aside and lists them as witnesses prior to his own testimony. It is unlikely that
4 James, the brother of Jesus, traveled far from Jerusalem where he was the bishop for the thirty year
5 span between Jesus' resurrection (ca. 30) and his own martyrdom in the early 60s. James had made a
6 reputation for himself in sparing the fledgling Christian movement from disintegration by providing a
7 way for Gentile Christians to be full members of the church without first becoming Jews (Acts 15:13-
8 21). In dealing with the Corinthians and his other churches, Paul probably had already made
9 reference to James as the authoritative figure in guiding the council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D. Unless
10 this was so, it is hard to explain why Paul named James as a witness of the resurrection. In being
11 spared the Jewish regulations, the Gentile Corinthians owed a debt to James. Being brought up in the
12 same household with Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph, he had an unmatched closeness to his
13 older brother.⁵⁶ It would have been no value to Paul to mention a witness who did not count for the
14 Corinthians.

15 **Mary Magdalene and "the other disciple"**

16 The gospel of John makes no reference to an angel telling the women to fetch Peter to the tomb,
17 but for whatever reason Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and "the other disciple" that the body of
18 Jesus had been taken out of the tomb and is supposedly missing (20:2). Historical reconstruction is
19 risky, but this is the way it might have happened. Mary leaves the tomb and assumably she knows
20 where Peter and the "other disciple" are - or that they are on the way. Apparently she accompanies
21 them back to the tomb for a second visit. There she meets and converses with the resurrected Lord.
22 She then goes to the (other) disciples to say, "I have seen the Lord" and provides them with full
23 details of her experiences at the tomb and what Jesus has told her (Jn 20:11-18). In John's gospel
24 Mary Magdalene, Thomas and Peter are those with whom the resurrected Jesus engages in extensive
25 discourses. "The other disciple," also known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (20:2), is the silent
26 listener to these conversations and assumes the obligation of reporting them (20:30-31; 21:20-25).

27 **"The women were right"**

28 Even though the women did not believe the words of Jesus that he would be raised from the
29 dead on the third day, their going to the tomb to anoint his body indicates his importance for them.
30 Discovering that the body missing adds confusion to their anxiety and sorrow. Not only is Jesus
31 dead, but the body is missing. Here we can speculate that even if Jesus had not risen from the dead, a
32 cult centered around the remembrance of his words and deeds would have arisen or at least he would
33 received the same honor given to the Old Testament prophets. A resurrection is not necessary for a
34 religion to form and thrive, e.g. Judaism, Islam and Mormonism. Jesus' resurrection distinguishes
35 Christianity from other religions.

36 "The other disciple" arrives at the tomb and from the door of the tomb scrutinizes the folded
37 burial cloths, but he gives pride of place to Peter by letting him be the first to enter the tomb (John
38 20:5-6). This may have theological significance. Though the beloved disciple has the closest

56 See Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relative of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 19-32.

1 relationship to Jesus, he does not intend to challenge Peter's place among the apostles (Cf. 1 Cor
2 15:3). Peter's prominence as the first official witness of the empty tomb is reenforced by John 21
3 where Peter initiates the fishing expedition, swims to the shore to see Jesus, receives the commission
4 to feed Jesus' lambs and sheep, raises the question of the fate of "the disciple whom Jesus loved, who
5 had lain close to his breast at the supper" (21:15-22). Paul's citing Peter as the first witness would
6 include what is reported of him in John's gospel. Whether the gospel of John was written from
7 Patmos or the vicinity around Ephesus at the end of the first century, both of which were not far from
8 Corinth, it would indicate Peter's importance in that region lasted long after his martyrdom in Rome
9 (ca. 65 A.D.) Paul's referencing Peter first points to his importance not only in Jerusalem but
10 throughout the church, which at that time extended into the far reaches of the Roman Empire.

11 As the church moved in time and space away from the events of that spring morning on which
12 the tomb was found empty, Peter's witness to the resurrection grew in importance in comparison with
13 the witness of anyone else. Due to his prominence about Jesus' disciples and his preeminence in the
14 church, he was, as long as he lived, the most important link between what really happened to the body
15 of Jesus on that Sunday and the message which the church was now preaching that he had been raised
16 from the dead on the third day. Matthew's defense that Jesus' Jewish opponents had concocted the
17 story of the body being stolen by the disciples (28:11-15) would carry weight in Jerusalem, where the
18 tomb remained accessible and perhaps in nearby Judea. Those with conflicting explanations for the
19 empty tomb could confront each other and probably did. This was not be the case for the churches in
20 Asia Minor and Europe whose members had and could not come into contact with the tomb itself, but
21 who had access to the witnesses. These churches and not those in Judea were the first to come under
22 the influence of Gnosticism, whose emphasis on the spirit would provide a reason for denying a
23 bodily resurrection. In 2 Peter 1:16-18 the writer lists himself as a witness of the transfiguration and
24 in 1 Peter 5:1 he says that he witnessed Christ's sufferings. This dovetails Paul's listing him first in 1
25 Corinthians 15 and his prominence in resurrection accounts of Mark and John.

26 **The Witness of the Twelve**

27 Since the gospels provide differing accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb and the
28 resurrection appearances of Jesus, it is difficult, yes, impossible, to provide an definitive
29 chronological ordering of the events of that morning; nevertheless the gospels are agreed that women
30 and not the disciples discover that the tomb is empty. 57 They inform the disciples of their
31 experience, but the responses are not of one kind. Peter and John apparently take the women at their
32 word and go to the tomb. Cleopas and another disciple, perhaps those who belong to the seventy (or
33 do they belong to the 500?), have learned that the women have found the tomb empty, have seen
34 angels and have heard that Jesus is alive, and on top of that, some disciples went to the tomb to
35 confirm that it really was empty (Lk 24:21-24). Add to the mystery of their conversation with the
36 resurrected Jesus is that though the two disciples do not yet believe in the resurrection, they know that

57 Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction*, 253-55. Different accounts have provided scholars reason to doubt the resurrection as an historical event. Common is that early Christians saw Jesus in terms of his own apocalyptic message which included a resurrection of God's chosen ones. Earlier accounts are more realizable than later ones. Not surprisingly for them, Mark with no resurrection account is the earliest (201-02).

1 it should be on the third day (24:7). Note that in John Mary Magdalene alone reports the tomb
2 circumstances to the disciples.

3 The prominence of the women in all four accounts of discovery and reporting of the empty
4 tomb provides a good reason to question the hypothesis put forth by Bultmann and Ehrman that the
5 resurrection of Jesus was a later creation of the church that describes his person from an apocalyptic
6 perspective. If the gospels were fabricated writings at the end of the first century, when church
7 revered the then martyred disciples as apostles, they, and not the women, would have been more
8 likely listed in the gospels as those who had discovered the tomb.⁵⁸ Note that scholars hold that 1
9 Corinthians is the first document to contain a report of the resurrection. Here the apostles and not the
10 women are listed as the witnesses. If the gospels were written a generation late, it must then be
11 explained how in them women have replaced Peter, the Twelve and James as the first witnesses of the
12 empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus.

13 **Dating the Written Accounts**

14 We now have to face the sticky wicket of dating the New Testament documents. In regard to
15 Christ's resurrection this becomes significant issue, because it affects how close we get to the event
16 itself. Documents composed at the end of the first century would not carry the weight of those
17 written 30, 40, or 50 years before as in the case of the Pauline corpus.⁵⁹ Nearly all scholars place
18 the gospels after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with an allowance for Mark being written a year or
19 two before. Absence in Mark of a resurrection appearance has been used to support the view that at
20 that time of its being written, this doctrine had not been fully developed. To allow for a more
21 developed doctrine of Jesus' resurrection, scholars place the remaining three gospels between 70-100
22 A.D., but favoring dates after 80, a time when the apostles had already been martyred and their
23 memories had become enshrined.⁶⁰ If this really was the case, it is hard to explain why the early
24 communities, out of which the accounts of the resurrection emerged, gave the prominent roles in their
25 accounts to the women and not the disciples. The women and not the disciples (1) on Saturday
26 evening buy spices to complete the burial, (2) go to the tomb and discover it empty, (3) see (an)
27 angel(s), (4) hear the angelic explanation for its being empty in that Jesus has been raised, (4) are the
28 first to see and (5) converse with the resurrected Jesus and (6) report all these things to the disciples.
29 Not insignificant things! The women lacked faith for not believing the words of Jesus that he would
30 be raised from the dead (Mk 16:7), but they and not the disciples display courage in at least going to
31 the grave of one executed for insurrection. The disciples are "Johnnies come lately." The assigned
32 topic catches all this: "The Women Were Right - 'On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead'"

33 **Apostles as Official Witnesses of the Resurrection**

34 Referring to the apostles in their roles as witnesses of the resurrection as the Eleven (Mt
35 28:16; Lk 24:33) and the Twelve (Jn 20:24; 1 Cor 15:5) minimally signifies that they possess a

58 Apocryphal is defined as a widely circulated but probably untrue account.

59 Some scholars argue that Paul knew of a resurrection but not an empty tomb, an idea which arose later and was then incorporated into the gospels. Since Paul speaks of Christ's burial, the tomb is fundamental to his proclamation.

60 Consider Revelation 14:21: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

1 special place in the church which others do not. They have been chosen by Jesus to preserve his
2 teachings and witness his deeds including his resurrection. Matthew and Luke usually refer to the
3 disciples as the Twelve, but in their function as witnesses to the resurrection refer to them as the
4 Eleven to stress the point that they have actually seen the resurrected Jesus (Mt 26:47-50; Acts 1:25).
5 Without Jesus' resurrection the gospel does not have a leg on which to stand. By recording the
6 perfidy and destruction of Judas (Mt 27:1-5; Acts 1:15-20), both evangelists provide a reason for
7 speaking of the apostles as the Eleven and not the Twelve. Paul (1 Cor 15:5) and John (20:24) speak
8 of the Twelve, even though in at that time of their writing not only is Judas excluded but also James,
9 the son of Zebedee and brother of John, the first martyred apostle (Acts 12:2). When Luke wrote
10 Acts, the apostles were called the Twelve (6:2). Mark consistently speaks of the Twelve. The
11 Twelve had heard the predictions of and then witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection and were their
12 first proclaimers. Matthew understands his gospel as the document which preserves the words of
13 Jesus and their authority for the church (28:19-20) and John saw his gospel as the instrument of
14 salvation (20:31) and the document which will preserve the acts of Jesus (21:24-25). They are the
15 leaders out of whom Christ will constitute the New Israel, that is, the church (Mt 19:28; Jas 1:1).
16 Hence they were called 'the Twelve.'

17 The Corinthians were not denying Christ's resurrection, but if their denial of the general
18 resurrection had remained unchecked, it would have led to this. Paul had to convince them that the
19 logic of their argument required denying the resurrection of Jesus. Thirty years earlier Jesus had
20 preached in a mostly Jewish world, even if he had done so in Greek. The apostles Peter and Paul
21 preached in a world which was Hellenistic in both language and culture. In this world, the material
22 sphere was regarded lower than of a reflection of the higher world of the non-corporeal. A person's
23 spirit was greater than his body. Plato was the standard and even had adherents in Jerusalem where
24 the Sadducees, who had a monopoly on the higher priesthood, denied the resurrection (Mt 22:25; Mk
25 12:18; Lk 20:27; Acts 23:6-8). Platonic philosophy did not allow for a restoration of physical things,
26 which had passed away.

27 At least by the second century, Neo-Platonism combined with paganism to form Gnosticism,
28 with its multiple deities and levels of salvation. Perhaps already in the first century it had combined
29 with Judaism and Christianity and it flourished at least up until the fourth-century. A nascent form
30 seems to have taken root among the Corinthians. This was at the root of their denial of the
31 resurrection. Left unchecked, the denial of the resurrection could corrupt their entire understanding
32 of Christ, not only in denying his resurrection but also his incarnation (Cf. 2 Jn 7). In an early stage
33 Gnosticism may have already been a problem for Luke's hearers. Jesus' disciples mistake his
34 resurrected body for a spirit or a ghost. This allows Jesus to give a discourse on his resurrected body
35 of flesh and bones and thus he cannot be a spirit. Caught between unbelief and astonishment, they are
36 asked by Jesus to see and touch his hands and feet and to provide him with something to eat. They
37 respond by giving him a fish which he eats in front of them (Lk 24:36-43).⁶¹ Combined with

61 Lk 24:37-39: But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit.

And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts?

See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.'

1 discourse with the Pharisees on the nature of the resurrected body, this pericope indicates that a
2 physical resurrection was an issue for the readers of Luke's gospel. This purports with the traditional
3 assumption that it was intended primarily for Gentiles. Similar themes run through the resurrection
4 accounts in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus accepts Thomas's challenge to show him the wounds in his
5 hands and feet (19:24-29) and prepares a fish breakfast for the disciples (20:9-13). Both Luke and
6 John take up the challenge that the resurrection is an event in the spirit and not the material world and
7 further their argument with Jesus' showing his wounds and participating in a meal. In Luke the
8 disciples prepare the fish and in John's gospel Jesus does.

9 **Peter as Witness to the Resurrection**

10 Apart from Mary Magdalene and the women, Peter is the most prominent figure in the
11 resurrection accounts. Paul knows that Peter is included in the Twelve, but nevertheless he lists him
12 separately as the first witness of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5). In the gospels, Peter stands out for
13 many reasons. Jesus chose him with James and John to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter and
14 Christ's suffering in Gethsemane. He converses with Jesus in the transfiguration and he is the only
15 eyewitness to provide a record of that extraordinary event (2 Pe 1:17-18). In all three synoptic
16 gospels, he confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the confession that would become standard in all the
17 churches (Mt 16:16). Mark and John give him a separate place in their resurrection narratives, a
18 theme which Paul picks up on (1 Cor 15:5). Luke reports Jesus' appearance to Peter, but does not
19 describe it (24:34). In the Pentecost sermon Peter presents himself with the Eleven as a witness to the
20 resurrection (Acts 2:32). A plausible explanation for Paul's placing Peter at the head of list of the
21 witnesses to the resurrection is that he may have visited Corinth. Admiration for him among some
22 members may have caused a sect to organized around him (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22). For Paul, Peter as the
23 first witness to the resurrection is the trump card. In the gospels only Jesus is mentioned more than
24 Peter. Paul refers to him four times in 1 Corinthians (1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). Not only is it probably
25 that Peter had visited Corinth, but he may have been stayed long enough to have instructed some for
26 them for baptism (1:12). The Corinthians may have even known Peter's wife (9:12). At least they
27 knew that she accompanied him on his travels.⁶² As a witness to the resurrection Peter had an
28 advantage over Paul. In his sermons Peter could relate how on several occasions he had seen and
29 conversed with the resurrected Jesus. Jesus engages Peter in a lengthy discourse about his apostolic
30 functions and responds to Peter's concerns about the fate of the disciple whom Jesus loved (John
31 21:1-23). He had received a special commission (Jn 21:7-22) beyond what was given to him with
32 the Eleven (Mt 28:16-20). Luke lists him as the first preacher of the resurrection (Acts 2:23). In
33 Mark the disciples neither are at the tomb nor do they see the resurrected Jesus, but the young man in
34 the tomb draped in the white shroud tells the women who discover the empty tomb that the should
35 inform the disciples and Peter that Jesus has been raised from the dead (14:7). Paul's saying that
36 "and that [Jesus] appeared to Cephas" was saying it all.

37 Peter was an authoritative witness to the resurrection as no other disciple, including Paul,
38 could be. In preaching the gospel from and about Jesus, he could and did recount from his own

⁶²Peter's prominence in western Asia Minor on eastern side of the Aegan Sea and in Greece on the western side is substantiated by the addressees in 1 Peter (1:1-2) who inhabit what is northwestern Asia Minor.

1 experiences about that one Sunday which changed the world forever. Unlike Peter, Paul had not been
2 a participant in the critical events of “the third day,” a phrase which became integral in the
3 resurrection account. It was also taken over into the Romanum, a second century creed from which
4 the Apostles’ Creed evolved. Peter’s knowledge of the resurrection came not only from his direct
5 encounters with Jesus, but in hearing the accounts of the women both before and after the ascension.
6 He could rehearse in his mind what had happened during the forty days. Through conversation with
7 other witnesses what he personally experienced was reenforced.⁶³ Jesus’ several appearances to
8 Peter could easily be located in regard to time and place and thus could be regarded as historical. His
9 being put to death “under Pontius Pilate” (1 Tm 6:13) provides a date and the empty tomb provides
10 location and evidence for the resurrection. In addition to being a witness of Christ’s sufferings, Peter
11 had seen the tomb (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:6-8) and the resurrected Lord not only in Jerusalem (Lk 24:36-43)
12 but also in Galilee (Jn 21:31) and over a forty-day period (Acts 1:3). His personal encounters with
13 the resurrected Jesus were confirmed by his being among the Eleven who see Jesus in Jerusalem and
14 Galilee. Paul’s reference to Peter as Cephas as the primary witness of the resurrection can hardly be
15 without meaning, since he was ordinarily known Peter (Gal 2:7-8). Cephas might be a deliberate
16 slight on Paul’s part, but Paul would have hardly degraded his major witness. One possibility is that
17 Paul’s uses the Aramaic Cephas to single out Peter’s commission to the Jews in contrast to his own
18 mission to the Gentiles. Though this is an extractive and obvious, it is too simple an explanation,
19 since Peter also understands his ministry as one to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7). This is supported in
20 there being no reference to Peter in Jerusalem after the council in that city (49 A.D.) New Testament
21 citations indicate that he visited some of the same places Paul did including Asia Minor, Greece and
22 Rome, where according to tradition he like Paul had been martyred. He was as much as an apostle
23 to the Gentiles as Paul was, as evidenced by the epistles bearing Peter’s name. Scholars have
24 suggested with good reason that in responding to Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:18, that Jesus
25 used the Aramaic and called him Cephas. In conjunction with Peter’s more formal confession
26 (16:16), the evangelist transposed Cephas into the Greek “Peter.” Another possibility is that Jesus
27 may have called his premier disciple Cephas on some occasions and Peter on others.⁶⁴ This is
28 supported by John 1:41-42 where Peter is informed by his brother Andrew that he has found the
29 Messiah (Christ). Peter’s coming to Jesus assumes that he has accepted what Andrew has said about
30 Jesus as the Christ. In response to Peter’s new found faith, Jesus says to Peter, “You will be called
31 Cephas,” though at the time the Fourth Gospel was written he was known as Simon Peter (1:40; cf. 2
32 Pt 1:2). By calling the first witness of the resurrection Cephas, Paul may also have in mind the
33 episode in which Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of living God, a confession that
34 may have already at that time had become the standard of faith for the church wherever it was found.
35 Both Peter and Paul could define their role as apostles by having seen the resurrected Lord, but Peter
36 had the advantage of having been with Jesus from the beginning up to his death and resurrection. Not
37 only had he heard Jesus say he would be raised from the dead on the third day (Mt 16:21; 17:23; 20:
38 19; Lk 9:22), but he witnessed the experiences of that day (Acts 1:15, 21-22). He participated in

63 Ignatius of Antioch writing in 110 A.D. singles out Peter as the primary witness by citing Luke 24:39 (Letter to the Smyrneans 3:2).

64 W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-97), 3:626-67.

1 them. According to all four gospels Peter had the definitive role in how the church would confess
2 Jesus as the Christ and in defining office of the apostle.

3 **Paul as Witness to the Resurrection**

4 Paul's argument for his own witness to the resurrection was of a different kind. He asks how
5 likely is it that someone who had spent all of his efforts in refuting what he considered a fiction
6 would now suffer for it (1 Cor 15:8-11).⁶⁵ What else besides the appearances of the resurrected to
7 Jesus could account for Paul's willingness to suffer for proclaiming this? This line of reasoning is an
8 *argumentum ad hominem* in reverse, because he points to what his former life was in persecuting the
9 church and to his present life in suffering for what the church believes. It resembles Luther's
10 argument that if infant baptism was not proper, as the Anabaptists held, how do you explain the
11 existence of the Christian church and such great men as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, John Gerson and
12 John Hus who had been baptized as infants?⁶⁶ As valuable as the appearance of the resurrected
13 Jesus was to Paul himself in being chosen as an apostle (1 Cor 15:8-10), it was a one-time occurrence
14 and understandably he places it last. Luke refers three times to the appearance of the resurrected
15 Jesus to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6; 22:5-10; 26:12-16).

16 **Oral Tradition and the Scriptures**

17 In response or even reaction to role Catholics give to tradition, Lutherans have stated that their
18 theology rests on *sola scriptura*. Under closer examination Lutheran churches are also guided by
19 tradition drawn and developed from the Scriptures over a period of time. Tradition is written down at
20 various stages and is regarded as authoritative in some sense. In a limited sense this is analogous to
21 the early church experience. For its first years, the early church relied more on the oral tradition of the
22 preaching of Jesus than they did the Old Testament Scriptures. These Scriptures had in their value
23 showing that Jesus was the Christ (Lk 24:27; 44-45). They provided the form for the content;
24 however, the historical content of Jesus' life that filled the outline provided by the Old Testament
25 Scriptures was oral tradition. This oral tradition, which was shaped by the Old Testament, eventually
26 was preserved in documents that were then put into collections which gradually came to resemble our
27 New Testament. In other words, there was no time when the apostles with others sat down and
28 decided to write a nearly complete New Testament, but the process began in the apostolic period.
29 Second Peter shows evidence of an embryonic canon consisting of I Peter, Matthew and the Pauline
30 epistles and anticipated Mark.⁶⁷ As soon as a church acquired its second apostolic document, it had
31 the makings of a canon. This was the case with the congregations in Thessalonica and Corinth upon
32 receiving the second of the two epistles addressed to them. (2 Cor 7:8; 2Th 2:15). These collections
33 of books differed from church to church, but it is probable that a gospel, which claimed to preserve
34 the words of Jesus, would take precedence over an epistle which was place and time specific. This
35 conflicts with the prevailing scholarly view that the epistles were written most likely from the late 40s
36 to the mid 60s and that the gospels appeared no earlier than 70 A.D. and probably some years later.
37 A date for the gospels after 80 A.D. would mean that during the church's formative years, it had to

65 Ignatius of Antioch uses the same argument in his Letter to the Smyrneans (4:2).

66 Large Catechism IV:51.

67 David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 136-50.

1 rely on oral tradition for its knowledge about Jesus' life, death and resurrection and his teachings.
2 This might have been possible for a couple of years after Jesus lived, had the church stayed in
3 Jerusalem, but as the church moved away from Judea and with the passing of years and the fading of
4 memories, written documents would be necessary for the preaching of the gospel and the establishing
5 of churches. Paul's epistles provides a modest, dogmatic outline of Jesus' life: he was descended
6 from David (Rm 1:3; 2 Tm 2:8), born of woman, crucified (under Pontius Pilate [1 Tm 6:13]), buried,
7 raised from dead on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-5), ascended into heaven and was at God's right hand
8 (Rm 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1). Noticeably absent from this Christological outline are the flesh and
9 blood of Jesus of Nazareth, his preaching and miracles. When Paul said he was not ashamed of the
10 gospel (Rm 1:11) for which he was ready to die, he was not referring to bare bones creedal formula,
11 but to everything that Jesus said and did, especially the details surrounding his arrest, trial and
12 crucifixion. Even as the New Testament took form, the people relied not on documents but on what
13 they heard read to them. Today Bibles are often free for the asking. One English translation soon
14 replaces another. They are found in church pews next to hymnals. Bulletin inserts provide the
15 readings appointed for a particular Sunday. Even the unchurched may have a Bible on the shelves.
16 In the ancient world the people did not have the luxury of books and if they did, the vast majority
17 including the upper classes, did not read.

18 Early Christian preaching that Jesus was the Christ depended on knowledge of the Old
19 Testament that would have been more extensive in the case of Jewish congregations, to which
20 Matthew directed his gospel, and less extensive in the case of the Gentiles. Mark, Luke and John do
21 not measure up to Matthew's concern for detailed Old Testament exegesis. Each evangelist handled
22 the application of the Old Testament to Jesus in his own way. One approach does not fit all. First
23 Corinthians presupposes that even its Gentile hearers knew the Genesis account of how sin entered
24 the world in Adam and the Exodus accounts of Israel passing through the sea and the story of the rock
25 (1 Cor 10:1-9: 15:22, 45), This said, predominantly Gentile congregations shortly after their
26 conversion would not have had an in depth knowledge of the Old Testament.

27 **Tradition and Written Gospels**

28 Three times Paul refers to the gospel, that is, Jesus' life, death and resurrection, things his
29 hearer had thoroughly grasped and believed (1 Cor 15:1-2).⁶⁸ Like the words of the institution of
30 the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23), his gospel belonged to established tradition (1 Cor 15:1, 3), which
31 was at the heart and center of what all the apostles, including Paul, had preached to the
32 Corinthians.⁶⁹ Paul's first argument of Christ's resurrection was a creed or confession, which this
33 congregation may have included in its services or at least they were familiar with it. In addition, it
34 may have served as an outline of his preaching. His second witness are the 'scriptures' or documents
35 and only then does he list the witnesses. All the apostles preached the same thing. Paul did not make
36 up the gospel as he went along. In fact he places himself at the end of the line. My assignment for

68 Γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν, ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐστήκατε...

69 παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς...

1 the Bethany Reformation Lectures was a mind opening experience, since, as mentioned, Luther had
2 focused not on the list of eyewitnesses but on the phrase “according to the Scriptures.” This is at odds
3 with the way contemporary apologetics which works. Putting Paul’s argument in outline form may
4 help.

5 (1) Jesus’ resurrection belongs to the gospel. (2) After a period of about twenty-fives years
6 Jesus’ resurrection belonged to established church tradition (confession) and constituted the content
7 of the apostolic preaching. (3) Jesus’ resurrection can be verified by the ‘scriptures’, leaving open for
8 now what writings Paul had in view. (4) Christ’s resurrection can be verified by the eyewitness
9 accounts in which he lists Peter, the Twelve, the anonymous 500 brothers, James, all the apostles
10 (maybe the seventy) and himself. Since some of the five hundred brethren have fallen asleep, some
11 are still living and hence accessible. These appearances of Jesus did not happen at one time or place,
12 as discussed above. (5) Logically the denial of the general resurrection leads to denying Christ’s
13 resurrection and the futility of Christian faith, a theme Paul introduces at the beginning and end of his
14 argument (15:2, 7). (6) A denial of Christ’s resurrection would show Paul to be a false witness, a liar,
15 something to which he does not take kindly, and leaves unexplained why he is now suffering for a
16 cause he once persecuted. (7) Without Christ’s resurrection the Corinthians can no longer consider
17 themselves forgiven (justified). (8) Lost are deceased members of the congregation along with those
18 who died before the gospel was preached in Corinth and for whom the Corinthians may have been
19 baptized vicariously.⁷⁰ Paul’s arguments for the resurrection are as multifaceted as they are
20 kaleidoscopic, even allowing him to defend his apostleship.

21 **Luther and “according to the Scriptures”**

22 Among the options Paul offers, Luther was attracted to the biblical one, that Christ rose
23 “according to the Scriptures,”⁷¹ This allowed him to express his characteristic doctrine of the
24 Scriptures: “The Holy Spirit, as you know, has deposited His wisdom and counsel and all mysteries
25 into the Word and revealed these in Scriptures, that no one excuse himself.”⁷² At the start of the
26 Reformation Luther’s attention quickly shifted from his Roman opponents to the fanatics who were
27 putting aside the Bible in favor of their own hallucinations, which they interpreted as the Spirit’s
28 direct workings in them. Had Luther lived after Benedict Spinoza called into dispute what was
29 miraculous in the Bible and after the Rationalists who gave natural explanations for supernatural
30 events, he might have concentrated his argument on Paul’s list of historical witnesses of the

70 ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπώλοντο. For a discussion of baptism for the dead at Corinth, see David P. Scaer, *Baptism*. Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics 11 (Saint Louis: Luther Academy, 1999), 54-59.

71 “Commentary in 1 Corinthians 15,” *Luther’s Works* 28:78-79. “First, he points out that he took from Scripture and that he proves this from with Scriptures. In the second place, he cites his own experience and that of many others who saw the resurrected Christ. But here notice how Paul adduces Scripture as his strongest proof, for there is no other way of preserving our doctrine and our faith than physical or written Word, poured into letters and preached orally by him or other; for here we find it stated clearly: ‘Scripture! Scripture!’”

72 Not surprisingly he sees the phrase against those who claim direct revelations from the Spirit, probably the followers of Schwenkfeldt. “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15,” *Luther’s Works* American Edition, 28:77.

1 resurrection. He lived when the historical events of Christ's life reported in the New Testament were
2 taken at face value. Differences with Rome had to do with how the events in Christ's life benefited
3 believers (justification) and not whether the canonical gospels were historically reliable.⁷³

4 In his discourse on 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 Luther does not identify which Scriptures Paul may
5 have in mind in the phrase "according to the Scriptures." Assumably Luther was thinking of the Old
6 Testament, as do contemporary scholars, who cannot point to the particular passages Paul had in mind
7 which looked forward to Christ's death, burial and resurrection. On the surface Luther's argument
8 that the Scriptures were the principle proof for the resurrection does grasp the importance Paul puts
9 on the phrase *κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς* by using it twice, first after Christ's death for sins and secondly after
10 his burial and resurrection on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-5). Its double use indicates that the phrase
11 was hardly incidental for Paul.⁷⁴ Since the phrase *κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς* in both cases uses the definite
12 article, Paul had particular documents in mind with which the Corinthians were so familiar that they
13 could lay their hands on them - or at least they could see them as they were read. Against the notion
14 that Paul may have been referring to the Old Testament, is that he cites specific precedence for
15 baptism and the Lord's Supper, namely the Egyptian exodus and their forty years in the wilderness
16 (10:1-8). Note that he does not provide specific Old Testament citations for Christ's death and
17 resurrection which are the essential and real content of his preaching. Hence we might conclude that
18 he was not thinking of the Old Testament at all.

19 At this point the phrase "on the third day" takes on added importance, since it places Jesus'
20 resurrection in relation to his execution administered under law. So important was the phrase "on the
21 third day", that it found a place in second and third century creeds which evolved into our Apostles'
22 and Nicene Creeds⁷⁵ It was not merely that Christ rose from the dead, but that it happened "on the
23 third day." Use of the definite article in both references is crucial in showing that Paul had in mind
24 particular documents whose authority was recognized by the Corinthians. Unless these were
25 authoritative documents, that is, "scriptures," Paul's argument for the resurrection could not stand.
26 For Paul to cite the "scriptures," "writings," or "documents," as authoritative required that the
27 Corinthians were well acquainted with them. Inaccessible documents could hardly be presented as
28 evidence. "Scriptures," pinpointing Christ's resurrection on the third day, would more likely be
29 'gospels', perhaps the ones we know, rather than scattered Old Testament references which the
30 Corinthians could hardly be expected to assemble into a creed. If our argument is plausible, then this
31 would be a case of one New Testament book quoting others, but this would not be the only case.⁷⁶

73 Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction*, 204.

74Old Testament references can be cobbled together from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, but neither provides for an explicit resurrection of the Messiah. Third day reference can be taken from Jonah or Esther, but would Paul expect the Corinthians to make these connections?

75 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (2nd edition; 5th impression; New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1986), 43-46

76Ehrman notes that 1 Timothy 5:18, "the worker is worthy of his wage," conflates Matthew 10:10 with Luke 10:7 and is placed after a citation from Deuteronomy 25:4, all of which is called "the scripture." (Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 11. David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 128.) Something similar happens in John 2:22 and 20:9, where that the evangelist in referring to a scriptures about Jesus being raised from the dead, is referring to his own gospel. (D. Moody

1 Now to the issue of the documents Paul had in mind with “according to the scriptures.”
2 Since Mark lacks a full resurrection account and does not have the third day phrase, Paul could have
3 it in mind. John has a resurrection account but not on the third day. This gospel is similarly
4 disqualified. Only Matthew and Luke fulfill both of these requirements of a resurrection on the third
5 day. Matthew’s three and Luke’s two predictions of Jesus’ death include a third day resurrection.⁷⁷
6 What about the phrase that Christ “died in behalf of sins”? Where does this come from? In the
7 institution of the Supper, Matthew speaks of Jesus’ death as one for sins (26:28),⁷⁸ the word found in
8 the Corinthians passage. Luke omits the reference to sins in the institution narrative but has “in
9 behalf of you” (22:19-20)⁷⁹ and Paul uses “behalf” to explain the value of Christ’s death. Paul
10 combines prediction of Christ’s death and resurrection and the meaning of his death found in the
11 words of institution in Matthew and Luke in saying that “Christ died in behalf of sins.”⁸⁰ Christ’s
12 death for sins is important. Without it the Corinthians would still be in their sins (I Cor. 15:17)

13 *Sepultus Est*

14 Missing from Jesus’ predictions about his end are references to his burial, but its importance
15 in is found in the account of the anonymous woman who anointed his body for burial. She will be
16 remembered wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9), probably
17 because she alone has taken seriously Jesus’ words that he will die and will be raised.⁸¹ All the
18 evangelists record the burial of Jesus and Paul includes it in the critical citation of Christian belief
19 (1 Cor 15:3-5) and so it was part of church proclamation from the beginning. Remove burial from
20 the confession about Jesus and his death may have been feigned and his resurrection fabricated.
21 Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts of the burial are similar in length (Mt 27:57-61; Mk 15:42-46).
22 John has the three Marys, including Jesus’ mother at the cross (19:25), but he does not mention that
23 they are present at the burial.⁸² Matthew agrees with John that at the crucifixion three Marys are

Smith, “When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119/1 (Spring 2000).) Second Peter 1:17 echoes Matthew 17:5. Reference to the preaching of the gospel throughout all the world may be to the document itself (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9).

⁷⁷Mt 16:21 (Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22); Mt 17:22-23 (Mk 9:30-32; Lk 9:43-44); Mt 20:18-20 (Lk 18:31-33; Mk 10:33-3). While Matthew and Luke speak of a resurrection “on the third day,” Mark consistently speaks of “after three days.” Citations with “on the third day”, here the character of a formula and so it seems that Jesus’ ordinary way of speak of his resurrection was that it was going to take place “after three days.” In the parallel citations all the evangelists speak of Jesus being killed, only Matthew speaks of being crucified, and none speak of Jesus’ dying, as Paul does in 1 Cor 15:3.

⁷⁸τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.
⁷⁹καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι, λέγων τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.

⁸⁰ Matthew 20:28 explains Christ’s death as substitutionary payment but only 26:28 says that this is payment is by his blood, that is, his death.

⁸¹“Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” Matthew could hardly be speaking of loosely formulated oral tradition, but more likely of a document which could only have been the gospel which he was writing. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 132.

⁸² Complicating our identifying of the Marys at the crucifixion, burial and the tomb is the popularity of that name at the time of Jesus. For a thorough study of this see Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, esp. 89-91

1 present and then adds other women are also there (27:55-56). Mary, mother of James and Joseph, is
2 assumably the mother of Jesus.⁸³ Mary, the mothers of the sons of Zebedee, does not seem to be the
3 “Mary Of Cleopas” in John’s gospel. In Matthew’s account of the burial, Mary Magdalene is present
4 along with “the other Mary” (27:61). Mark calls this other Mary, the mother of Joseph, which is
5 arguably the mother of James and hence also the mother of Jesus (6:3; 15:47; cf. Mt 13:55). In Luke
6 the women observe the crucifixion and the burial, but they are anonymous (23:29). In Mark the
7 Mary present at the crucifixion is called the mother of James the Less or the Little One, probably an
8 alias for Jesus’ brother, the bishop of Jerusalem (15:40). This Mary, referred to as the mother of Jesus
9 in John, the mother of James in Matthew and the mother of James and Joseph in Mark, observes both
10 his death and burial, and in Matthew she is among the women who come to the tomb (28:1). She is
11 also among the women who purchase spices to anoint the body of Jesus on the evening before the
12 discovery of the empty tomb (Mk 16:1). The Pieta, especially the one carved by Michelangelo in the
13 Vatican, commemorates the death and burial of Jesus by her holding the dead body of her son in her
14 arms. This has theological significance in that Mary in whom Jesus is conceived by the Spirit is not
15 only the vessel in which the incarnation takes place, but she is a witness to his death, burial and
16 resurrection. She becomes the chord which binds the second article of the creed together from the
17 incarnation to the ascension (Acts 1:14).

18 By calling her the mother of James, Matthew and Mark indicate that James not only is known
19 throughout the church at that time even as far as Rome, but that he is important as a witness to
20 Christ’s resurrection. As the bishop of Jerusalem, he was not only the organizational glue that held
21 the dwindling church there together but also he served as a point of reference as the church spread
22 throughout the Roman Empire. She is also probably “the other Mary” who with the other women
23 discovers the empty tomb (Mt 28:1, 5-8; Lk 24:1-3) and hears the angel’s message of the resurrection
24 and then sees the resurrected Jesus (Mt 28:1, 5-8). In the second column of witnesses Paul lists
25 James as the first, but no record exists of when this happened. However, it is likely that his mother
26 told him and her recollections of the empty tomb and the appearance of Jesus combined with his own
27 witness of the resurrection make him a credible witness. Mark links the separate accounts of Jesus’
28 crucifixion, burial and resurrection by the placing the women first at the crucifixion (15:40-41), then
29 their venturing out on the Sabbath, that is, Saturday night, to buy spices to complete the burial
30 arrangements (16:1), and finally their discovery of the empty tomb. In Matthew the women actually
31 encounter the resurrected Jesus, who commissions them to tell his disciples to go to Galilee where
32 they will see him (28:7). What is remarkable is that even though the witness of Peter and then the
33 other apostles to Jesus’ resurrection became foundational for Christian faith (1 Cor 15:3-5), the
34 women present at the Golgotha and tomb for Jesus’ burial and resurrection, and not the disciples,
35 bind these Christological mysteries together on which faith relies.

36 Mark alone records the buying of the spices for Jesus’ burial on the evening of the Sabbath,
37 that is, Saturday night, but Matthew is the only one to record the daylight events of that day. Jewish
38 leaders instrumental in rousing the crowds to demand Jesus’ crucifixion by Pilate meet together and
39 then meet with Pilate to secure the tomb against body theft (27:62-66). Matthew’s intention is to

83 Mt 13: 55 “Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”

1 show that the meeting between Jewish and Roman authorities is a formal one. They do not meet by
2 chance. With the placing of the guard at Jesus' burial spot, it had become imperially protected
3 property and trespassing was a felony. Equally important is that on Saturday morning the body of
4 Jesus is still in the tomb. He is dead. Accounts of the official meeting and the commissioning and
5 the sending of the guard to the tomb are vital in refuting the claim of Jesus' enemies that his disciples
6 had been surreptitiously taken his body from tomb (Mt 28:11-15). In discrediting Jesus his enemies
7 pointed to how Jesus had broken certain ceremonial laws (Mt 12:2; Mk 2:24; Lk 6:2). Now they
8 commit a greater offense in meeting on the Sabbath with Pilate, a Gentile on Gentile territory. Their
9 attempt to prevent the disciples from fabricating a resurrection story about Jesus shows that they
10 understood that in speaking of the temple's destruction and its reconstruction (Mt 26:61; Mk 14:58),
11 he was referring to his death and resurrection.⁸⁴ They knew their charge against Jesus of destroying
12 government property for which Jesus was executed was bogus.

13 **“The Women Were Right - ‘On the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead’”**

14 Attempts to harmonize the evangelists' accounts of “the third day” come up short, but there
15 are points of agreement. His followers, including the women, have not taken Jesus' prediction of his
16 resurrection seriously. In the case of Luke and John, some do not believe even when confronted with
17 the news (Lk 24:11; Jn 20:25). Additionally in the case of Luke, they don't recognize him, even
18 when they see him (24:16). Luke reports that disciples go to the tomb to verify that it is empty, but
19 they do not see Jesus (24:24). Thus Luke and John place the first appearance of the resurrected Jesus
20 to the disciples on Sunday evening, which occasion John uses for their receiving the Holy Spirit to be
21 commissioned as apostles (20:21-23). In all the gospels the women and in the case of the Fourth
22 Gospel only Mary Magdalene, find the tomb empty. Each Evangelist places an unusual person in or
23 at the tomb, but they are not agreed as to the number or the terms used to describe him/them.
24 Matthew and Mark have one figure and Luke and John two. Matthew and John use the word angel,
25 but differ on their number. Mark speaks of a young man and Luke two men. (In Greek the word
26 ‘angel’ means a messenger.) The synoptic evangelists agree the women present at the crucifixion
27 and burial of Jesus are the first to go to the tomb on Sunday to complete the arrangements not allowed
28 on the Sabbath. For the women the third day is not the one of the resurrection but one for preserving
29 the body of a beloved religious leader. Though they have not believed the words of Jesus that he
30 would be raised from the dead, they demonstrate a courage lacking in the disciples, but like them they
31 do not believe. While the synoptic evangelists agree in having a heavenly being inform the women
32 that the reason for Jesus' missing body is that he is risen from the dead, John has one of two angels
33 asking Mary Magdalene why she is weeping. (Why two angels?) While Matthew and Mark have the
34 tomb figure tell the women to inform the disciples about the resurrection, we are not told that they
35 actually do it. Luke does (24:10, 22). In the Fourth Gospel no instructions are given Mary
36 Magdalene, but she takes it upon herself to inform “Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus
37 loved,” that the tomb is empty (Jn 20:2).

38 Though gospel harmonies are well intentioned in answering critics who relish in the locating
39 discrepancies in the gospels to discredit their accounts, sadly these harmonies submerge the unique

84 Only John explains that Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction referred to his resurrection (John 2:19-21).

1 literary and theological character of those who first had to wrestle with what was for them and still is
2 for us an occurrence which is inexplicable according to our ordinary experiences. One explanation
3 for such diverse resurrection accounts in the gospels is that Jesus is no longer gathering his followers
4 around him, but in appearing to them in less that predictable ways and so the witnesses of the
5 resurrection are left to their own devices in how these appearances should be described and
6 interpreted. Mark has no resurrection appearance of Jesus to the women or the disciples, but
7 according what he said they will see him in Galilee (14:28; 16:7). Matthew has two commands for
8 the disciples to go to Galilee (28:7, 10), but no reference to the promise that Jesus made to see his
9 disciples there (26:32). Unlike Mark, the disciples in Matthew see Jesus in Galilee (28:16), an
10 occasion which is reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount (5:1; 8:1) and the transfiguration (17:1).
11 God gives Jesus the authority (28:16) with which Satan promised him if he worshiped him (4:8).

12 In 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 Paul preserves an ordered account of Christ's death, burial and
13 resurrection which he received from the Jerusalem church and which has been the core of the
14 church's creeds for nearly two millennia. Christ's death, burial and resurrection are what our creeds
15 are all about. The creed is a second article business. Resurrection is for us a common knowledge,
16 but on that first "third day" confusion followed confusion and ecstasy could not overcome fear.⁸⁵
17 Matthew divides the resurrection materials into three separate sections. In the first section (28:1-10)
18 the women discover the tomb empty and are informed by the angel that the tomb is empty because of
19 the resurrection of Jesus. They follow the angel's instruction to tell the disciples. On the way Jesus
20 meets them who re-enforces the angelic command to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. By
21 worshiping Jesus the women acknowledge that the crucified one is God, as also the disciples will
22 later do in Galilee (28:16) and as the wise men already have the infant Jesus (2:11). Matthew has no
23 appearance of Jesus to the disciples at the tomb or in Jerusalem. A second section (28:11-15) reports
24 that the tomb guards, who are struck and become almost as dead men by sight of the resurrection,
25 find the Jewish leaders who bribe them into telling a story of how, while they were sleeping, the
26 disciples came by night and stole the body of Jesus. Matthew provides for the authenticity of the
27 bribing in his prior reporting of how the burial ground came to be called the field of blood because
28 the Jewish leaders had used the bribe money given to Judas to buy it (27:8). These leaders had a
29 reputation for using money to attain their ends. The story told by the soldiers was still circulating in
30 Matthew's day and the field of blood still served as a burial place for strangers. Only if the gospel
31 was written before 70 A.D. could its readers actually check the veracity of these things. If the field of
32 blood did not exist when Matthew wrote, he would not have included data that could be used to
33 confirm his own report. In the third section, generally known as Great Commission (28:16-20), the
34 disciples have followed Jesus' command and gone to Galilee, where he commissioned them as his
35 apostles. A period of an undetermined length of time has elapsed between the third day and their
36 going to Galilee. Matthew sees both crucifixion and resurrection as apocalyptic moments signified
37 by earthquake(s). It is possible that the two earthquake references refer to one event, because the first
38 earthquake is accompanied by a resurrection of the saints and the second reference is placed after

⁸⁵ Mk 8:16:"And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid."

1 Jesus' resurrection (27:51, 52; 28:2).⁸⁶ Whether or not the evangelist is referring to one or two
2 earthquakes, these geological catastrophes along with the rending of the temple curtain and the
3 resurrection of sleeping saints are apocalyptic occurrences indicating that an entirely new era has
4 dawned in human history. The old wineskin has been replaced by a new one.

5 Matthew's identifying the tomb figure as the angel of the Lord attaches the account to the
6 three appearances of the angel of the Lord in dreams to Joseph (1:20; 2:13, 24) the nativity narrative.
7 These angelic appearances to Joseph combine the angel of the Lord coming to Abraham (Gn
8 22:11,15) with the dreams of Genesis Joseph (37:9). However, In Matthew's resurrection account,
9 the angel does not appear in dreams as he did to the Old and New Testament Josephs, but speaks to
10 the women, as he did to Abraham. The angel of the Lord (1) comes down from heaven, (2) pushes
11 the stone away from the door, (3) sits on top of it, (4) has a star like appearance, and (5) has clothes as
12 white as snow, which are reminiscent of the transfiguration (17:2) and anticipatory of Christ's
13 appearance in the Book of Revelation (1:14). Matthew's apocalyptic description account of the
14 resurrection carries the note of judgment against those who do not believe.⁸⁷

15 Only Matthew reports that Jesus' enemies have concocted the story of the disciples having
16 stolen the body as their explanation of the missing body. Unwittingly they substantiate the first
17 elements in the Christian proclamation of the resurrection that the tomb is empty. In asking Pilate for
18 a tomb guard, ironically Jesus' enemies testify to his past and possible future success with the people,
19 even if the disciples' preaching is based upon a fabricated account of his being raised from the dead.
20 Alive or dead Jesus is destined for apotheosis: "the last error [he rose from the dead] will be worse
21 than the first [he said he was the Son of God]" (27:62-66; 28:11-15).⁸⁸ Matthew's account of the
22 resurrection involves ordinary unbelief, sublimity and downright refusal to accept the obvious.

23 Like Matthew, Luke reports that the women, later named as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and
24 Mary, the mother of James, come to complete the burial arrangements. Upon finding the tomb
25 empty, they fall on their faces in confronting two men with star-like appearances who provide a
26 homily on the words that living people are not found among dead ones (24:4-6). The language of
27 starlight is reminiscent of the transfiguration. Jesus clothing was star bright, ὁ ἱματισμὸς αὐτοῦ
28 λευκὸς ἕξαστράπτων, as was the appearance of the two men in the tomb, ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο
29 ἐπέστησαν αὐταῖς ἐν ἑσθῆτι ἀστραπτούση. In Galilee Jesus made it clear to them, that according
30 to God's plan he had to be crucified and raised on the third day. Hence the women should not have
31 come looking for his body. Without being given a command from one of the two tomb figures, the
32 women go to tell the disciples, who in spite of the women's eyewitness account and their explanation
33 that Jesus is raised from the dead, do not believe them (24:11).

34 It might be helpful to put the Emmaus road account in perspective. Events of the previous
35 week from Jesus entry into Jerusalem as a king and concluding with being sentenced to crucifixion
36 for insurrection were no less tumultuous for the disciples than it was the general populace. Sunday

86 Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew* 399-400, n. 2.

87 Matthew's four references to Babylon in his genealogy (1:11,12, 17) may suggest a closer relationship to Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10 and 21) than what is generally recognized.

88 Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 79-80.

1 was day of pleasant release from political tension. Mob action in bringing Jesus to justice could
2 easily be interpreted as a challenge to Roman rule (Jn 19:15). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that
3 the two Emmaus disciples wanted to get away from it all. Rather than escaping from the confusion,
4 Cleopas and an anonymous disciple meet a stranger who asks them why they are rejected. In
5 response they inform Jesus, whom they do not recognize, that the tomb was found empty by women,
6 a fact confirmed by some disciples who checked this out for themselves. The report of women
7 having seen “a vision of angels” may have come from the women themselves, but it is just as likely
8 as the two disciples were interpreting events with which they could not come to terms. (24:23). Only
9 after Jesus uses the Old Testament to interpret the tomb events and engages in a meal, which is
10 arguably the Lord’s Supper, do the two disciples believe. They return to Jerusalem to tell the
11 disciples (the Eleven) of this unusual occurrence only to find out that Jesus had already appeared to
12 Peter (Simon) (24:14-35). Luke does not include an actual appearance of Jesus until that evening
13 with his appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem and asking them to look at his hands and feet (24:36-
14 49), an account paralleling his appearance to Thomas in the Fourth Gospel (20:27). In his final Easter
15 Sunday appearance, Jesus provides a second discourse showing that what has happened to him is in
16 accord with the Old Testament (Luke 24:44-48), after which he ascends (v. 50). In comparison with
17 Matthew’s vigorous polemic against the enemies of Jesus, Luke takes a more reasoned approach by
18 having the angel explain to the women that when Jesus had spoken of the necessity of his death, he
19 also spoke of his resurrection (9:22; 24:7). This episode is followed by Jesus twice explaining that
20 his death and resurrection could only be explained from the Old Testament (24:25-27; 44). This non-
21 aggressive approach seems to fit into Luke’s understanding of his gospel as a reasonable apologetic to
22 the Gentile world that with the right arguments calmly set forth, hearers of this gospel will come to
23 believe in Jesus. Whether this approach is a more or less effective than Matthew’s is one each of us
24 has to determine. Simply knowing the facts of the empty tomb is not enough to evoke faith. This is
25 as true for the Emmaus disciples, as it is for the tomb guard (Mt 28:10-15).

26 Matthew having the disciples meet Jesus in Galilee and Luke placing the ascension of Jesus
27 outside of Jerusalem cannot be the same events, though this common view is fostered by movies and
28 paintings of the Great Commission. Luke alone says that forty days elapse between the resurrection
29 and ascension. Two men with their star bright appearances in the tomb resemble the transfiguration
30 figures of Moses and Elijah who discourse with Jesus about his departure, that is, his death (9:31-
31 32).⁸⁹ Moses and Elijah were the personification of the Old Testament to which the resurrected
32 Jesus twice points (Lk 24:26; 44-46).

33 All the Evangelists take us as far as the tomb on Good Friday, but after that they go their
34 different ways. Matthew provides us with how the Jewish authorities approached Pilate on Saturday
35 to secure a guard and follow up with another meeting on Sunday. Mark begins his account of the
36 resurrection on the evening or the first part of the third day, that is, Saturday night. Only Mark
37 reports that the women purchase spices on Saturday night to be ready to go to the tomb before sunrise
38 to anoint the body, even though they know that unless the stone is rolled away they will not be able to

89 “And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

1 complete the task. One explanation is that they are so eager to perform this function, that they will
2 cross this bridge when they come to it. The stone's being described as very large (Mk 16:4) more
3 likely came from women who more than men were aware that their strength did not match the task.
4 Entering the tomb, they are awe struck by a young man, dressed in shroud inexplicably sitting on the
5 right side who tells them not to be astounded (16:5). (Why the right side? cf. Mk 10:40) Like
6 Matthew's account, the figure instructs them to look at the place where the body of Jesus was placed.
7 The young man in the white garment explains that the space has been vacated because Jesus has been
8 raised from the dead and instructs them to tell Jesus' disciples that they will see him Galilee, just as
9 he said (16:7). Mark does not mention the Old Testament Scriptures. The words of Jesus on their
10 own merits require belief. Luke and John have appearances of Jesus to the disciples in Jerusalem.
11 Mark agrees with Matthew that this will happen in Galilee, but Mark, unlike Matthew, never tells us
12 that the women tell Jesus or that they and the disciples see Jesus. The women flee from the tomb
13 with fear, trembling and ecstasy but it is left unsaid is whether the women tell the disciples. Mark
14 tells us things that can be gleaned from Matthew and Luke, but he includes unique items. The young
15 man in the tomb resembles the young man who at the arrest of Jesus in the garden flees naked leaving
16 his garment behind him (14:52). In the contrasting account of the resurrection the young man in the
17 tomb is dressed in a burial cloth, a shroud. This episode is so unique to Mark, that we might conclude
18 that he might have portrayed the tomb figure to resemble himself. In this way the Second Evangelist
19 pictures himself as a preacher of the resurrection, which of course is something every good
20 'evangelist' should do. Secondly, while the followers of Jesus in Matthew and Luke are overcome
21 with fear, in Mark they are pictured as having lost it - I can think of no better way to describe it. In
22 contrast, for Luke Easter was a day of calm discourse, but not for the disciples in Mark's gospel. If
23 the report of the women proved to be right, the disciples who had deserted Jesus had good reason to
24 be ambivalent about what his resurrection meant for them - the news was not all good, especially for
25 Peter to whom Jesus singles out (16:7; cf. 10: 37; 66-72). Bedlam best describes the condition of
26 Jesus' followers - weeping, laughing, shaking, trembling, repercussions, shifting the blame,
27 incrimination, worrying about Jewish leaders looking for them, reports of visions of angels and even
28 of Jesus himself. Mark got it right. They were astounded. Unlike the other evangelists Mark records
29 no appearances of Jesus. Mark's account may be at the edge of the apostolic era, when the church
30 could no longer rely on the eyewitnesses but only reports of the resurrection among which Mark
31 surely counted his gospel. A fourth and final point: Mark's gospel ends with "and," but nothing
32 follows the "and" and the scholars do not know why. This may have been seen as an invitation for
33 others or even Mark himself to provide an ending. It was like a story without a punch line, perhaps
34 with the suggestion that everyone who heard the story would have to add the conclusion. Whoever
35 wrote the conclusion (16:9-20) - and it might have been Mark himself - might have a thought that
36 without a conclusion some people would come to the wrong conclusion. No matter who attached the
37 conclusion, the original ending of "and" leaves the story suspended in mid air and may be that's a
38 good way to end.

39 John's gospel is slightly different. During the darkness only Mary Magdalene comes to the
40 tomb, possibly before the other women, and discovers that it is empty and runs to tell Peter and the
41 beloved disciple. Peter, who appears to be the older, gets there last, but enters first and discovers the
42 burial cloths, that is, a body bag and the chin napkin, used to keep the jaw clinched to the rest of the

1 skull, which are neatly folded. This is hardly the work of grave robbers (20:1-5). Everything is in
2 order. Is the message here that for us the resurrection of the body is extraordinary for us but not for
3 God? It is almost as if Jesus had awoken from a sleep and made his bed. As the two disciples
4 examine the grave's contents, one of two angels asks Mary Magdalene why she is weeping. She
5 answers that her Lord's body has been taken away. Then a person she thinks is the gardener inquires
6 about her well being, just as the angel had (20:13-15), whom assumably she also did not recognize.
7 When she is addressed by name, Mary recognizes Jesus and grasps his feet, which can interpreted as
8 an act of worship (20:16-18). Like in Matthew, Luke and Mark, she goes and tells the disciples to
9 whom Jesus appears that night, an account in agreement with Luke's. What we are not told is
10 whether in leaving the tomb Peter and the other disciple see Jesus, but there may be reason to think
11 they did. John includes two other appearances of the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem, the first with
12 Thomas absent and the second one with him present (20:19-29). A third episode takes place in
13 Galilee where the disciples have a miraculous draft of fishes, Peter swims to shore and is
14 commissioned by Jesus. In response, Peter asks about the fate of "the other disciple". The Fourth
15 Gospel has two conclusions (20:30-31; 21:24-25) and in both the evangelist wants his gospel to be
16 understood as instrumental in winning people to the cause of Jesus.

17 I began by saying that an assignment given me on Luther's doctrine of the resurrection some
18 years ago opened up for me the prime importance that the Scriptures had for him. Coming then from
19 another angle, I discovered that the Reformer's arguments grasped Paul's intentions in 1 Corinthians
20 15:3-5 in a way that I had not expected. Paul's argument for the general resurrection was first based
21 on a creedal formula, which all the apostolic churches were using and which could be traced back to
22 Jesus himself. However, we cannot be content with the summary content of a dogmatic or
23 confessional formula, but we must submerge ourselves in the resurrection accounts of the gospels
24 themselves, as we have briefly done here. How the evangelists recorded Jesus' resurrection reflected
25 their own perspective along with responses of the first witnesses and those who later heard the story,
26 but at the center of each account was that the Jesus' tomb was empty and he had been raised from the
27 dead. All this still astounds us. "The women were right."

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