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THE MYTH OF THE METAPHORICAL RESURRECTION:  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN'S  
METHODOLOGY, PRESUPPOSITIONS, AND  
CONCLUSIONS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Tawa Jon Anderson

May 2011

## **APPROVAL SHEET**

THE MYTH OF THE METAPHORICAL RESURRECTION:  
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METHODOLOGY, PRESUPPOSITIONS, AND  
CONCLUSIONS

Tawa Jon Anderson

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To Vanessa,

my best friend, my love,

my inspiration, and my support

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## PREFACE

Writing a dissertation has been compared to giving birth to a child. I suggest, however, that pregnancy does not last as long as a dissertation's gestation.

Perhaps a more apt analogy compares writing a dissertation to *raising* a child. There is a certain ecstasy and joy in conceiving a research project and dissertation topic. What ensues is an often difficult process of developing the seed into a viable concept; that process results in the birth of a prospectus which can feel like prolonged, painful labor. After the prospectus is birthed, it must be fed, clothed, and nurtured to full growth. There is joy, but also times of frustration as one wonders how the dissertation could have gone in such a foolish direction as *that*. Moreover, crafting a dissertation, like raising a child, is not done in isolation. Ideally, parents raising children are surrounded a support system—grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, neighbors, friends, fellow pilgrims.

Similarly, there is a network of support which has made writing this dissertation possible. I owe a debt of gratitude to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. James Parker III, for providing an appropriate balance of freedom, guidance, and correction. I am thankful for the insights and critiques of the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Mark Coppenger and Dr. William F. Cook III. This research project was conceived in the context of my cherished pastoral ministry at Edmonton Chinese Baptist Church; we miss our home church family dearly as I bring this project to term.

I am grateful to friends and colleagues who have challenged my thinking, pushed my research, and motivated my perseverance over the years—David Arndt, Mark

Maney, Ari Carr, Yong-Won (James) Lee, Brad Weldy, and Syd Page. I am also thankful for the mentors and advisors who encouraged me to pursue God's calling to doctoral studies, particularly Drs. Sydney Page and Jerry Shepherd, and Revs. Greg Idell, Peter Ng, Owen Bayne, Salt Jones, and Jack Knight.

Pregnancy brings on the occasional mood swing, and my family has experienced the bulk of them throughout this process. Our three children, Mataeo, Alethea, and Keilani, have been a constant source of joy and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. We embarked on this journey together, and I am thankful for the way God has sustained us and drawn us closer as a family. They have often brought a smile to my face and warmth to my heart when I felt particularly discouraged. They have always reminded me, not only verbally but simply through their presence, that this dissertation is far from my most important earthly legacy. I am blessed among fathers!

Behind every successful married Ph.D. student is an amazing wife. I could never have returned to school, let alone completed doctoral studies, without the support and love of my wife, Vanessa. She has been a constant source of encouragement, believing in me when I no longer believed in myself. It is to Vanessa that I dedicate this dissertation.

Finally, I thank God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, without whom all would be vanity. In all I do, I pray He will be honored and glorified.

Tawa J. Anderson

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. . . .

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. . . .

. . . If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. . . . If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor 15:1, 3-8, 13-20)<sup>1</sup>

### **The Centrality of Resurrection Belief in Christianity**

Christianity is an historical religion, fundamentally and inextricably tied to the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Historic orthodox Christianity has traditionally affirmed the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostles Creed records a confession of faith from the early church. After affirming the crucifixion and death of Jesus, it

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>As noted, e.g., by C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 2.

proceeds to proclaim that “He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead.” Similarly, the fourth century Nicene Creed affirms that “for our sake he [Jesus] was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” The early church fathers similarly professed the importance of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus was unquestioned in Christendom through the Middle Ages. Adherents of Islam and other religions rejected Christian belief in Christ’s resurrection; but within the confines of Western Christianity, the resurrection was proclaimed and accepted. With the dawn of the Enlightenment, however, challenges to resurrection faith began to arise within the Christian West.

Following the development of deism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Scottish skeptic David Hume (1711-1776) launched a well-known critique of miracles in general, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ in particular. Hume argued that within a modern mindset acknowledging the universal applicability of the laws of nature, belief in miracles (like the resurrection) was uncivilized and infantile.

Hume’s philosophical critique was complemented by the conclusions of critical biblical scholars. Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768), influenced strongly by Enlightenment deism, rejected the supernatural elements of the Gospels including, quite naturally, the resurrection of Jesus. David Strauss (1808-1874) argued that the New Testament is so full of supernatural miracles and factual contradictions that it could not be historical, but must instead be conscious mythology. As the combination of higher biblical criticism and Enlightenment naturalism took hold, belief in the bodily

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<sup>3</sup>Chapter 2 of this dissertation will defend and expand upon the bare outline of early Christian resurrection belief given in this section.

resurrection of Jesus waned.<sup>4</sup> Some (e.g., Hume) were willing to discard belief in Christianity altogether, including any notion of Christ's resurrection. Many others, however, sought to retain a semblance of Christian faith, and embraced alternative understandings of the resurrection presented in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup>

### **Crossan's Redefinition of Resurrection Belief**

John Dominic Crossan began his scholarly career as a Catholic teaching monk. As a result of his biblical studies, Crossan drew numerous conclusions about the life, and ministry of Jesus Christ, many of which are beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>6</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the focus of this study, is understood by Crossan as a parabolic metaphor—infused with meaning, but not intended to convey historical fact.

Easter means for me that the divine empowerment which was present in Jesus, but once upon a time limited to those people in Galilee and Judea who had contact with him, is now available to anyone, anywhere in the world, who finds God in Jesus. As far as I'm concerned, it has nothing to do, literally, with a body coming out of a tomb, or a tomb being found empty, or visions, or anything else. All those are dramatic ways of expressing the faith. The heart of resurrection for me is that the power of God is now available through Jesus, unconfined by time or space, to anyone who believes and experiences it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Chapter 2 of this dissertation will expand upon the resurrection critiques offered by deism, Humean skepticism, and German critical scholarship.

<sup>5</sup>The 'swoon' theory holds that Jesus never actually died on the cross, but merely fainted, and was revived in the tomb. Various 'fraud' theories figure the disciples stole the body and then invented the resurrection, or someone else stole or moved the body and the disciples then mistakenly believed Jesus had risen from the dead. 'Hallucination' or 'vision' theories claim that the disciples had subjective personal experiences which they believed were encounters with the risen Lord, but that Jesus wasn't bodily raised from the dead. A critical analysis of these explanations is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in, e.g., William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1981), 23-44; Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 81-165.

<sup>6</sup>The fullest statement of Crossan's conclusions is found in John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>7</sup>John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 127-28.

Crossan desires to focus contemporary Christian attention upon the *meaning* of Jesus' resurrection, rather than battling over the *mode*.<sup>8</sup> In other words, instead of debating whether Jesus' resurrection should be understood as a historical fact or a metaphorical parable, Christians should explore the personal<sup>9</sup> and political<sup>10</sup> meaning of the resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Purpose and Structure of this Study**

This dissertation is a critical analysis of John Dominic Crossan's historical Jesus methodology and theological presuppositions as they relate to his conclusions regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Background**

From 2001 through 2008, I served as the English Pastor at Edmonton Chinese Baptist Church. Our English congregation was composed predominantly of second-generation Chinese Canadians. The congregation was both young and well-educated, with the majority of the congregation attending (at one point in time) the University of Alberta. In 2005, one of the young men in our congregation came into contact with John

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<sup>8</sup>"Seeing the Easter stories as parable does not involve a denial of their factuality. It's quite happy leaving the question open. What it does insist upon is that *the importance of these stories lies in their meanings*." Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: The Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 193. Emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup>"Good Friday and Easter, death and resurrection together, are a central image in the New Testament for the path to a transformed self. The path involves dying to an old way of being and being reborn into a new way of being. Good Friday and Easter are about this path, the path of dying and rising, of being born again. . . . So there is powerful personal meaning to Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter. We are invited into the journey that leads through death to resurrection and rebirth." Ibid., 210-11.

<sup>10</sup>"The political meaning of Good Friday and Easter sees the human problem as injustice, and the solution as God's justice." Ibid., 211.

<sup>11</sup>Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection will be covered in more detail at the end of Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Dominic Crossan's historical Jesus scholarship and was impressed by his arguments and rigorous methodology. Desiring to understand and respond to the young man's growing interest in Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth, I began to read Crossan's academic work, beginning with *The Historical Jesus*. Around the same time, I heard the 1996 debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan on the resurrection of Jesus, which later resulted in the book *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*.<sup>12</sup> I also became more familiar with the scholarship of the Jesus Seminar (co-founded by Crossan and Robert Funk), and their reconstructions of Jesus' teaching and ministry.<sup>13</sup>

Encountering Crossan's persuasive scholarly arguments precipitated a crisis of intellectual faith. My personal faith in Jesus Christ neither wavered nor waned; but I was forced, probably for the first time in my adult Christian life, to question the intellectual foundations of my evangelical faith. Was it rational to believe that Jesus was literally raised from the dead? Or were Crossan's arguments that nothing happened to Jesus' deceased physical body compelling historically? I began reading arguments for<sup>14</sup> and against<sup>15</sup> the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Eventually, I arrived at the conclusion that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was fully defensible as an historical fact, and that resurrection faith was both rational and compelling. That conclusion, along with my admiration for Crossan's winsome personality and persuasive writing, led to an

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<sup>12</sup>Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>E.g., Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

<sup>15</sup>E.g., Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*; Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Ozen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).



existential crisis: how could an intelligent, prominent scholar and professing Christian come to a radically different conclusion, and deny the historicity of Christ's resurrection?

In 2007, I flew to Toronto for a week-long course with Gary Habermas, and spent some time with long-time friends discussing the resurrection of Jesus. I was surprised to hear them articulate what I had come to recognize as Crossan's metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection. My friends pressed me as to why the historicity of Jesus' bodily resurrection was so important. Why was I so concerned about the literal historical fact? They asked, "Isn't the importance of the resurrection how it symbolizes the ongoing power of Jesus' teaching and ministry?" I had believed that the metaphorical understanding of the resurrection was restricted to the guild of critical New Testament scholarship. Instead, the conversations I was having, and would continue to have with others over the ensuing years, revealed that Crossan's best-selling published work on Jesus and his resurrection had taken hold within the mainstream Protestant churches of Canada. Simply put, Crossan's perspective of the resurrection has become a widely-held view of pastors and lay Christians alike. I suspect that it may even be the primary view of Christ's resurrection among professing Christians in Canada today.

## **Focus**

The focus of this dissertation is John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical conception of Jesus' resurrection. Throughout, this study will emphasize the influence of Crossan's theological presuppositions upon his methodology and conclusions.

**John Dominic Crossan.** John Dominic Crossan is by no means the only scholar who accepts and promotes a metaphorical understanding of the resurrection. He

is preceded by such luminaries as Rudolf Bultmann,<sup>16</sup> and joined by contemporaries like Robert Funk,<sup>17</sup> Marcus Borg,<sup>18</sup> and John Shelby Spong.<sup>19</sup> This dissertation will focus on Crossan's resurrection scholarship for three reasons. First, Crossan was the first proponent of the metaphorical resurrection I encountered; thus, he piqued my pastoral and academic interest from the outset.

Second, Crossan is arguably the most prolific, prominent, and popular defender of the metaphorical resurrection. He has written twenty books, co-authored six, authored forty-eight chapters for compilations, and published sixty-three journal articles. He has lectured at fifty-six scholarly conferences, been invited to deliver nearly one hundred and fifty academic lectures, and presented over two hundred and fifty popular lectures and addresses.<sup>20</sup> He continues to write and speak prolifically,<sup>21</sup> and his scholarly conclusions (though not his methodology and underlying presuppositions) are widely disseminated through his books, popular lectures, and public appearances.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>E.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); idem, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>17</sup>E.g., Robert Funk, "The Jesus Seminar and the Quest," in *Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001): 130-39.

<sup>18</sup>E.g., Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1995); idem, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

<sup>19</sup>E.g., John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (New York: HarperOne, 1995).

<sup>20</sup>Information derived from John Dominic Crossan, "Professional Resume," [on-line], accessed 21 September 2010, <http://www.johndominiccrossan.com/Professional%20Resume.htm>; Internet.

<sup>21</sup>Crossan has an additional book currently under contract with HarperOne, *Parables: How Jesus with Parables became Christ in Parables*, to be published in April 2011.

<sup>22</sup>Crossan has also been featured on 36 television programs, been interviewed live on 246 radio shows, and had his work featured in 28 popular magazines and 128 newspapers.

Third, John Dominic Crossan is a winsome and persuasive scholar and teacher. In person, Crossan is amiable, gentle, and thoroughly likeable.<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, despite sharp criticism of and disagreement with his conclusions, hails Crossan as the pre-eminent figure in contemporary historical Jesus research.<sup>24</sup> Crossan presents himself in his books, lectures, interviews, and debates as a faithful Christian, and many lay Christians understand and accept his views of the historical Jesus as being authentically (though unconventionally) Christian.<sup>25</sup>

**Influence of worldview presuppositions.** The relationship between Crossan's theological presuppositions, historical-critical methodology, and metaphorical reconstruction of Christ's resurrection has not been subjected to a full critical analysis. Many scholars have critiqued Crossan's metaphorical resurrection on various fronts.<sup>26</sup> Others have incisively critiqued Crossan's methodology and gospel hypotheses.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>I have heard him speak on various occasions and had the opportunity to speak with him briefly at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Greer-Heard dialogue with Ben Witherington in February 2010. Our conversation was regrettably brief, but pleasant.

<sup>24</sup>"Crossan towers above the rest of the renewed 'New Quest', in just the same way as Schweitzer and Bultmann tower above most of twentieth-century scholarship, and for much the same reasons. He, like them, has had the courage to see the whole picture, to think his hypothesis through to the end, to try out radically new ideas, to write it all up in a highly engaging manner, and to debate it publicly without acrimony. With enemies like these, who needs friends." N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 65.

<sup>25</sup>For example, reflecting on his 1996 debate with William Lane Craig, Crossan writes, "I . . . can only attempt to explain to Group A [evangelical Christians who read the Gospels as literal historical fact], if it cares, how I can be a believing Christian and still find very much of the Gospel accounts about Jesus to be traditional and evangelical rather than original and historical." Crossan, "Reflections on a Debate," in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 150.

<sup>26</sup>See, e.g., Craig A. Evans, "The Passion of Jesus: History Remembered or Prophecy Historicized?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 159-65; Paul Rhodes Eddy, "Response to William Lane Craig on 'John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus'," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 272-286.

<sup>27</sup>See, e.g., Raymond Brown, "The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321-43; Craig A. Evans, "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of

Interaction with Crossan's theological presuppositions, however, has been infrequent, with Greg Boyd's 1995 *Cynic Sage or Son of God* the most notable contribution.

Crossan has engaged in public dialogue about the resurrection of Jesus, most notably his 1996 debate with William Lane Craig at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago<sup>28</sup> and his 2005 dialogue with N. T. Wright at the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>29</sup> Both Wright and Craig engage Crossan's methodology and conclusions in their discussions and other published reflections.<sup>30</sup>

My contention is that focusing on Crossan's methodology, gospel hypotheses, and historical Jesus conclusions is insufficient; we must ask further what *drives* those gospel hypotheses. Insufficient attention has been paid in historical Jesus research to the role that worldview presuppositions play in influencing a scholar's reconstruction of who Jesus was and what he said and did. This dissertation is a step towards redressing that

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Mythology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 3-36; F. Neirynck, "The Historical Jesus: Reflections on an Inventory," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 70 (1994): 221-34; and particularly Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995). Other studies focusing on Crossan's methodology and hermeneutics include Hal Childs, *The Myth of the Historical Jesus and the Evolution of Consciousness*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, No. 179 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Brent Schlittenhart, "The Eschatology of the Jesus Seminar: The Non-Apocalyptic Character and Mission of Jesus" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); Gladstone H. Stevens III, "Towards a Theological Assessment of the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1997); and Robert B. Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus: The Impact of Hermeneutics on the Jesus Research of John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>The Crossan-Craig debate was published in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*.

<sup>29</sup>The Crossan-Wright dialogue was published in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

<sup>30</sup>See, e.g., William Lane Craig, "John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Davis, Kendall, and O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 249-71; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 19-20; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 44-65.

imbalance, by focusing intentionally and emphatically upon the influence that Crossan's theological presuppositions exert upon his methodology and conclusions.

## **Structure**

The task of this dissertation will be to trace the influence of Crossan's theological worldview upon his historical Jesus methodology, presuppositions, and conclusions. Chapter 2 will establish the historical context of Crossan's scholarship, examining the rise and fall of resurrection belief in the early church, through the medieval period, and consequent to the rise of Enlightenment deism. I will conclude chapter 2 with an exposition of Crossan's metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection. Chapter 3 will provide a biographical and theological sketch of John Dominic Crossan, including a key section outlining three core theological presuppositions which direct Crossan's historical investigation and conclusions. Chapter 4 will analyze Crossan's hermeneutics and methodology, focusing on how both are affected by his underlying worldview presuppositions. Chapter 5 will examine the impact of theological worldview upon resurrection belief in the early church and her opponents. Chapter 6 will consider the broader relationship between theological worldview and the resurrection of Jesus.

## **Thesis**

The thesis of this study is that *John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection is itself a myth, predetermined by his theological presuppositions*. Crossan's rigorous methodology is inexorably directed by his naturalistic worldview presuppositions. Despite his sincere desire for scholarly honesty and objectivity, his worldview predetermines his conclusions. The metaphorical

resurrection is itself a myth with no historical basis, driven solely by underlying theological assumptions. The orthodox understanding of Christ's resurrection is never in Crossan's pool of live options; hence, his historical study is never able to conceive that the bodily resurrection of Jesus could have happened as a literal historical fact.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESURRECTION HISTORICALLY AND METAPHORICALLY

Jesus of Nazareth burst onto the scene in early first-century Galilee, challenging the authority of both Jewish religious leaders and Roman imperial leaders, teaching in parables, gathering a group of disciples, healing the sick, and eating with the marginalized. He was executed around 30 A.D. under the authority of Pontius Pilate, but the movement begun by Jesus did not die out with him. Instead, as Josephus wrote late in the first century, “those that loved him at the first did not forsake him . . . and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”<sup>1</sup> The Roman historian Tacitus, writing around 115 A.D., describes Christians thus:

They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. That checked the pernicious superstition for a short time, but it broke out afresh—not only in Judaea, where the plague first arose, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.<sup>2</sup>

From its obscure origins in a provincial backwater of the Roman Empire, the Jesus movement spread to the center of the Empire, and continued to be identified with the title of its founder—Jesus, the Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3, in *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged: New Updated Edition*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 480.

<sup>2</sup>Tacitus, *Roman Annals* 15.44, cited in F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 22.

## Early Christianity and the Rise of Resurrection Belief

Orthodox Christianity has traditionally embraced a set of foundational doctrines—among them the deity, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The person and work of Jesus Christ lies at the very center of the medieval Christian tradition in both its Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms.<sup>3</sup>

### The Emergence of Resurrection Belief: The New Testament

Christian resurrection belief is founded upon the New Testament. The four canonical Gospels conclude by narrating the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb, and appearances of the resurrected Jesus to certain of his followers.<sup>4</sup> Before their respective

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<sup>3</sup>Australian theologian Frank Rees argues that “at the heart of Christianity is a *life*, a *death* and a *resurrection* and it makes no sense to play one of these off against the others.” Frank Rees, “Re-Cognising the Christ: An Australian Response to John Dominic Crossan,” *Colloquium* 31 (1999): 104. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup>Mark 16, Matt 28, Luke 24, and John 20-21. There are numerous apparent discrepancies in the details and structure of the four Gospels' portraits of Easter Sunday which have been well-known, documented, and discussed for centuries. How many women came to the tomb? (John 20:1 = 1; Luke 24:1 = multiple unnamed; Luke 24:10 = 3 plus other unnamed; Mark 16:1 = 3; Matt 28:1 = 2) What were their names? (John 20:1 = Mary Magdalene; Luke 24:10 = Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and unnamed others; Mark 16:1 = Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome; Matt 28:1 = Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) Did they encounter men or angels at the tomb? How many? (Matt 28:2 = one angel; Mark 16:5 = one young man, dressed in white; Luke 24:4 = two men in gleaming clothes; John 20:12 = two angels) What happened to the stone? Did it roll away on its own, or did the angels roll it away? (Matt 28:2 = the angel; Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, and John 20:1 = stone is already rolled away) Which male disciples came to the empty tomb? Who arrived first? Did they believe at the sight of the empty tomb? Did the risen Jesus command the disciples to stay in Jerusalem, or to return to Galilee to await him there?

Crossan cites such discrepancies as a clear indication that the resurrection narratives in the canonical Gospels cannot be intended to convey literal historical fact. Crossan writes, “Anyone who reads the gospel stories about Easter Sunday is struck by their diversity on several fronts. First, there are no risen apparitions in Mark, but several in Matt, Luke, Acts, and John. Second, the scribes who copied and transmitted Mark found that absence so disquieting that they appended three different endings, all containing risen apparitions. Third, the resurrectional visions differ in almost every way imaginable. In *number*: how many happened? In *place*: inside and/or outside a house, in Judea and/or in Galilee? In *time*: all on one day, over forty days, or somewhere in between? In *content*: who said what to whom? Fourth, even the final climactic meeting, in which Jesus announces the community's missionary program and leadership structure, is extremely diverse.” John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus*:



resurrection narratives, however, the four canonical Gospels are permeated with

resurrection-consciousness.

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*Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 254. See also John Dominic Crossan and Richard Watts, *Who Is Jesus Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 121.

Other commentators respond just that discrepancies are to be expected in eyewitness accounts, only affect surface details, are fully harmonizable, and do not affect the core historical recollection of the resurrection accounts. “*Discrepancies are the norm* [in eyewitness accounts]—which means attempts at harmonization accounts *must be the rule* as we try to discern what actually happened. Because of this, the standard historiographical assumption is that conflicting data that is purportedly historical deserves to be read as sympathetically as possible, with attempts to harmonize the conflicting data carried out before one dismisses the data as unreliable on the basis of these apparent conflicts. The only apparent reason legendary-Jesus theorists don’t extend this same courtesy to the Gospels is because they have already decided—for metaphysical, not historiographical, reasons—that the Gospels aren’t trustworthy.” Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 114. Emphasis original. See also N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 585-682; William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* 16 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 205-06, 222-48, 351-404.

N. T. Wright shares a concrete example of similar eyewitness discrepancies, concerning Karl Popper’s famous encounter with Ludwig Wittgenstein at Cambridge in 1946. Their tumultuous encounter, which culminated in Wittgenstein brandishing a fireplace poker and waving it around before leaving the room, was witnessed by many fellow philosophers including Bertrand Russell. The eyewitnesses had different recollections of the event. “Did Popper make a crushing rejoinder before Wittgenstein left the room, or did he make a key comment only afterward? At what point did Wittgenstein pick up the poker? Was it hot or cold? Did he slam the door or did he leave quietly?” N. T. Wright, “The Surprise of Resurrection,” in Craig A. Evans and N. T. Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days: What Really Happened*, ed. Troy A. Miller (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2009), 80-81. Wright notes, “there was continuing disagreement, but we should notice that nobody would say that nothing at all happened—that there was not a meeting, that there was not a poker, that there were not two philosophers, and that one of them did not leave the room. Something happened, but it was so dramatic, so quick, and so unexpected that all of the eyewitnesses, who were all people professionally concerned with the pursuit of truth, never quite agreed. As any lawyer will know, this is often what you find when people give eyewitness evidence. Exciting and dramatic things often happen, but eyewitnesses disagree about them. However, to reemphasize, that does not mean that nothing happened. Rather the reverse. This, I believe, is what we should conclude from our puzzled initial readings of the Gospel stories.” *Ibid.*, 81. Wright argues that the discrepancies in the Gospel details surrounding the empty tomb are the result of eyewitness testimony rather than proof of fabrication.

Interestingly, when it comes to discrepancy of detail in other historical accounts, Crossan follows normal historiographical procedure and is not so quick to reject the literal historical intent. For example, Philo and Josephus both recount the non-violent Jewish protests against Caligula’s statue being erected in the Temple of Jerusalem in 40-41 A.D. There are considerable discrepancies in the two accounts, but Crossan states, “I leave aside differences between his [Philo’s] account and that of Josephus, differences such as the role of Herod Agrippa I or the fact that an agricultural strike at sowing time becomes an arson danger at reaping time. What is more significant is that, if anything, Philo emphasizes even more than does Josephus both the nonviolence of the resistance and the willingness for martyrdom.” John Dominic Crossan, “Eschatology, Apocalypticism, and the Historical Jesus,” in *Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001), 105. Crossan recounts the same examples in Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 144, where he concludes, “in this case at least, and even allowing for rhetorical exaggeration, both authors agree on the major points.” Why is it that Philo and Josephus have discrepancies, but can still be said to “agree on the major points,” while the canonical evangelists do not receive the same treatment? Why does Crossan not acknowledge that the canonical Gospels also “agree on the major points”?

In Luke 2:33-35, Simeon praises God for the infant Jesus presented in the temple, using resurrection language to declare that “this child is destined to cause the falling and rising (αναστασις) of many in Israel.” In Luke 7:11-17, Jesus resuscitates the deceased son of a widow: “Young man, I say to you, get up (εγερθητι)!” The crowd responds, “God has come to help his people.” In Luke 15, the parable of the prodigal son concludes with the father’s joyful declaration, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. . . . This brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15:24, 32) Luke concludes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus by clearly anticipating Jesus’ resurrection: “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (εκ νεκρων αναστη πεισθησονται).” (Luke 16:31) Resurrection theology is not limited to Luke’s closing chapter; the whole Gospel is permeated with expectation, anticipation, and present application of Christ’s resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

Resurrection theology is equally manifest throughout John’s gospel. The fulcrum of John is the resuscitation of Lazarus in John 11, the present in-breaking of the future resurrection of Jesus. Future resurrection is certain,<sup>6</sup> but resurrection also invades the present,<sup>7</sup> as evidenced by Jesus calling Lazarus out from among the dead.<sup>8</sup> After recounting the raising of Lazarus, John narrates Jesus’ anointing by Mary in preparation

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<sup>5</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 435-39, 647-61.

<sup>6</sup>John 11:23-24—“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’”

<sup>7</sup>John 11:25-26—“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.’”

<sup>8</sup>John 11:43—“Jesus called out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

for his impending death.<sup>9</sup> Jesus then refers to his coming death as “a kernel of wheat [which] falls to the ground and dies” so that it “produces many seeds.” (John 12:24) Earlier, John 6:32-59 has numerous references to eternal life, culminating in Jesus’ promise to “raise up” (αναστησω) his followers “on the last day.” (John 6:54) The expectation, implication, and application of Jesus’ resurrection are presumed throughout John’s Gospel.<sup>10</sup> A similar case can be mounted for Matthew and Mark as well.<sup>11</sup> The Gospels conclude with presentations of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but their contents are also built around resurrection theology.

The rest of the New Testament is replete with declarations of Christ’s resurrection and the hope that it conveys to His followers. In Romans 1:4, Paul proclaims the centrality of Jesus, “who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (εξ αναστασεως νεκρων).” Romans 6:1-14 contains a sustained meditation upon the present implications of Christ’s past resurrection.

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead (ηγερθη . . . εκ νεκρων) through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:2-4)

Paul’s resurrection hope gives him comfort and perspective in the midst of suffering: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are

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<sup>9</sup>John 12:7—“She . . . save[d] this perfume for the day of my burial.”

<sup>10</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 440-47, 662-82.

<sup>11</sup>And has been, quite competently, in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 401-28, 616-31 (Mark); 429-33, 632-46 (Matt).

achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Cor 4:16-17) Paul’s faith centers upon Jesus’ resurrection and his hope of sharing in it: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:10-11) In 1 Corinthians 15, the epigraph for this dissertation, Paul insists that the resurrection is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. If Christ is not risen, his own ministry is in vain (15:31-32); indeed, he would be a liar (15:15), since he claims to have seen the risen Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Resurrection is central in the non-Pauline epistles as well. Hebrews 11, the Hall of Fame of Faith, concludes:

Women received back their dead, raised to life (ἐξ ἀναστασεως τῶν νεκρῶν) again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection (ἀναστασεως). Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. . . . These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Heb 11:35-40)

First Peter opens with thanksgiving to God, who “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection (ἀναστασεως) of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the Christian faith has historically affirmed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion, based upon the proclamation of the risen Christ in the New Testament Gospels and Epistles. The Gospels, Pauline epistles, and general epistles alike are permeated with the reality of Christ’s resurrection.

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<sup>12</sup>N. T. Wright discusses other passages in the Pauline epistles which express the centrality of Jesus’ resurrection in Paul’s theology. See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 207-311.

<sup>13</sup>First Peter 1:3-4. See further Wright’s discussion of resurrection hope outside the Gospels and Pauline epistles in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 450-79.

## The Rise of Resurrection Belief: The Early Church Fathers and Creeds

The early church fathers continued to present the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a concrete historical event which occupied the center of Christian hope, doctrine, and theology. Apostolic teaching was rooted in two intertwined theological traditions—the righteousness of the covenantal God of the Hebrew Scriptures and the risen Messiah of the apostolic teaching and tradition. Believers will participate in Jesus’ resurrection literally at his second coming, but already participate metaphorically through baptism and Spirit-filled life.<sup>14</sup> N. T. Wright traces the proclamation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ through the writings of the apostolic fathers,<sup>15</sup> early Christian literature,<sup>16</sup> the second-century apologists,<sup>17</sup> and the “Great Early Theologians.”<sup>18</sup>

In a few cases, it seems that the ancient Christian author is simply not interested in the question of resurrection (Christ’s or the Christians’).<sup>19</sup> The teaching in

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<sup>14</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 461.

<sup>15</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 481-94. Wright discusses Clement’s epistles, written around 90 A.D.; Ignatius of Antioch (30-107 A.D.); Polycarp (69-155 A.D.); the *Didache*; the *Epistle of Barbanas* (80-120 A.D.); the *Shepherd of Hermas* (150 A.D.); and Papias (60-130 A.D.).

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 495-500. Wright briefly discusses the *Ascension of Isaiah* (c. 70-170 A.D.); the *Apocalypse of Peter* (c. 132-135 A.D.); 5 Ezra (c. 135 A.D.); and *The Epistle of the Apostles* (c. 150 A.D.).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 500-09. Wright discusses the works of Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.); Athenagoras (110-175 A.D.); Theophilus (140-200 A.D.); and Minucius Felix (c. 170-230 A.D.).

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 510-27. Wright discusses Hippolytus (170-236 A.D.) briefly, but covers Tertullian (160-225 A.D.), Irenaeus (130-200 A.D.), and Origen (185-254 A.D.) in greater depth.

<sup>19</sup>In addition to the *Didache*, the mid-second century *Shepherd of Hermas* displays no particular concern for the resurrection. Resurrection does appear to be taken for granted—hence, *Similitude* 5.7 in the *Shepherd of Hermas* implies that the one who fails to “guard” his “flesh . . . pure and undefiled . . . shall not live.” Nonetheless, Wright concludes that “all in all, we have a strong sense that we are asking a question that Hermas was not interested in. We cannot press him one way or the other for the kind of exact answer that so many other early Christian texts were eager to supply.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 492. *Hermas* is indeed unconcerned about enunciating belief in the resurrection; but absence of evidence regarding explicit resurrection faith is not evidence of absence of resurrection faith. It is dangerous to draw significant conclusions from the lack of explicit mention of resurrection in a tiny minority (two or three out of dozens) of extant first- and second-century A.D. Christian texts.

the *Didache*, for example, is for the most part unconcerned with resurrection, focusing instead upon a “life of piety and good works.”<sup>20</sup> Even with the *Didache*, however, oblique reference to the future resurrection of believers is made in association with Eucharistic instructions: “Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it.”<sup>21</sup> In the closing chapter, the reference to future resurrection is explicit: “And then shall appear the signs of the truth. First the sign spread out in Heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead: but not of all the dead, but as it was said, The Lord shall come and all his saints with him.”<sup>22</sup> Even when resurrection is not central, it is still present.

For the vast majority of the apostolic fathers, early Christian apocrypha, apologists, and theologians, however, the resurrection plays a prominent role, often taking center stage. *I Clement* was written around 96 A.D. by the bishop of Rome to the church in Corinth.<sup>23</sup> The letter contains explicit and implicit references to the future

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<sup>20</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 488-89. The *Didache* is generally understood as being an instructional manual, demonstrating how new converts are to behave as followers of the Lord. Thus, the absence of explicit reference to the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of believers is understandable.

<sup>21</sup>*Didache* 10:5.

<sup>22</sup>*Didache* 16:6-7. Crossan separates *Didache* 16 from the rest of the document as a later addition resulting from pressure exerted by orthodox circles—the original, in his opinion, had no such explicit reference to the future resurrection of believers. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 572-73. The separation of *Didache* 16 is questionable, as there is no textual support for an earlier version without the offending chapter. Regardless, my earlier comments still apply: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and the *Didache* does imply affirmation of Christ’s past resurrection and the future resurrection of believers.

<sup>23</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 481. Clement was bishop of Rome and was martyred around 100 A.D., during the reign of Domitian, when persecution broke out against Christians.

resurrection of faithful Christians.<sup>24</sup> The central passage on resurrection occurs in chapters 24-27. Clement first emphasizes the certainty of future resurrection, founded upon Christ's historical resurrection:

Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead. . . . Let us behold the fruits [of the earth], how the sowing of grain takes place. The sower goes forth, and casts it into the ground; and the seed being thus scattered, though dry and naked when it fell upon the earth, is gradually dissolved. Then out of its dissolution the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again, and from one seed many arise and bring forth fruit.<sup>25</sup>

Clement then refers to the myth of the phoenix,<sup>26</sup> affirms future resurrection through reference to Psalm 25:7 and Job 19:25-26,<sup>27</sup> and exhorts believers, "having then this hope," to "be bound to Him who is faithful in His promises, and just in His judgments."<sup>28</sup> Clement explicitly appeals to the believers' sure hope of future resurrection, which itself is founded upon the certainty of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, as motivation for faithfulness in the midst of persecution.

Ignatius of Antioch returns continually to the resurrection through his letters written to various churches as he journeyed to his martyrdom in Rome around 105 A.D. Like other early church fathers, Ignatius writes partially to combat the spread of

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<sup>24</sup>E.g., *1 Clement* 5:4-6. "There was Peter who by reason of unrighteous jealousy endured not one not one but many labors, and thus having borne his testimony went to his appointed place of glory. By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. . . . when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance." Cited from Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Oak Harbor, CA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), S. 11.

<sup>25</sup>*1 Clement* 24:1-5. Clement's anticipation reflects the resurrection imagery from 1 Cor 15.

<sup>26</sup>*1 Clement* 25.

<sup>27</sup>*1 Clement* 26. "For the Scripture saith in a certain place: 'Thou shalt raise me up, and I shall confess unto Thee;' . . . and again, Job says, 'Thou shalt raise up this flesh of mine, which has suffered all these things.'"

<sup>28</sup>*1 Clement* 27.

heterodoxy, or false teaching; in Ignatius' case, the opponents are clearly docetist. In his *Epistle to the Trallians*, Ignatius writes,

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also from Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also *truly raised from the dead*, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner *His Father will so raise up us who believe* in Him by Jesus Christ, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.<sup>29</sup>

Ignatius emphasizes that Jesus was *truly* born, persecuted, crucified, and raised, and presents Jesus' resurrection as the pattern for the future resurrection of Christian believers. His theology is reminiscent of Paul's reasoning in 1 Corinthians 15—Christ was truly raised, and we will be truly raised in similar fashion.

Ignatius' *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* contains a lengthier exhortation to resurrection faith:

Now, he suffered all these things for our sakes, that we might be saved. And He suffered truly, even as also He truly raised Himself up, not, as certain unbelievers maintain, that He only seemed to suffer, as they themselves only seem to be [Christians]. And as they believe, so shall it happen unto them, when they shall be divested of their bodies, and be mere evil spirits.

For I know that after His resurrection also He was still possessed of flesh, and I believe that He is so now. When, for instance, He came to those who were with Peter, He said to them, "Lay hold, handle Me, and see that I am not an incorporeal spirit." And immediately they touched Him, and believed, being convinced both by His flesh and spirit. For this cause also they despised death, and were found its conquerors. And after His resurrection He did eat and drink with them, as being possessed of flesh, although spiritually He was united to His father.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup>Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 2:1-3:3.



Ignatius, then, exemplifies an early and clear witness to the rise of robust resurrection belief within the early Christian church.<sup>31</sup>

Writing a half-century later, Justin Martyr defends the resurrection in dialogue with both pagan and Jewish opponents and skeptics. The predominant Greco-Roman worldview disbelieved in the very possibility of fleshly reanimation after death;<sup>32</sup> thus, Justin spends considerable time responding to pagan attacks upon the coherence of Christian resurrection faith. Using Plato as an initial point of contact with Greco-Romans, Justin insists that both righteous and wicked will be posthumously raised for eternal judgment.<sup>33</sup> Justin acknowledges the apparent impossibility of dead men rising, but appeals to God's power and the historical example of Christ's resurrection. Adopting Paul's seed metaphor from 1 Corinthians 15, Justin compares the mystery of resurrection to the mystery of people developing from "human seed."<sup>34</sup> Finally, he draws analogies to Greco-Roman beliefs:

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter. . . . Aesculapius, who, though he was a great physician, was struck by a thunderbolt, and so ascended

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<sup>31</sup>See also Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 8:2: "Jesus Christ is in the place of all that is ancient: His cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is by Him, are undefiled monuments of antiquity; by which I desire, through your prayers, to be justified;" and *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19:3: "And now took a beginning which had been prepared by God. Henceforth all things were in a state of tumult, because He meditated the abolition of death."

<sup>32</sup>See chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>33</sup>Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 8. "For, impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the abode that is with God, the Father and Creator of all, . . . persuaded and convinced as we are that they who have proved to God by their works that they followed Him, and loved to abide with Him where there is no sin to cause disturbance, can obtain these things. . . . And Plato, in like manner, used to say that Rhadamanthus and Minos would punish the wicked who came before them; and we say that the same thing will be done, but at the hand of Christ, . . . in the same bodies united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years."

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, *First Apology* 19.

to heaven; and Bacchus too, after he had been torn limb from limb; and Hercules, when he had committed himself to the flames to escape his toils; . . . And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce someone who swears he has seen the burning Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre?<sup>35</sup>

In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Justin continues to emphasize the centrality of resurrection to the Christian faith. He admits that there are some “who are called Christians,” but “who say there is no resurrection of the dead.” Such “false Christians” promote a Platonic view of eternal disembodied soul, but Justin insists that Trypho should “not imagine that they are Christians.” Rather, “I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead.”<sup>36</sup> Justin appeals to Psalm 22 as a comprehensive foretelling of Christ’s passion, and applies the psalm specifically to the resurrection.<sup>37</sup> Justin decries the continuation of Jewish accusations that Christ’s disciples stole his crucified body, and urges Trypho and his fellow Jews to repent of their unbelief.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to references to and defenses of bodily resurrection in his two *Apologies* and the *Dialogue*, Justin also wrote the first (extant) full-length defense of Christian resurrection faith.<sup>39</sup> In his *Treatise on Resurrection*, Justin responds to arguments (apparently from self-professing Christians) that resurrection is physically

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., *First Apology* 21.

<sup>36</sup>Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 80.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 98-108.

<sup>38</sup>“You not only have not repented, after you learned that He rose from the dead, but . . . you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.” Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 108.

<sup>39</sup>Justin Martyr, *Treatise on the Resurrection*.

impossible,<sup>40</sup> philosophically untenable,<sup>41</sup> and theologically objectionable.<sup>42</sup> Justin Martyr clearly exemplifies a robust belief in Christ's bodily resurrection, and the future hope of Christians' own similar resurrection to eternal life.<sup>43</sup>

Clement, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr represent a sampling of early Christian tradition. Each explicitly and consistently professes belief in Christ's literal bodily resurrection from the dead, and the certainty of the Christian hope in future bodily resurrection. Clement, Ignatius and Justin Martyr are representative of the early Church's proclamation of Christ's resurrection. Polycarp, Papias, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Tatian, and Origen echo and augment the affirmation and centrality of resurrection faith. Other early Christian writings similarly emphasize the importance of belief in the past resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future

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<sup>40</sup>E.g., Justin Martyr, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, 5. "In respect of those who say that it is impossible for God to raise it, it seems to me that I should show that they are ignorant, professing as they do in word that they are believers, yet by their works proving themselves to be unbelieving, even more unbelieving than the unbelievers." Justin notes that even the pagan Romans ascribe power and majesty to their idols to do such things "easily." Thus it is unseemly that 'Christians' hold it impossible for the one true God to effect bodily resurrection, especially in light of God's demonstration of his power first in Creation and then in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>41</sup>E.g., Justin Martyr, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, 6. Justin appeals to the Greek philosophers Plato and Epicurus, who hold that existing matter cannot be finally dissolved or destroyed—thus, "the regeneration of the flesh will, according to these philosophers, appear to be possible."

<sup>42</sup>E.g., Justin Martyr, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, 7. "We must now speak with respect to those who think meanly of the flesh, and say that it is not worthy of the resurrection nor of the heavenly economy. . . . But these persons seem to be ignorant of the whole work of God, both the genesis and formation of man at the first, and why the things in the world were made." It is instructive to note that Justin grounds his theological justification for resurrection in terms of the doctrine of creation. It is also interesting that the objections posed to Justin are similar to those posed by modern critics and skeptics.

<sup>43</sup>Wright notes, "There is no controversy about what his view was, and a brief summary will suffice." Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 500. Wright concludes his section on Justin, "Justin thus stands foursquare with the New Testament, not only on the continuity between the present and future bodies . . . , but also on the difference between them. . . . He has no doubts that Jesus himself was bodily raised. Like the Apostolic Fathers, he does not use 'resurrection' language in a metaphorical way, though he stresses the continuity between present *ethical* life and the future resurrection. Martyred roughly a hundred years after Paul, he shows every sign of having absorbed essentially the same view of this topic, and of defending it, at more length than Paul had ever done, within the swirling currents of pagan philosophy." Ibid., 503.

resurrection of faithful Christians: *2 Clement*, *Barnabas*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *5 Ezra*, the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the *Odes of Solomon*, and the *Acts of Thomas*.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, early Christian writers do not emphasize the resurrection (e.g., the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*); but this does not necessarily reveal a lack of concern for or belief in the resurrection. Rather, the writer is concerned to emphasize other areas of doctrine or instruction (e.g., the *Didache*'s emphasis on practical piety), or to convey sayings of Jesus rather than events in his life (e.g., the *Gospel of Thomas*).

Early Christian creeds also emphasize the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of believers. Creedal affirmation of the resurrection is reflected in the traditional Christian liturgical greeting, "He is Risen; He is Risen indeed!" While not hearkening back to the original disciples, the Apostles' Creed reflects the faith of the early church.<sup>45</sup> After affirming Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial, it proclaims that "the third day He arose again from the dead."<sup>46</sup> The closing phrase of the Apostles' Creed proclaims that Christ's resurrection assures the future resurrection of believers as well:

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<sup>44</sup>See N. T. Wright's treatment of the resurrection in these early Christian documents; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 480-533.

<sup>45</sup>Craig Evans represents mainstream scholarly consensus when he argues that the Apostles' Creed "probably came to expression in the third century." Craig A. Evans, "The Shout of Death," in Craig A. Evans and N. T. Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days: What Really Happened*, ed. Troy A. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 1.

<sup>46</sup>The Apostles' Creed in the wording we use today dates from a mid-eighth century Latin document (*Dicta Abbatis Pirminii*). Earlier attestations of the Creed are evidenced in the writings of the late fourth century bishop of Aquileia, Rufinus ("and the third day rose from the dead"), and a sermon by Caesarius, Bishop of Arles, in the early sixth century, quoting from a mid-third century sermon ("rose again the third day"). The wording in the Apostles' Creed quoted by Rufinus and Caesarius differ slightly from one another and from the version handed down to us today. The *content*, however, is consistent. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25-26.

“[I believe in] the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the fourth-century Nicene Creed affirms that “For us men and for our salvation . . . [Jesus] was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, from the New Testament, through the early church fathers, to the early Christian creeds, the resurrection has been a key component of historic Christian faith.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body lie at the heart of Christian faith and life. . . . Although initially the early church had to maintain this doctrine against certain Gnosticizing tendencies,<sup>49</sup> from the end of the second century until the modern period the church has had no serious conflict concerning this doctrine.<sup>50</sup>

After first- and second-century opponents and skeptics had been refuted, the resurrection held a central place in Christian proclamation and doctrine for over a thousand years.

### **Hume: The Impact of Philosophical Skepticism**

The resurrection of Jesus was unquestioned in Western Christendom through the Middle Ages. Adherents of Islam and other religions rejected Christian belief in Christ’s resurrection; but within the confines of Western Christianity, the resurrection was proclaimed and accepted. Christian theologians acknowledged the startling and

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<sup>47</sup>The wording of the Christian’s future hope in the traditional Apostles’ Creed is precisely mirrored in the version cited by Rufinus; Caesarius differs only in calling our hope “life eternal” rather than “life everlasting.” See again Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 26.

<sup>48</sup>Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 28.

<sup>49</sup>See chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>50</sup>D. Holwerda, “Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 265.

counter-intuitive nature of miracles in general and Jesus' resurrection in particular.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the intellectual difficulties involved with miracles like the resurrection, Christian theologians cited three primary reasons to embrace resurrection belief.

First, the accounts of the resurrection were judged to be trustworthy—the accounts were written by professing eyewitnesses with honorable character close to the date of the purported miracles, when public refutation by contrary eyewitnesses was still possible. Second, the biblical miracles, particularly the resurrection, were adjudicated to cohere with the experiences of contemporary believers. Finally, the predominant Western worldview shared by Christians and non-Christians admitted the possibility of miraculous interventions in the natural order.<sup>52</sup> Thus, although miracles were conceded to be uncommon, the prevalence of theistic belief rendered the possibility of miracles, and thus the resurrection, at least coherent and plausible.

### **Precursors of Hume: Science and Deism, 1600-1800**

With the dawn of the Enlightenment, however, challenges to miracles and resurrection faith began to arise within Western Christendom. Empirical science had made slow but steady progress throughout the medieval period; but the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a robust scientific method with Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) *The New Organon*. Bacon "stressed the importance of amassing data followed by judicious

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<sup>51</sup>Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 18. Brown notes that theologians "do not appear to have been oblivious to the fact that belief in miracles does raise problems. Testimony to the miraculous was no less difficult to believe for the educated person in the second century than for his or her twentieth-century counterpart."

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

interpretation and experimentation, in order to learn the secrets of nature by the planned, organized observation of its regularities.”<sup>53</sup>

Early modern scientists were not, generally speaking, religious or philosophical skeptics. Rather, as Rodney Stark argues, “Christian theology was essential for the rise of science.”<sup>54</sup> Christian theism provided the philosophical underpinnings for the pursuit of rationalistic and empirical scientific observation and experimentation. God was understood to have crafted a natural order governed by regular laws and constants; man, through inquiry, could come to understand the workings of creation. Many of seventeenth-century Britain’s leading scientists were highly religious; none more so than Sir Isaac Newton, head of the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge.<sup>55</sup>

Nonetheless, the rise of modern empirical science contributed to a revolutionary change in the predominant Western worldview.<sup>56</sup> The laws governing the

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 28. See Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings*, ed. Fulton H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan, 1960). *The New Organon* was originally published in England in 1620.

<sup>54</sup>Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 123.

<sup>55</sup>Colin Brown notes the dual ecclesiastical and scientific roles of John Wilkins, Thomas Sprat, Joseph Glanville, John Tillotson, and Robert Boyle. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 29. Rodney Stark develops a composite religious biography of leading Western scientists from 1543-1680 and concluded that over 60 percent of them (32 out of 52 total) were “devout” in their personal piety, another 35 percent (18 out of 52) were “conventionally religious,” while only 4 percent (2 out of 52) were “skeptical.” Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 161-62. Newton wrote numerous theological treatises and biblical commentaries in addition to his copious scientific literature.

<sup>56</sup>Science was not the only influential factor; the fracturing of Western Christendom following the Protestant Reformation, along with greater inter-religious awareness brought about by expanded trade routes and trans-oceanic exploration had their effect too. Descartes’ strict rationalism and the resulting emergence of narrow foundationalism also undermined confidence in revealed knowledge and the miracles contained within the Bible, as they fell outside the purview of man’s rational faculties. See Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993). The brief summary presented in this section unfortunately glosses over the complex nature of worldview revolutions between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries; see W. Andrew Hoffercker, ed., *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007); particularly chapters 6 (“The Renaissance”), 7 (“The Reformation as a Revolution in Worldview”), and 8

workings of the natural world were seen as “the laws of God.”<sup>57</sup> While early scientists did not see God’s natural laws as threatening or overriding belief in biblical miracles, later philosophers did. Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) concluded that if God had ordained natural laws, he would not overturn or supercede them in daily events. Spinoza argued that “there was a divine necessity in the laws of nature that precluded the possibility of anything happening outside those laws.”<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued the divine wisdom contained within natural law must cover even those occurrences which ancients and contemporaries designate to be miracles. In such cases, people simply did not yet understand the natural operation which caused the marvel or wonder.<sup>59</sup>

The rise of modern science and belief in the law-like regularity of God’s creation was one side of the coin driving skepticism regarding miracles in general and the resurrection of Jesus in particular; the development of deism was the other side of the coin. Deism was not driven solely by belief in a ‘watchmaker God’ who had created the universe to be governed by natural laws and proceeded to absent himself from universal history. Rather, one of the key tenets of deism was “bitter hostility to the church and the Bible.”<sup>60</sup> Deists responded to interminable inter-Christian wars and continual demands for religious conformity (to whatever was the currently ascendant form of Christianity

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(“Enlightenments and Awakenings”). See also David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>57</sup>Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 29.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 32. See also Robert Sloan Lee, “Miracles: A Philosophical Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 2004), 36-59.

<sup>59</sup>Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 35-36.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 48.



embraced by the state) by rejecting institutional and doctrinal religion altogether. Deists particularly rejected the stringent requirements of English Puritanism.

Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), widely considered the “father of English deism,” critiqued the concept of divine revelation.<sup>61</sup> His zealous disciple Charles Blount (1654-1693) developed Hobbes’ critique of miracles as unexplained or misunderstood natural phenomena. Blount further argued that miracle-claims tended to develop around the memories of religious leaders—a not-too-subtle critique of Christian claims concerning Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>62</sup> John Toland (1670-1722) sought to demonstrate that the miracle-claims of Scripture could be understood naturalistically and rationally.<sup>63</sup>

Anthony Collins (1676-1729) furthered deist arguments against miracles, and began to engage in elementary biblical criticism.<sup>64</sup> Thomas Woolston (1670-1731) wrote more aggressively and disparagingly against the veracity of biblical miracles, especially the resurrection of Jesus, which he held to be a deceitful fraud perpetrated by dishonest disciples.<sup>65</sup> Matthew Tindal (1655-1733) published “the deist’s Bible,” *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, arguing for a de-supernaturalized (de-mythologized?) Christian faith.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>63</sup>The title of Toland’s 1696 work, *Christianity not Mysterious: Or, a Treatise Shewing, That there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d a Mystery*, reveals the essence of Toland’s thesis—Christianity is a purely natural religion. See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 49.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 50, 57. Woolston presents a dialogical attack upon the resurrection, arguing that the disciples stole Jesus’ body the night after his crucifixion.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 50-51. Thomas Chubb (1679-1746) and Peter Annet (1693-1769) round out Brown’s discussion of the early English deists.

The deists were not generally concerned to “deny the possibility of miracles in themselves,” although the arguments they put forward lent themselves to that later philosophical conclusion. Rather, they sought to “nullify the evidentialist use of miracles.”<sup>67</sup> Since the early church fathers, the resurrection of Jesus had been promoted as the supreme miracle of the Christian faith; deism undermined Christian confidence in the historicity of miracles. Holwerda concludes: “Since one canon of rationalistic historical criticism was that God does not intervene in the chain of secondary causes, miracles lost their status as historical events.”<sup>68</sup>

Christian apologists and theologians did not sit idly by as deists sharpened their attacks against the veracity of miracles in general and the resurrection in particular. John Locke (1632-1704), Thomas Sherlock (1678-1761), Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Hugh Farmer (1714-1787), and William Paley (1743-1805) countered the arguments set forth by the deists (particularly Woolston), insisting that miracles were both possible and historically factual.<sup>69</sup>

Sherlock’s *A Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection* (1729) was a clever piece of cultural apologetics. Sherlock insisted that man’s universal observation that dead men stay dead does not disprove the possibility of Christ’s resurrection—it just proves that *if* Christ truly rose from the dead, it was a historically unique event. Paley’s watchmaker analogy (from his *Natural Theology*) continues to resonate in contemporary circles, prompting atheist biologist Richard Dawkins to argue for the existence of *The*

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<sup>67</sup>Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 52.

<sup>68</sup>Holwerda, “Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection,” 265.

<sup>69</sup>See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 55-63.

*Blind Watchmaker* (a direct response to Paley's teleological argument).<sup>70</sup> Butler's 1736 *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* is still regarded as a classic of natural theology.

Individually and collectively, Christian apologists responded effectively and persuasively to the arguments presented by deists; they could not, however, reverse the growing revolution in Western worldview. The hegemonic theistic worldview of medieval Christian Europe had been irrevocably shattered. An increasing number of Westerners, while still self-identifying as Christians (or 'Christian deists'),<sup>71</sup> no longer accepted *carte blanche* the veracity of miracles. The object of skepticism covered contemporary miracle-claims and the resurrection of Jesus Christ alike. Christians could no longer assume that others embraced the bare possibility of Christ's resurrection—for deists and skeptics, the resurrection was no longer in the worldview pool of live options. The philosophical playing ground had shifted.

### **David Hume and the Legacy of Skeptical Deism**

Any contemporary philosophical discussion of miracles must acknowledge the impact of David Hume (1711-1776), particularly his essay "Of Miracles."<sup>72</sup> Hume lamented that his literary genius was relatively unacknowledged in his own day;<sup>73</sup> but, as

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<sup>70</sup>See Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986).

<sup>71</sup>Like, for example, Tindal and Chubb. See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 51.

<sup>72</sup>Section 10 of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Selections from a Treatise of Human Nature* (Chicago: Paquin, 1963).

<sup>73</sup>Of his 1738 publication of *The Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume wrote, "Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my *Treatise of Human Nature*. It fell dead-born from the press, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots." Hume, "The Life of David Hume, Esq., Written by Himself," in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, vii. Hume published his

Brown notes, “posterity has made more than ample redress.”<sup>74</sup> While Hume’s essay was not particularly novel or innovative, he aptly summarized and enunciated the various scientific and deistic arguments against miracles generally and resurrection particularly. As such, Hume’s “Of Miracles” is considered the classic statement of the argument against miracles, by friends and foes alike.<sup>75</sup> Hume’s critique of miracles forms part of the historical-critical method and worldview inherited by John Dominic Crossan.

Hume argues that belief in miracles is untenable within a modern mindset that acknowledges the universal applicability of the laws of nature. Hume’s critique is theoretically directed towards miracles in general, but he provides indications throughout that Jesus’ resurrection lies in the crosshairs of his philosophical argument. He first defines a miracle as “a violation of the laws of nature,” and argues that “as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be

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*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in 1748; “But this piece was at first little more successful than the *Treatise of Human Nature*. . . . I had the mortification to find all England in a ferment, on account of Dr. Middleton’s *Free Inquiry*, while my performance was entirely overlooked and neglected.” Hume, “The Life of David Hume, Esq.,” ix.

<sup>74</sup>Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 79.

<sup>75</sup>See, for example, R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997). In this compilation, Britain’s leading philosophical atheist of the late twentieth century, Antony Flew, updates and defends Hume’s arguments against miracles (“Neo-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous”). The editors print Hume’s “Of Miracles” as the argument that they are countering within the rest of the volume. See also James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, eds., *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), which is addressed specifically to the challenges still posed by Hume’s arguments. Hume’s argument continues to draw significant, focused attention, from devotees defending the integrity of his arguments (e.g., Robert J. Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005]; Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* [New York: Dell, 1966]) to detractors insisting that his argument has been decisively and conclusively defeated (e.g., John Earman, *Hume’s Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]). At the popular level, however, it is still often assumed that Hume’s argument against miracles is successful. Lee notes that Hume’s critique is thought to have “provided a final and devastating blow against miracle reports.” Lee, “Miracles,” 73. In many ways, this demonstrates the dissolution of the governing supernaturalistic worldview of Western Christendom in Hume’s day, and how that trend continued after Hume’s death.

imagined.”<sup>76</sup> Hume insists that “it is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden”; however, “it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; *because that has never been observed in any age or country.*”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Hume arrives at the maxim “that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish.”<sup>78</sup> Hume has, essentially, defined miracles out of existence.<sup>79</sup>

When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other . . . and always reject the greater miracle.<sup>80</sup>

Hume’s initial argument against miracles leaves open the theoretical possibility that testimony *could* establish the historicity of a particular miracle.<sup>81</sup> His subsequent development of the argument, however, renders that theoretical possibility impotent. Hume develops four arguments against the reliability of miracle-claims. First, miracles have never historically been attested by a “sufficient number of men” whose “good-sense, education, . . . learning, . . . undoubted integrity, . . . credit and reputation” places

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<sup>76</sup>Hume, “Of Miracles,” in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 126.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-27. Emphasis added. Note how Hume immediately predetermines the discussion concerning Christ’s resurrection—a man rising from the dead *would* be a miracle, because such has *never* been observed, including, of course, by the purported eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection in the New Testament.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>79</sup>See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 80-86; Lee, “Miracles,” 73ff. Hume’s definition of miracles essentially decides the matter *a priori*. (1) The laws of nature are established by universal observation and experience, and cannot be violated. (2) If miracles occur, they are violations of the laws of nature. (3) Therefore, miracles do not occur. Hume’s initial statement of the argument against miracles is in fact a linguistic sleight of hand.

<sup>80</sup>Hume, “Of Miracles,” 128. The unstated conclusion drawn by Hume is that it is more likely that the disciples’ testimony concerning Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is false.

<sup>81</sup>See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 80-82; Lee, “Miracles,” 73-112.

them above doubt.<sup>82</sup> Second, Hume notes the natural human credulity toward miracle claims.<sup>83</sup> Third, “it forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations.”<sup>84</sup> Finally, Hume suggests, without supporting argumentation, that the various miracle-claims of different religions cancel one another out.<sup>85</sup>

In this section, Hume seems to be arguing that testimony may *in theory* be capable of establishing a historical miracle, but *in actuality* no such miracles have been sufficiently attested. It is instructive to note that Hume gives no indication of having carefully examined and weighed all historical miracle-claims to have come to such a comprehensive conclusion against their veracity. More compelling, however, is that Hume later reverts to defining miracles out of existence.

Hume considers the raft of miracles attested to at the tomb of François de Paris in the Saint-Medard neighborhood of Paris. Hume acknowledges that “the curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind” were claimed; moreover, “many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, and on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, Hume’s four

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<sup>82</sup>Hume, “Of Miracles,” 128.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 129-31. It is interesting to note that this credulity does not seem to be operative in our contemporary society—rather, there seems to be an underlying *incredulity* toward miracle-claims.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 131-34.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 134-35. See further Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 86-89. If America and China both claim to possess the most powerful armies in the world, do their truth-claims necessarily cancel one another out? It is difficult to see why this would be the case in either scenario.

<sup>86</sup>Hume, “Of Miracles,” 138.

criteria for reliable miracle-attestation were all met in the case of the Abbé Paris.<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, Hume refuses to accept the miracle-claims as factual, claiming instead that they are impossible by definition.

And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, miracles may be theoretically possible, but there can never be a sufficient body of evidence to prove one historically. Throughout, Hume's implicit target has been the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the conclusion of his essay, Hume focuses on his target more directly by drawing a contemporary analogy.

But suppose, that all the historians who treat of England, should agree, that, on the first of January 1600, Queen Elizabeth died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court . . . and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed England for three years: I must confess that I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real. You would in vain object to me the difficulty, and almost impossibility of deceiving the world in an affair of such consequence. . . . All this might astonish me; but I would still reply, that the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.<sup>89</sup>

Hume explicitly affirms that the resurrection from the dead of a prominent figure is absolutely impossible. Miracles fall outside the pool of live options of Hume's worldview, influenced as he is by the rise of English deism and modern science. There is

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<sup>87</sup>Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 88.

<sup>88</sup>Hume, "Of Miracles," 138.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.

absolutely no set of evidence, public or private, that could convince Hume of the veracity of a resurrection—of Queen Elizabeth in 1600, or of Jesus Christ in 30 A.D.

Hume's rejection of Jesus' resurrection, initially justified on the basis of lack of sufficient testimonial evidence, turns out to be an *a priori* rejection of the possibility of all miracles. Hume represents the culmination of deism and modern science's faith in the unbreakable regularity of natural law. The stream of Western philosophy and science that birthed Hume's classic formulation of the argument against miracles flowed quickly into the pond of European biblical scholarship, and from it to the contemporary worldview of John Dominic Crossan.

### **Biblical Criticism and the Rise of Resurrection Disbelief**

The philosophical critique of miracles contributed to and was complemented by the rise of biblical criticism. Prior to the rise of deism and skepticism, the Jesus of history had been equated with the Christ of faith. Biblical scholars presumed that the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels and creeds was identical with the historical first-century Jesus of Nazareth. The scriptures were accepted more or less at face value as historical narratives with theological significance. The healing and nature miracles portrayed in the Gospels were read as straightforward historical accounts of what happened, as they fit within the prevailing theological worldview. Jesus' resurrection was understood as a literal, bodily rising from the dead, in accordance with what seemed to be the clear proclamation of the New Testament and the unanimous belief of early Christian writers.

As the Western theistic worldview consensus gradually disintegrated and the possibility of miracles began to be questioned, the equation of the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith became increasingly problematic. Deistic philosophers like Thomas



Woolston, Matthew Tindal, and David Hume had already expressed skepticism concerning the veracity of the professed miracles of the New Testament, especially the resurrection of Jesus. Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, however, skepticism concerning miracles and the resurrection entered the discipline of biblical studies with the rise of biblical criticism. Biblical scholars began to encourage a critical reading of the scriptures as literature rather than as revelation, under the strictures of rational human inquiry. This new method of biblical interpretation, combined with the philosophical direction of deism, gave birth to a searching for the historical Jesus—the first-century Jesus of Nazareth without the accumulated creed and dogma of later Christendom.

### **From Reimarus to Strauss: Fiction and Myth**

Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768) is generally acknowledged as the beginning point of the quest for the historical Jesus.<sup>90</sup> Reimarus was influenced by English deism, and came to reject the supernatural elements of the Gospels including, quite naturally, the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>91</sup> His deistic beliefs strongly directed his reflections on the historical Jesus.<sup>92</sup> In his posthumously-published *Fragments*, Reimarus insisted that

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<sup>90</sup> Albert Schweitzer writes, “Before Reimarus, no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus.” Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 13. See also Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought 1778-1860*, Studies in Historical Theology 1 (Durham: Labyrinth, 1985), 1; Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 20-21; Robert B. Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus: The Impact of Hermeneutics on the Jesus Research of John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 9-10.

<sup>91</sup> Boyd argues that “Reimarus was a synthesizer and translator of English Deism . . . equally a child of the Enlightenment, as demonstrated by the desupernaturalizing, secularizing nature of his project.” Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 23.

<sup>92</sup> Craig Evans writes, “In the place of dogmatic orthodoxy (i.e., the historical Jesus = the Jesus of the Gospels, who is none other than the Christ of orthodox Christianity) there arose dogmatic skepticism

Jesus taught a purely natural (deistic) religion, but his teachings had been perverted by the apostles after his death.<sup>93</sup> Reimarus examined the Gospels through the critical lens of deism, and concluded that Jesus had hoped for and expected an earthly deliverance and vindication.<sup>94</sup> The truth of the Christian faith depends, Reimarus argued, on the truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.<sup>95</sup> Reimarus' critical analysis of the Gospels' accounts of the resurrection, however, uncovered inconsistencies, discrepancies and contradictions.<sup>96</sup> Thus, he concluded that the resurrection of Jesus was a fraud, an intentional deception perpetrated by Jesus' disciples, who in reality stole the body.<sup>97</sup>

The publication of Reimarus' *Fragments* inaugurated a torrent of responses. Traditionalists defended the historicity of biblical miracles and prophecy.<sup>98</sup> Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781), who published Reimarus' *Fragments*, argued in his own work that

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(i.e. miracles cannot occur; all documents that describe miracles are therefore mythological)." Craig A. Evans, "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 5.

<sup>93</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 2.

<sup>94</sup>Reimarus writes, "The master, and how much more his disciples, found themselves mistaken and deceived by the condemnation and death, and [thus] the new system of a suffering spiritual savior, which no one had ever known or thought of before, was *invented* after the death of Jesus, and invented only because the first hopes had failed." Henri Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 151.

<sup>95</sup>"Now everyone will readily acknowledge, as do the apostles, that Christianity depends entirely upon the truth of the story of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead." Reimarus, *Fragments*, 153. This is one of the few areas where contemporary evangelical scholars agree heartily with Reimarus over against mainstream biblical scholarship, which, following Bultmann (see below), insists that the historical truth of the resurrection has nothing whatsoever to do with the truth of Christianity.

<sup>96</sup>Reimarus, *Fragments*, 165-97. For example, the chief priests guard the tomb because they know of Jesus' prophecy concerning his resurrection (Matt 27:62-66), while the disciples themselves are apparently ignorant of Jesus' prophesied resurrection (John 20:9; Luke 24:21). Reimarus, *Fragments*, 165. "The first thing that we notice concerning the consistency of the four evangelists is that their stories diverge from each other in almost each and every point of the affair, and each one reads differently. Although this does not straightway show a contradiction, still it certainly does not make a unanimous story, especially since the difference is expressed in the most important elements of the event." *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>97</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 4-6; Reimarus, *Fragments*, 154-61.

<sup>98</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 6-7.

after Reimarus, traditional Christian appeals to miracles and prophecy “no longer constitute a proof [of Christianity] because they are no longer admissible as evidence.”<sup>99</sup>

Carl Bahrdt (1741-1792) suggested that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were all part of an elaborate Essene plot. The miracles were explained naturalistically; the crucifixion was explained away as an elaborate illusion, the physician Luke revived Jesus in the cave-tomb, and Jesus was presented for occasional public appearances to convince others of his resurrection.<sup>100</sup> Bahrdt is representative of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars who sought to present a natural reading of the Gospel miracles. Others in this tradition include H. E. G. Paulus (1761-1851), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and Karl Venturini (1768-1849).<sup>101</sup> Their critical rationalism “consistently sought to explain all phenomena in a rational way, while leaving God to be the ultimate cause of all. In so doing, it transferred the center of interest from the supernatural and divine to the natural and the human.”<sup>102</sup>

The academic die had been cast. Deism, with its insistence upon the regular workings of the natural order, had taken strong hold in educated European circles. There were, and would always remain, scholarly voices promoting the traditional orthodox view of miracles and the resurrection. But the worldview of the biblical academy was no

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>100</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 163; Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 38-44.

<sup>101</sup>On Paulus, see Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 48-57. On Schleiermacher, *ibid.*, 62-67. On Venturini, *ibid.*, 44-47. See also Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 23-27.

<sup>102</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 165.

longer monolithically supernatural. The trajectory of modern liberal scholarship moved toward a “positive, practical religion, conceived within the limits of reason alone.”<sup>103</sup>

David Strauss (1808-1874) marked a new transition in historical Jesus research. Before Strauss, lives of Jesus sought to naturalize the Gospel miracles.<sup>104</sup> Strauss’ major works (*Life of Jesus*, and *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*) laid a new methodological foundation. Strauss agreed with deists and earlier biblical critics regarding the impossibility of miracles.<sup>105</sup> Strauss went further, however, and insisted that rationalistic attempts to preserve the historical core of biblical miracles were doomed to failure. Scholars like Venturini, Bahrtdt, and Paulus, in seeking to explain the miracles naturalistically, “went to extravagant and absurd lengths in their alternative explanations.”<sup>106</sup> Strauss insisted that it was impossible to explain the multitude of scriptural miracle-claims naturalistically.

In particular, Strauss critiqued the ‘swoon’ theory, popular in his day, which attempted to naturalistically explain the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. Scholars like Venturini and Bahrtdt argued that the resurrection was a plot intended to elevate Jesus

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>104</sup>E.g., Schweitzer translates Venturini’s historical Jesus study as “Non-supernatural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth.” Venturini explains the miracles in naturalistic terms: “[Jesus] never healed without medicaments and always carried His ‘portable medicine chest’ with Him. . . . The raisings from the dead were cases of coma. The nature-miracles were due to a profound acquaintance with the powers of Nature and the order of her processes. They involve fore-knowledge rather than control. Many miracle stories rest on obvious misunderstandings. Nothing could be simpler than the explanation of the miracle at Cana. Jesus had brought with Him as a wedding-gift some jars of good wine and put them aside in another room.” Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 44-45. See also Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 163-64.

<sup>105</sup>Brown notes that “in common with the skeptics, he insisted on allowing only those events that were conformable to his understanding of natural laws.” Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 188.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 189. Boyd writes that Strauss considered “attempts to explain [the Gospels’ supernatural events] by rationalistic methods are mistaken, even ridiculous.” Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 27-28.

in the eyes of his disciples and later followers. In reality, a secret society, with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus playing key leadership roles, oversaw Jesus' apparent death on the cross and revival in the tomb. Strauss insists that Jesus' death on the cross was real—the Romans were too good at crucifying to have left him half-dead.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, the resuscitation of an almost-dead but seriously-wounded Jesus could not have given rise to resurrection faith:

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence . . . could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry.<sup>108</sup>

Having rejected naturalistic and supernaturalistic explanations of the Gospel miracles, including the resurrection, Strauss argued that the New Testament is not meant to be read as natural or supernatural history, but rather as self-conscious mythology.<sup>109</sup> Strauss detected literary and thematic similarities between scripture and other myths from ancient cultures and religions; thus, the Gospels most neatly fit the genre of myth, not history.<sup>110</sup> Strauss then employed a double principle of analogy. First, in line with deists, he insisted that “reported events of the past should bear analogy to the events of his own experience and understanding.”<sup>111</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not matched by

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<sup>107</sup>David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus, ed. and trans. Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 123-25.

<sup>108</sup>David Friedrich Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 412. Some contemporary scholars conclude that “Strauss delivered the historical death blow to the swoon theory held by Karl Venturini, Heinrich Paulus, and others.” Gary R. Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 125.

<sup>109</sup>Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 27-29.

<sup>110</sup>Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 78-120.

<sup>111</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 189.

any other contemporary or historical event; therefore, it could not be taken as a literal historical fact. Second, in a new departure in biblical studies, he insisted that “the biblical stories bore unmistakable analogy to the known myths of antiquity.”<sup>112</sup> The resurrection could not be interpreted or accepted supernaturally, nor could it be explained away rationalistically: it must be accepted as profound myth.

### **From Strauss to Bultmann: Demythologizing Jesus**

Strauss distinguished different types of myth in ancient literature, including “historical mythi: narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural.”<sup>113</sup> The Gospels contained different types of myth as well, but again historical myth is most significant: “The historical mythus has for its groundwork a definite individual fact which has been seized upon by religious enthusiasm, and twined around with mythical conceptions culled from the idea of the Christ.”<sup>114</sup> Strauss also identified the presence of legends,<sup>115</sup> evangelists’ additions,<sup>116</sup> and a core of historical material in the Gospels. Unsurprisingly, the historical core of Jesus of Nazareth is thoroughly natural and rationalistic.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>115</sup>“Those parts of the history which are characterized by indefiniteness and want of connexion, by misconstruction and transformation, by strange combinations and confusion—the natural results of a long course of oral transmission; or which, on the contrary, are distinguished by highly coloured and pictorial representations, which also seem to point to a traditionary origin.” Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>“Those parts of the narrative which were clearly of an individual character, designed merely to give cleverness, connexion, and climax, to the representation.” Ibid., 191.

<sup>117</sup>“He grew up at Nazareth, let himself be baptized by John, collected disciples, went about teaching in the Jewish land, opposed Pharisaism everywhere and invited men into the messianic kingdom, but . . . in the end fell victim to the hatred and envy of the Pharisaic party and died on the cross.” Ibid.

Strauss was forthright and unapologetic about allowing “philosophical and theological presuppositions to determine his historical research.”<sup>118</sup> He explicitly rejects the possibility of real miracles occurring, and confesses that his research is thus driven by “anti-dogmatic concern.”<sup>119</sup> Strauss was certainly not alone in allowing his theological presuppositions to govern his biblical interpretation;<sup>120</sup> however, his acknowledgement of the role of worldview was fresh.<sup>121</sup> Strauss’ lasting legacy was removing the perceived need to explain the Gospel accounts at face value. After Strauss, it was intellectually and theologically acceptable to reject the apparent historical miracles of the Gospels rather than seeking a naturalistic explanation for them.

Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) pushed in the directions pioneered by Strauss. He considered many Gospel accounts and teachings to be metaphorical rather than natural or historical.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, his critical study of the Gospel of John convinced him that it was a purely literary account, with little or no historical basis.<sup>123</sup> The infancy and passion narratives derive not from historical fact, but from mythological symbolism and theological system.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 28.

<sup>119</sup>Personal letter from Strauss cited in Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 204.

<sup>120</sup>Bahrdrdt and Venturini serve as additional scholars whose anti-supernatural worldview determined their far-fetched attempts to rationally explain away the miracles of the Gospels.

<sup>121</sup>We shall see that while Crossan inherits the anti-supernaturalistic bias against miracle-claims in the Gospels, he is not as forthcoming about his *a priori* worldview presuppositions as Strauss.

<sup>122</sup>Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 139.

<sup>123</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 228. Bauer calls the Gospels “artistic compositions . . . of purely literary origin.” Bruno Bauer, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought*, 228-29; Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 140-59.

Ernest Renan (1823-1892) rejected the supernatural worldview of the Gospels, and presented a natural, rationalist historical Jesus.<sup>125</sup> William Wrede (1859-1906) expressed thoroughgoing skepticism regarding the reliability of the Gospel accounts, and famously expressed the ‘Messianic secret’ of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>126</sup> After Wrede, it was fashionable to reject the historical contribution of all four gospels.<sup>127</sup>

### **To Bultmann and Beyond: No Quest, New Quest, and Demythologization**

The classical ‘quest for the historical Jesus,’ begun by Reimarus, was ended by Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). Schweitzer summarized the trajectory of eighteenth and nineteenth century biblical criticism, demonstrating the collapse of critical confidence in the historical reliability of the canonical Gospels had profound effects for modern Christianity. Schweitzer also indicted the life-of-Jesus research of his predecessors for finding a Jesus of their own construction, a Christ who fit with the spirit of the age.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 33. Schweitzer, however, argues that Renan “refuses to assert either the possibility or the impossibility of miracle, but speaks only as an historian. ‘We do not say miracle is impossible, we say only that there has never been a satisfactorily authenticated miracle.’” Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 183. Following the principle of analogy through, however, results in denying the existence of miracles by definition. And certainly, the assertion that “there has never been a satisfactorily authenticated miracle” encompasses biblical history as well; thus, Renan rejects *carte blanche* the possible historicity of the Gospel miracles.

<sup>126</sup>Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 330-97. Schweitzer compares Wrede’s *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels* with his own *The Secret of the Messiahship and the Passion: A Sketch of the Life of Jesus*, designating Wrede’s “thoroughgoing scepticism” and his own “thoroughgoing eschatology.” Ibid., 330.

<sup>127</sup>Wrede insisted that “both Mark’s framework and much of its detail derives not from reliable traditions about Jesus, but from fabrications fed by post-Easter theological reflection of the early church.” See Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

<sup>128</sup>Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 398-99. “The mistake was to suppose that Jesus could come to mean more to our time by entering into it as a man like ourselves. That is not possible . . . because such a Jesus never existed.” Ibid., 399.



The trajectory beginning with Reimarus and culminating in Wrede moved toward ever-increasing skepticism regarding the historical foundations of the Jesus of Christian creed and tradition.<sup>129</sup> The tools of biblical criticism, honed by Reimarus, Lessing, Bahrdt, Paulus, Strauss, Schleiermacher, Renan, Wrede, and others, tended to decrease the core of historical facts that could be known about Jesus of Nazareth.

The thoroughgoing skepticism of Wrede, combined with Schweitzer's penetrating critique of liberal Protestantism's reconstructions of the historical Jesus, resulted in a period of 'no quest.'<sup>130</sup> The Gospels were considered unreliable, and as a result biblical scholars had no confidence in their ability to obtain an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus. Consequently, no new 'lives of Jesus' were written until the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>131</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) both epitomizes and concludes the 'no quest' period. Bultmann argued that "we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."<sup>132</sup> The historical core of Jesus life had been obscured by early Christian sources which, he argued, evidence no interest in the *historical* Jesus but rather engage in legendary accretion and development.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Bultmann concluded that "Wrede's work on the Messianic Secret . . . did most to call into question [the] traditional attitude which went far beyond what could be established by a cautious analysis of Mark. . . . Wrede's work constituted a quite annihilating criticism of a seemingly clear picture of historical development in Mark. This picture is an illusion; Mark is the work of an author who is steeped in the theology of the early Church, and who ordered and arranged the traditional material that he received in the light of the faith of the early church." Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 1.

<sup>130</sup>Eddy and Beilby, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 20.

<sup>131</sup>Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 39-40.

<sup>132</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958), 8.

<sup>133</sup>Eddy and Beilby, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 22.

Bultmann is explicit about the worldview presuppositions which govern his critical study of the New Testament. First, he outlines the “mythical view of the world which the New Testament presupposes”<sup>134</sup>—a three-storied universe, with supernatural beings residing in heaven (the world above) who frequently “intervene in the course of nature and in all that men think and will and do.”<sup>135</sup> Bultmann then identifies the sources of the New Testament worldview in “the contemporary mythology of Jewish Apocalyptic and in the redemption myths of Gnosticism.”<sup>136</sup> The New Testament worldview, however, is no longer tenable; thus, the Gospel message, if presented in terms of the New Testament’s own worldview, is simply unacceptable and unbelievable: “To this extent the kerygma is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete.”<sup>137</sup>

Can Christian preaching expect modern man to accept the mythical view of the world as true? To do so would be both senseless and impossible. It would be senseless, because there is nothing specifically Christian in the mythical view of the world as such. It is simply the cosmology of a pre-scientific age. Again, it would be impossible, because no man can adopt a view of the world by his own volition—it is already determined for him by his place in history.<sup>138</sup>

Bultmann then concludes quite famously that “it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries,

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<sup>134</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology: The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of its Re-interpretation,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 2.

<sup>135</sup>Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 1.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.* Unfortunately, Bultmann simply assumes that a supernaturalistic (classical theistic) worldview is “obsolete”—he does not offer any supporting philosophical arguments. Crossan inherits both Bultmann’s rejection of classical theism and his failure to offer any reasons for such rejection.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.* Incidentally, I find it quite remarkable that Bultmann could conclude, quite sincerely, that the supernatural worldview which permeates the New Testament, contains “nothing specifically Christian.” Does this include the very existence of God?

and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.”<sup>139</sup>

The miracles of the New Testament, including Jesus’ resurrection, are mythical accounts with neither natural nor supernatural explanation.<sup>140</sup> The spirit and presuppositions of Strauss continue in Bultmann and his protégés.

In the 1950s, interest in the historical Jesus re-awakened. The rebirth of historical Jesus research is attributed to a lecture delivered by Ernest Käsemann (1906-1998) on October 20, 1953.<sup>141</sup> Käsemann insisted that the obstacles raised by biblical criticism must not be permitted to prevent investigation into the historical Jesus, lest contemporary Christian theology fall into a new type of docetism. Within ten years, numerous prominent biblical scholars became involved once again in a quest for uncovering the words and deeds of the historical Jesus.<sup>142</sup> Two key aspects of the ‘new quest’ for the historical Jesus were the marked rise of redaction criticism and the continuation of Bultmannian presuppositions.

On the one hand, the new quest insisted that the canonical Gospels did not merely record received Jesus tradition, but rather shaped it according to their own theological and literary intentions and desires.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, the anti-

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>140</sup>On the resurrection narratives specifically, see Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 284-91. Bultmann, like Crossan after him, identifies the road to Emmaus and the Galilean appearance in Matt 28 as purely mythological indications of older legends.

<sup>141</sup>Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus.” The lecture was presented at an annual colloquium of Bultmann and his former students and was later published in Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1964).

<sup>142</sup>Eddy and Beilby identify key figures in the renewed quest as Gunther Bornkamm, C. H. Dodd, Herbert Braun, Leander Keck, Norman Perrin, and Edward Schillebeeckx. Eddy and Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus,” 26.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 26.

supernaturalistic worldview developed by English deism continued to hold sway.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, in outlining his own “presuppositions, method and interests,” contemporary German biblical scholar Gerd Lüdemann writes, “Today no one seriously accepts that Jesus in fact walked on the sea, stilled a storm, multiplied bread, turned water into wine and raised the dead. Rather, these actions were invented for Jesus only after his death or his supposed resurrection.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, in order to recover the historical Jesus, Lüdemann insists,

First of all, words and actions are inauthentic in which the risen Lord speaks and acts or is presupposed as the one who speaks and acts, for after his death Jesus no longer spoke and acted himself. . . . Secondly, those actions are unhistorical which presuppose that the laws of nature are broken. Here it makes no difference that people at the time of Jesus did not know these laws or did not think in scientific categories.<sup>146</sup>

Lüdemann, expressing the confident consensus of critical biblical scholarship, insists that the historical Jesus did not and could not perform miracles, and was certainly not raised from the dead supernaturally by God after his death. The stream of biblical scholarship generated from Enlightenment deism and developed through historical criticism has resulted in firm certainty that the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be understood as a literal historical event.

### **Summary: The Resurrection Historically**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ held a central place in Christian history and theology from the apostolic age through the sixteenth century. As the combination of

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 27; Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 51-60.

<sup>145</sup>Gerd Lüdemann, *Jesus After 2000 Years: What He Really Said and Did*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 2000), 1.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 4.

deistic naturalism and higher biblical criticism developed, belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus waned. Some were willing to discard belief in Christianity altogether, including any notion of Christ's resurrection. Many others, however, sought to retain some semblance of Christian faith, and embraced an alternative understanding of the resurrection presented in the New Testament.

The 'swoon' theory, exemplified in Karl Bahrdt and Karl Venturini, holds that Jesus never actually died on the cross, but merely fainted, and was revived in the tomb.<sup>147</sup>

Various 'fraud' theories, like those of Reimarus and Lessing, argue that the disciples stole the body and then invented the resurrection, or someone else stole or moved the body and the disciples then mistakenly believed Jesus had risen from the dead.

'Hallucination' or 'vision' theories, like that of Strauss, claim that the disciples had subjective personal experiences which they believed were encounters with the risen Lord, but that Jesus wasn't bodily raised from the dead.<sup>148</sup>

In North America, a popular understanding of Jesus' resurrection is that of a metaphor or myth—Jesus was not literally raised from the dead in bodily form, but rather the resurrection indicates that in some way the mission, teaching, community, or vision of Jesus Christ lives on.<sup>149</sup> John Dominic Crossan, co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, is a major proponent of the metaphorical resurrection.

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<sup>147</sup>Venturini and Bahrdt could also be classified as 'conspiracy theories,' involving as they do the presence of a secret society to revive and present Jesus after his crucifixion.

<sup>148</sup> A critical analysis of these explanations is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in many places, e.g., William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1981), 23-44; Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 81-165.

<sup>149</sup> The popularity of this view is not difficult to understand. Although post-Christian, North America retains a deep Judeo-Christian heritage; hence there is a desire, amongst a majority of the population, to retain a connection to the Christian faith. Jesus Christ is generally affirmed and admired as a great man, a wonderful moral teacher, and an excellent example. There is, thus, a yearning to retain faith in

### **Crossan's Metaphorical Reconstruction of the Resurrection**

Later chapters of this study will examine Crossan's theological worldview and historical Jesus methodology in more detail. At this point, however, it is helpful to outline Crossan's understanding of Jesus' resurrection—the fruit of his theological worldview and historical Jesus methodology. Such a procedure will place Crossan's hypotheses in the historical context of early Christian proclamation, medieval theological agreement, the rise of deism, and the development of critical biblical scholarship.

John Dominic Crossan (b. 1934), Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at DePaul University in Chicago, has spent his academic career studying the historical Jesus. As a result of those studies, Crossan has come to numerous conclusions about the nature, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ, many of which are beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>150</sup> He also arrived at some significant and controversial conclusions regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First, Crossan argues that following Jesus' arrest, the male disciples all fled Jerusalem and returned to Galilee without knowing the details of Jesus' fate. The disciples likely learned that Jesus had been executed by the Romans, but that was the extent of their knowledge.<sup>151</sup>

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Jesus Christ. At the same time, many North Americans have adopted a deistic or naturalistic worldview, which disallows miraculous or clearly supernatural occurrences like the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Hence, the metaphorical resurrection allows Jesus-minded secular North Americans to simultaneously embrace the importance of Christ, the truth of the resurrection, and a naturalistic worldview.

<sup>150</sup>The fullest statement of Crossan's conclusions about Jesus of Nazareth is found in John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). That volume was condensed and popularized in idem, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

<sup>151</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 392; Crossan, *Jesus*, 145-54.

Second, after his death on the cross Jesus was *not* buried in a private tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>152</sup> Rather, Joseph is a fictional character, invented by Mark to solve a thorny problem in the early Christian community. The problem was that, after Jesus' death, his body was most likely either (1) dishonorably buried in a common grave by Roman authorities;<sup>153</sup> or (2) consumed by wild animals as it hung on the cross (or after having been taken down off the cross and thrown in a ditch).<sup>154</sup> Either way, Jesus did not receive an honorable burial.<sup>155</sup> The early Christian community could not bear the thought of their beloved master receiving a dishonorable burial or no burial at all. Rather, they desired to have Jesus properly buried in accordance with Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 21)–hence Mark's creation of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>156</sup> The later Gospel-writers (Matthew, Luke, and John) develop the person of Joseph and Jesus' burial, eventually ending up with John's kingly burial.

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<sup>152</sup>Crossan notes that of all the crucified victims in first century Palestine, archaeologists have discovered only *one* clear example of a victim who received proper Jewish burial. Crossan concludes: "In general, however, if one had influence, one was not crucified, and if one was crucified, one would not have influence enough to obtain burial." Crossan, *Jesus*, 153.

<sup>153</sup>"What must have happened normally was that the soldiers who executed the crucifixion guarded the cross until death and made sure it was over by burying the crucified one themselves. Guarding was necessary to make certain that nobody intervened to save the crucified person and to ensure the full public effect of the slow and horrible death." Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 392.

<sup>154</sup>"In normal circumstances the soldiers guarded the body until death and thereafter it was left for carrion crow, scavenger dog, or other wild beasts to finish the brutal job. That nonburial consummated authority's dreadful warning to any observer and every passerby." Crossan, *Jesus*, 153.

<sup>155</sup>Until 1992, Crossan favored the proposition that Jesus' crucified body would probably have been buried in a common grave by the Roman authorities. Beginning in 1992, however, Crossan insists that Jesus' body would most likely have been consumed by wild animals, either while still on the cross or after having been removed from the cross and tossed aside. See Crossan, *Jesus*, 154; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 246-54; Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 120.

<sup>156</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 393; *Jesus*, 155-56.

Third, there is no tomb to be found empty. Rather, the Gospel narratives describing the discovery of the empty tomb are, again, invented elements added by Mark, and copied and expanded by the others.

Fourth, there most likely were visionary appearances of Jesus to his disciples following his death, but these are natural, well-understood psychological phenomena which are present not only in Christianity but in other religions and even in secular grief settings. There is nothing supernatural or miraculous about the disciples experiencing subjective visions—even in corporate settings—of their leader and teacher after his death. Thus, although the disciples saw visions of Jesus, they did not literally, physically see the risen Jesus in bodily form.<sup>157</sup>

Fifth, the bodily appearances of Jesus after his crucifixion narrated in the Gospels are not actually resurrection appearances. In fact, they are not appearances at all. Rather, they are later inventions of the early Christian community, which were retrojected in order to establish the authority of one individual or group over another individual or group.<sup>158</sup> In essence, the Gospel writers become conscious participants in political power plays, seeking to establish hegemony over an initially diverse and egalitarian Christian

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<sup>157</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xiv-xix.

<sup>158</sup>“In my thesis, therefore, it was originally another symbolical, resurrectional validation of apostolic authority. None of the three was an illusion, hallucination, vision, or apparition. Each was a symbolic assertion of Jesus’ continued presence to the *general community*, to *leadership groups*, or to specific and even competing *individual leaders*.” Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 407. Emphasis original. Two interesting notes: first, Crossan does not believe that anything like these things ever actually happened. That is, the narratives are entirely fictitious. Second, Crossan finds these ‘resurrectional validations’ not only in the Gospel resurrection narratives (e.g., John 20-21), but also retrojected into the context of Jesus’ ministry within the Gospels. In fact, this is how Crossan explains the so-called ‘nature miracles’—the feeding of the multitudes (e.g., Matt 14:13-21), walking on water (e.g., Matt 14:22-33). The latter story, particularly, was retrojected in order to assert Petrine authority. See further Crossan, *Jesus*, 169-81. E.g., “All Jesus’ *nature miracles* before his death and all his *risen apparitions* afterward should be grouped together and analyzed in terms of the authority of this or that *specific leader* over this or that *leadership group* and/or over this or that *general community*.” Ibid., 181. Emphasis original.



community by concocting accounts where the risen Jesus appeared to the particular individual or group seeking authority.

Sixth, the historical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ need not be discarded, merely redefined.<sup>159</sup> The resurrection for Crossan is metaphorical.<sup>160</sup>

Easter means for me that the divine empowerment which was present in Jesus, but once upon a time limited to those people in Galilee and Judea who had contact with him, is now available to anyone, anywhere in the world, who finds God in Jesus. As far as I'm concerned, it has nothing to do, literally, with a body coming out of a tomb, or a tomb being found empty, or visions, or anything else. All those are dramatic ways of expressing the faith. The heart of resurrection for me is that *the power of God is now available through Jesus, unconfined by time or space, to anyone who believes and experiences it.*<sup>161</sup>

Resurrection does not mean, simply, that the spirit or soul of Jesus lives on in the world. And neither does it mean, simply, that the companions or followers of Jesus live on in the world. *It must be the embodied life that remains powerfully efficacious in this world.* I recognize those claims as an historian, and I believe them as a Christian. . . . [his] continued empowering presence indicates, for believers, that God is not on the side of injustice.<sup>162</sup>

When it suits him, Crossan even professes belief in a *bodily* metaphorical resurrection:

Bodily resurrection has nothing to do with a resuscitated body coming out of its tomb. And neither is it just another word for Christian faith itself. Bodily resurrection means that the embodied life and death of the historical Jesus continues to be experienced, by believers, as powerfully efficacious and salvifically present in this world.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>“Just to make it accurate, I am not denying the resurrection. You just don't like my definition of resurrection.” Crossan, in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 58.

<sup>160</sup>“Christian faith experiences the *continuation* of divine empowerment through Jesus, but that continuation began only after his death and burial. Christian faith itself was there beforehand among Jesus' first followers in Lower Galilee, and it continued, developed, and widened across time and space after his execution.” Crossan, *Jesus*, 161. Emphasis original.

<sup>161</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 127-128. Emphasis added.

<sup>162</sup> Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, xxx. Emphasis original.

<sup>163</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “Historical Jesus as Risen Lord,” in *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict*, ed. John Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson and Werner Kelber (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 46.

After his death, then, Jesus of Nazareth was still experienced in some way by his disciples. That is, in some metaphorical fashion, Jesus has in fact been raised from the dead.

Finally, as Jesus' learned and literate followers experienced His continuing empowering presence amongst them, they searched the Old Testament Scriptures to understand how the Messiah could be so dishonorably murdered by his enemies? As they searched the Scriptures, they applied passages like Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and Psalm 61 to Jesus.<sup>164</sup> Hence Crossan's famous explication of the Road to Emmaus narrative. The disciples were dejected at the death of Jesus. Yet they experienced his presence with them as they continued to live the "open commensality"<sup>165</sup> which Jesus practiced and preached. They searched the Scriptures and began to understand what happened to Jesus. Their hearts were "strangely warmed," and they began to understand. "The symbolism is obvious, as is the metaphoric condensation of the first years of Christian thought and practice into one parabolic afternoon. Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens."<sup>166</sup> Emmaus and other resurrection appearances thus become prophecy historicized; later accounts created to narrate the continuing presence of Jesus with his followers after his death:

My proposal is that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. What we have now in those detailed

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<sup>164</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, 145-152. For evaluations of Crossan's theory, see Charles L. Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?" in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 107-09; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 59-61.

<sup>165</sup>Crossan understands open commensality to be the heart of Jesus' mission and ministry. Eating with sinners and others rejected by the power structures of first-century society, accepting them into his life, welcoming them to the kingdom of God. Crossan, *Jesus*, 196-200.

<sup>166</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xiii.

passion accounts is not *history remembered* but *prophecy historicized*. And it is necessary to be very clear on what I mean here by *prophecy*. I do not mean texts, events, or persons that predicted or foreshadowed the future, that projected themselves *forward* toward a distant fulfillment. I mean such units sought out *backward*, as it were, sought out *after* the events of Jesus' life were already known and his followers declared that texts from the Hebrew Scriptures had been written with him in mind. Prophecy, in this sense, is known after rather than before the fact.<sup>167</sup>

Each of these seven conclusions runs contrary to the confession of orthodox Christianity. If Crossan's reconstruction of the resurrection as a metaphor is correct, then Christianity as historically conceived is gravely mistaken and in need of serious reformation. Indeed, if we follow the Apostle Paul's clarion call in 1 Corinthians 15, then historical Christianity has been a tragic waste of time.

The thesis of this dissertation is that Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection is itself a myth, predetermined by his theological presuppositions. This thesis is will be worked out in two ways. First, it will be argued that Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection is itself a myth, lacking historical and evidential support. Secondly, it will be argued that Crossan's metaphorical resurrection is driven neither by his exegesis of the canonical and extra-canonical Jesus tradition, nor by his rigorous triple-triadic historical methodology. Rather, Crossan is driven to the metaphorical resurrection by the logic of his theological worldview. Crossan has inherited, apparently uncritically, the deistic worldview of Hume, Reimarus, Strauss, and Bultmann, a worldview which denies the possibility of miracles like the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The orthodox understanding of Christ's resurrection is never in Crossan's pool of live options.

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<sup>167</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, 145. Emphasis original.

### CHAPTER 3

#### JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN: BIOGRAPHY AND THEOLOGY

John Dominic Crossan's academic career has spanned more than fifty years.<sup>1</sup> Over the past twenty years, he has emerged as one of the most prolific, public, and popular biblical scholars in America. He is broadly acknowledged, by theological friends and foes alike, as a pre-eminent historical Jesus scholar. Crossan insists that his academic work has consistently focused upon a historical reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth, both in his earlier works on parables and aphorisms,<sup>2</sup> and his later well-known works on Jesus.<sup>3</sup> His life, like his academic career, has been full of adventurous twists and turns. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, this chapter provides a biographical sketch of John Dominic Crossan, thereby putting his academic work into personal context. Second, this chapter provides a theological sketch of John Dominic Crossan, outlining and examining his core theological presuppositions and beliefs. Third,

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<sup>1</sup>To my knowledge, Crossan's first published work is John Dominic Crossan, "Mary's Virginity in St. John—An Exegetical Study," *Marianum* 19 (1957): 115-26. There is a seven-year lull before the publication of Crossan's next article, idem, "The Biblical Poetry of the Hebrews," *The Bible Today* 13 (1964): 832-37. His first full-length work was published in 1966—idem, *Scanning the Sunday Gospel* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>E.g., John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); idem, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury, 1980); idem, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>E.g., John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); idem, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995); idem, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

this chapter will briefly evaluate the implications of Crossan's theological worldview for his understanding of Jesus' resurrection.

### **A Long Way from Tipperary: A Biographical Sketch**

John Michael Edmund Crossan was born on February 17, 1934, in Nenagh County, Tipperary, Ireland.<sup>4</sup> His father, Daniel, was a banker, but despite deep admiration of and love for his father, John neither desired nor intended to follow his father's footsteps in the commercial world. High school in rural Ireland involved going off to boarding school—not because John came from a wealthy family, but because the rural county did not boast sufficient numbers of students to maintain its own high school. John Crossan thus spent five years (1945-1950) at St. Eunan's College in Letterkenny, Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

Crossan did very well in boarding school in a challenging (compared to contemporary North American standards) classical British education which included lessons in Latin and Greek. He was prepared and poised to graduate at sixteen years of age, but was unsure of his future endeavors.

### **The Servite Order: Life as a Scholar-Priest**

Growing up in the south of Ireland, “being Catholic was simply what everyone else was. Catholicism was simply taken for granted as part of your sensibility growing

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<sup>4</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “Exile, Stealth, and Cunning,” *Forum* 1, no. 1 (1985): 59; Hershel Shanks, “The Bad Boy of Historical Jesus Studies,” *Bible Review* 16, no. 5 (2000): 28.

<sup>5</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 7.

up.”<sup>6</sup> The Catholic faith was an unquestioned and unexamined part of Crossan’s self-identity during his school years.<sup>7</sup> During his final year of boarding school, Crossan recalls that “many representatives from monastic orders spoke at my high school. One, from the Servite Order caught my imagination more than any of the others.”<sup>8</sup> While most join religious orders or enter ministry based on a sense of holy calling or personal piety, Crossan’s imagination was caught by the Servite Order’s call to adventure.

Not piety but adventure was what fired my imagination at fifteen years of age. If somebody had told me that I was giving up my life to God . . . [or] giving up my life for others . . . I would not have been impressed. What impressed me was that monastic life meant challenge, that foreign mission meant adventure, and that God clearly had the best game in town, the most exciting game around.<sup>9</sup>

The young John Crossan had Catholicism bred into his personal identity, but it was not a conscious, pious Catholic faith which prompted him to enter the Servite Order. Rather, he possessed a desire for adventure and a yearning for travel, and Catholic monastic orders appeared to be the only (or the best) means to such a life of travel and adventure.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “after graduating in 1950, I entered the American province of this thirteenth-century Roman Catholic monastic order.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>James Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan: An Interview,” *Cross Currents* 45 (1995-1996): 512.

<sup>7</sup>Crossan leaves the nature and content of his Irish Catholic faith unexplained in his autobiographical reflections. To my knowledge, nowhere does he identify the content or depth of his early Catholicism. The reader is left to ponder of what Crossan’s young faith actually consisted. Certainly as a young Catholic he would have recited the prayers and creeds of the Church; but what personal or intellectual attachment did he have to the recited faith?

<sup>8</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “Odyssey: Almost the Whole Truth,” *The Fourth R* 6, no. 5 (1993): 4.

<sup>9</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary: A Memoir* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup>“Crossan became a priest not from any excess of piety, but simply because it sounded adventuresome, especially studying abroad.” Shanks, “The Bad Boy of Historical Jesus Studies,” 28.

<sup>11</sup>Crossan, “Exile, Stealth, and Cunning,” 60.

After a year-long novitiate, Crossan left his native Ireland and traveled to Chicago, where he settled into the Servite monastery and was given a new name, Dominic.<sup>12</sup> From 1951 through 1957, Crossan underwent preparatory study for ordination into the Servite order.<sup>13</sup> He took his vows in 1957, and having been recognized as a promising priest-scholar (or scholarly monk), was sponsored by the Servites to undergo doctoral studies. Crossan was sent back to his native Ireland to study, and graduated with a Doctor of Divinity from St. Patrick's College in Maynooth in 1959.<sup>14</sup>

Having completed doctoral studies, Crossan was sent to the Biblical Institute in Rome "to specialize in the Bible for two years."<sup>15</sup> Crossan returned to the United States in 1961 "to teach at the Servite seminary from which [he] had been ordained."<sup>16</sup> In 1965, the Servites sponsored a two-year sabbatical study in Jordan.<sup>17</sup> Crossan resumed his teaching duties in Chicago in 1968.<sup>18</sup> Crossan taught at the Servite seminary, which moved from its original site at Stonebridge Priory, to Mundelein Seminary, and finally to its merger into the Catholic Theological Union near the University of Chicago.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>In his introductory comments at the Greer-Heard Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in February 2010, Crossan quipped, "My government knows me as John. My God knows me as Dominic. And they haven't been speaking to each other for many years, so all is well."

<sup>13</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 69.

<sup>14</sup>Crossan, "Odyssey," 5; idem, "Exile, Stealth, and Cunning," 60.

<sup>15</sup>Crossan, "Odyssey," 5.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 6; Crossan, "Exile, Stealth, and Cunning," 60.

<sup>18</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 77-78.

<sup>19</sup>John Dominic Crossan, "Bliss at Dawn, Darkness at Noon," in *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories*, ed. William Madges and Michael J. Daley (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 2003), 120.

Monastic vows in the Servite Order included vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Crossan insists, quite sincerely, that his vows did not trouble him during his time within the monastic order. The vow of poverty was made bearable by the fact that the Order provided for all of his needs, and even sponsored the adventure and travel that he had desired. The vow of obedience was acceptable, as the Order never asked or required anything of him that he was unwilling to do; furthermore, his superiors were amenable to sponsoring Crossan's furthered academic studies. The vow of chastity was enabled by three factors: "One was isolation from girls, another was occupation of time, and last was concentration on studies."<sup>20</sup> The vow of poverty was destined never to trouble Crossan within the Servite Order. The other two vows, however, made it progressively difficult for him to remain a Servite priest-scholar.

### **The 1960s: Crisis and Departure**

The 1960s were a turbulent decade for the Roman Catholic Church. Vatican II opened the doors to modernizing and liberalizing tendencies, and also provided a measure of legitimacy to critical scholarship within the Church.<sup>21</sup> As Crossan recalls, those were "heady days" to be a Catholic biblical scholar. "Questions dismissed or forbidden in the 1950s were now openly discussed in the 1960s."<sup>22</sup> The questions at the forefront, for Crossan at least, primarily revolved around issues of human sexuality and religious obedience.

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<sup>20</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 69. Crossan does admit, however, that the vow of chastity "was more difficult for me than the vow of poverty, minimally so before ordination and maximally so afterward." Ibid., 68.

<sup>21</sup>Crossan, "Bliss at Dawn, Darkness at Noon," 122.

<sup>22</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 75.



The vow of chastity-as-celibacy was a subvow of obedience, and when, in the early 1960s, ecclesial obedience came under debate, then so inevitably did clerical and even monastic celibacy. For me that meant deliberate experimentation with female friendships and sexual relationships. Some of it was belated adolescent self-indulgence . . . some of it was trying to understand an option, test a possibility, and imagine a future I had never considered before.<sup>23</sup>

During this period of questioning, testing, and sexual experimentation, Crossan became involved with Margaret Dagenais, a professor at Loyola University. The two fell in love, and soon “clerical celibacy had become much less important than female relationship.”<sup>24</sup> Their sexual relationship did not drive Crossan out of the priesthood: “It was already quite clear by the late 1960s that heterosexuality was quite available even or especially while one remained a monastic priest.”<sup>25</sup> Crossan, however, desired to marry Margaret, who for her part was somewhat unsure about the prospects for marriage.<sup>26</sup> Marriage *did* inevitably entail departure from the priesthood.

So did John Dominic Crossan leave the priesthood because of sex? Did he abandon the monastic order because of his desire to be married? The answer appears to be both yes and no. On the one hand, as Crossan himself admits, “I wanted to get married even if that meant I could no longer be a professor or even a scholar.”<sup>27</sup> When reporters or fellow Christians ask him why he left the priesthood after thirteen years in

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>26</sup>Margaret feared suffering the same fate as her own unhappily divorced parents: she “was much surer of us as friends and lovers than she was of us as husband and wife.” Ibid., 78.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 77. Earlier, Crossan states, “Eventually, after nineteen years, I left the monastic priesthood to get married.” Ibid., xiii.

the Servite Order, Crossan usually responds that he left in order to marry Margaret.<sup>28</sup>

The answer is both simple and understandable.

On the other hand, Crossan insists, “Even if I could have stayed and married [Margaret], I would not have done so.”<sup>29</sup> Crossan had always understood the vow of chastity to be a sub-vow to the vow of obedience. It was the vow of obedience that Crossan was flouting by engaging in “female friendships and sexual relationships,”<sup>30</sup> and it was the vow of obedience by which he ultimately could not abide. Obedience “in terms of where to go and what to do” was unproblematic.<sup>31</sup> But “there was also obedience in terms of how to think and what to say. That was, slowly but surely, where the problem arose and the crisis erupted.”<sup>32</sup>

Sexual experimentation and boundary-pushing was a key part of the cultural revolution in the 1960s; a questioning of institutional power structures and an anti-authority stance were also part of the package. Crossan sincerely and believably insists that his sexual involvement was a reflection of his opposition to authoritarian power structures within the Roman Catholic Church. His rebellion against the Order’s sexual strictures, however, calls into question his insistence that he found it easy to follow his vow of obedience “in terms of where to go and what to do.” If the vow of chastity is

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<sup>28</sup>See, for example, John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 141.

<sup>29</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, xiii.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>31</sup>In part, Crossan found it easy to obey “in terms of where to go and what to do” because the Servites were very gracious in allowing Crossan to pursue his scholarly pursuits; indeed, the Order funded and sponsored his education and travel. Crossan recalls rare occasions when his requests were denied; but generally, he recalls generous living and traveling allowances and shares numerous anecdotes of pleasant holidays and trips funded by the Servites. See Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, chapters 1-3.

<sup>32</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 86.

truly a sub-vow of the vow of obedience, as Crossan implies, then it is certainly related to obedience in terms of what to do, or in this case, what *not* to do. In other words, Crossan's difficulty with the vow of obedience was not limited, as he implies, to "obedience in terms of how to think and what to say." Rather, he was also unwilling to obey his superiors "in terms of where to go and what to do."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the two sides (how to think/what to say and where to go/what to do) are inextricably related.

Nonetheless, the precipitating crisis which resulted in Crossan's departure from the priesthood was related to his vow of obedience clashing with his scholarly endeavors. Crossan's biblical studies and theological reflections were leading him to conclusions at odds with official Catholic dogma and ethical teaching. Many of those conclusions involved beliefs about the person and work of the historical Jesus, and will be the main focus of this dissertation. Some of Crossan's academic and theological conclusions, however, touched on issues of human sexuality. Crossan had concluded that monastic celibacy was unnecessary—his sexual experimentation expressed his differing conclusions regarding both "how to think and what to say" *and* "where to go and what to do." Furthermore, Crossan opposed the papal position on birth control, and in the summer of 1968, participated in a televised Chicago PBS panel discussion on the topic.<sup>34</sup>

Crossan had been able to pursue sexual experimentation without raising hackles within the Roman Catholic hierarchy.<sup>35</sup> The open expression of his counter-institutional beliefs and scholarly conclusions, however, created conflict with bureaucratic superiors, who sought to silence him. Crossan, who by 1968 was

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 80.

determined to remain a scholar and cease being a priest at any rate,<sup>36</sup> objected to the perceived infringement upon his academic freedom as a Catholic scholar:

The only integrity that scholars have is to say honestly what they have learned and to say clearly what they have discovered. They should not trim their reports to what a leader expects or a people want. That is the conflict of interest I found in being a priest-scholar and a seminary professor. . . . It is one thing to be an investigative scholar, another to be a defensive scholar; one thing to find an answer as you proceed, another to know the answer before you begin; one thing to do research, another to do apologetics.<sup>37</sup>

Crossan's interests clearly lay in the direction of investigative, not defensive, scholarship. He desired to do research, not apologetics, and this route was not available to him within the Servite Order as a priest-professor. Crossan received his dispensation from the Servite Order and married Margaret in the summer of 1969, ending his time as a scholarly monk, and marking his official transition from the monastery to non-sectarian academia.<sup>38</sup>

### **Excursus: Investigative vs. Defensive Scholarship, Research vs. Apologetics**

When articulating the reasons for his departure from the Servite Order of the Roman Catholic Church, Crossan draws a sharp distinction between investigative scholarship and defensive scholarship. The former, he argues, pursues research without bias, drawing conclusions as it goes; the latter, on the other hand, knows the answer

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<sup>36</sup>“For me, by the 1960s, the monastic priesthood had become less important than biblical scholarship . . . I wanted to remain a scholar and professor if that were at all possible. . . . I no longer wanted to be a priest under any circumstances, even if I could remain one, still get married, and stay a scholar and professor. But my problem, to repeat, as a priest-professor was how to stop being a priest and stay a professor.” Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 77.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 89-91.

before it begins.<sup>39</sup> The investigative scholar engages in true research; the defensive scholar engages in apologetics. Crossan does not denigrate the worth of defensive scholarship or apologetics; he merely wants to emphasize the difference between them.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, there are three fronts on which I question the sharpness of Crossan's dual distinction between investigative and defensive scholarship, research and apologetics.

**The necessity and inevitability of defensive scholarship.** First, Crossan himself engages vigorously in defensive scholarship. For example, one of the primary purposes of Crossan's 1995 *Who Killed Jesus* is to defend his hypotheses concerning the *Gospel of Peter* and the roots of the Synoptic passion-resurrection narratives against objections raised by Raymond Brown in various articles and his comprehensive *The Death of the Messiah*.<sup>41</sup> The difference, of course, is that Crossan is defending conclusions which he himself embraces. Crossan begins with "investigative scholarship" or "research," arriving at conclusions which he then proceeds to defend against the objections and attacks of other scholars. When Crossan turns from research to defense of his own scholarly conclusions, he is engaging in active apologetics. There is nothing illegitimate or unseemly about scholars defending conclusions that they have already

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example, his identification of two different but valid Christian scholarly positions in John Dominic Crossan, "Reflections on a Debate," in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 148-49.

<sup>41</sup>Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. 2 of *A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); also Raymond E. Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321-43. Crossan describes his purpose: "The purpose of this book is to ensure that a wider population, and not just scholarly experts, knows as clearly as possible that there already existed a radically different interpretation of the passion stories from that given in Raymond Brown's *The Death of the Messiah*. That different interpretation is based on six fundamental disagreements between Brown and myself." Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 6. Raymond Brown receives the largest index listing in the book (ibid., 233). Further, ibid., 21, 30-31, 84-91, 96-100, 137-41, 152-58, 177-81.

arrived at—to the contrary, there would be something unseemly about scholars refusing to defend their own conclusions!

**The research agenda generated by defensive apologetics.** Second, I suggest that the apologetic enterprise (or defensive scholarship) often generates an active research process (i.e., investigative scholarship). For example, Crossan's conclusions regarding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, outlined at the conclusion of chapter 2, have remained relatively stable over his academic career. The second tenet of Crossan's metaphorical understanding of the resurrection holds that Jesus was not buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea; therefore there was no tomb to be found empty on Easter Sunday morning. Until 1992, Crossan implicitly favored the proposition that Jesus' crucified body would probably have been buried in a common grave by the Roman authorities.<sup>42</sup> Beginning in 1992, however, Crossan insists that Jesus' body would most likely have been consumed by wild animals, either while still on the cross or after having been removed from the cross and tossed aside.<sup>43</sup> What prompted this change in Crossan's position?

Crossan recounts the book tour he did to promote his 1991 *Historical Jesus*. At one stop, a questioner focused in on Crossan's rejection of the historicity of the Gospels' burial narratives. Crossan had theorized that the canonical Gospels gradually developed the burial tradition in order to have their messiah-king receive an honorable

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<sup>42</sup>See, e.g., Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 392. "What must have happened normally was that the soldiers who executed the crucifixion guarded the cross until death and made sure it was over by burying the crucified one themselves. Guarding was necessary to make certain that nobody intervened to save the crucified person and to ensure the full public effect of the slow and horrible death."

<sup>43</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 154; John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 246-54; Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 120.

burial—first (in *The Gospel of Peter*) by his enemies, then (beginning in Mark) by secret friends, eventually culminating in the royal burial by secret disciples. The questioner pressed Crossan on his theory—if Crossan rejected the canonical burial narratives, what did he believe had actually happened to Jesus’ body?<sup>44</sup> Until that point, Crossan had never asked that question explicitly. Instead, he had been content with the negative side of the hypothesis—Mark’s burial narrative was an invented fiction. The perceptive question, however, forced Crossan to pursue the issue further. That is, *defending* his scholarly conclusion (the practice of scholarly apologetics) that the canonical burial narratives were invented and that Jesus had not received an honorable burial, pushed Crossan into further *research* to determine what had really happened to Jesus’ body.

Over the next year, therefore, Crossan read Martin Hengel’s work on Roman crucifixion,<sup>45</sup> and came to a further, perhaps even more startling, conclusion. Not only did Jesus not receive an honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea, he was most likely not buried at all; rather, his body was most likely devoured by wild animals either as it hung on the cross or after it was removed by Roman soldiers and tossed in a nearby ditch.<sup>46</sup> Crossan’s overall position on the burial and resurrection did not change—Jesus was not buried, and nothing supernatural happened to his body after his crucifixion. But active defense of his metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus’ resurrection forced Crossan to engage in what might be termed apologetic research—research undertaken in order to

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<sup>44</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “The Power of the Dog,” in *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible: A Reader*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 190-92.

<sup>45</sup>Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>46</sup>See Crossan, “The Power of the Dog,” 192; Crossan, *Jesus*, 154; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 246-54; Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 120.

further buttress or explain a scholarly conclusion drawn as a result of earlier study. I suggest that investigative research driven by apologetic concerns or needs is prevalent within diverse streams of scholarship.<sup>47</sup>

It is fair to point out that Crossan did not know what the conclusion of his study was going to be when he delved into the fate of Jesus' physical body. It is also fair, however, to suggest that we know what was *not* going to be the result of Crossan's further research: namely, he was not going to arrive at the conclusion that Jesus' body was buried by Joseph of Arimathea after all, and the tomb was thereafter found empty on Sunday morning, probably indicating that something supernatural had occurred to the corpse. There is, to be sure, a distinction between knowing what *is* going to be found (in Crossan's words, "to know the answer before you begin")<sup>48</sup> and knowing what is *not* going to be found (in my words, knowing what the answer is *not* before you begin). The

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<sup>47</sup>Some examples of evangelical scholarship which represent such apologetic-driven research include Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993); and William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* 16 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989). Habermas, Licona, McDowell, and Craig have all come to the conclusion as scholars and men of faith that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine son of God who was raised bodily from the dead supernaturally. That conclusion then generates a research project which is expected to support the original stance. Modifications of secondary issues is both expected and achieved, just as Crossan modifies his position on the post-crucifixion fate of Jesus' body without altering his overall conclusions regarding the metaphorical resurrection. Critical scholarship falling into the same category includes John S. Kloppenborg's pioneering work on 'Q' including *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); and Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005). Kloppenborg engaged in ground-breaking research on the postulated Q document beginning in the 1980s, including his textual reconstruction and theoretical stratification of the 'sayings gospel.' His primary position, the result of early research, is that Q once existed as an independent, complete document, went through several stages of redaction and addition, was incorporated into Matthew and Luke, and eventually fell out of circulation as an independent source. That hypothesis generated further research projects, which resulted in extensions and modifications of his original theory. The overall position, however, has remained constant. Crossan would not, however, accuse Kloppenborg of engaging in "defensive" scholarship, or of already knowing the answer before beginning his research.

<sup>48</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 96.



distinction, however, is a fine one, measured by degrees and not by the academic chasm Crossan suggests. In both cases, the scholar does not simply “find an answer” in and through his research; the direction and results of his research are influenced by pre-existing commitments and prior scholarly conclusions.<sup>49</sup>

### **The vow of obedience in voluntary religious and academic groups.**

Crossan’s sharp distinction between investigative and defensive scholarship is difficult to sustain in the face of his own academic practice. Furthermore, the apologetic defense of scholarly positions can generate a positive research agenda. There is a third front on which I question Crossan’s distinction between investigative and defensive scholarship (apologetics), and it has to do with the relationship between academic freedom and integrity on the one hand and the vow of scholarly obedience on the other.

Crossan rightly notes that “the only integrity that scholars have is to say honestly what they have learned and to say clearly what they have discovered.” Accordingly, scholars “should not trim their reports to what a leader expects or a people want.”<sup>50</sup> The dual position Crossan held as a priest-professor, a scholar who was simultaneously an ordained member of the Servite Order, led to a scholarly conflict of interest. Crossan had arrived at scholarly conclusions which contradicted the rule of faith of the Servite Order and the doctrinal statements of the Roman Catholic Church. He was expected, as an ordained priest and a teaching monk, to conform to the beliefs and practices of the religious hierarchy; he was simultaneously compelled, as a biblical

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<sup>49</sup> Again, Crossan’s further research presupposed his earlier conclusion—Jesus was *not* buried by Joseph of Arimathea. Given that pre-existing conclusion, what then really happened to Jesus’ body? The answer was not predetermined by Crossan’s earlier work, but it was certainly directed by it, and some answers (i.e., Jesus really was buried by Joseph) were ruled out.

<sup>50</sup> Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 96.

scholar and reflective academic, to “say clearly” what he had “discovered.” If the institutional beliefs matched his academic conclusions, all would have been well; in actuality, a wide and growing chasm separated Crossan’s personal conclusions from Catholic dogma and praxis, and all was not well. Thus, Crossan became certain that he was going to have to leave the priesthood in order to retain his academic integrity.<sup>51</sup>

Crossan does not have an axe to grind against the Catholic Church; he left the Servite Order willingly, remains a professing member of the Church, and cannot conceive of being anything other than a Catholic Christian.<sup>52</sup> Crossan does, however, lament the conflict created by his vow of obedience and his academic freedom. Scholars of any stripe, he insists, should not be censured. As a fellow researcher, I heartily concur.

It should be pointed out, however, that no one was questioning Crossan’s right as a scholar to disseminate the results of his academic research. What was being questioned was Crossan’s right to disseminate scholarly conclusions that fundamentally contradicted the tenets of faith which he had assented to as a priest-professor within the Servite Order of the Roman Catholic Church. Crossan had voluntarily entered the Servite Order, took monastic vows, and willingly took a vow of obedience, including a pledge to uphold and promote the core doctrine of the universal Catholic Church.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>52</sup>“I have been asked, quite often, what drives this lifetime of research. I have been told, quite often, that I must be anti-dogmatic, anti-ecclesiastical, or anti-fundamentalist, that, having left the priesthood and monasticism, I must be seeking excuse at best or revenge at worst. Maybe. But dogmatism or fundamentalism, which have certainly scarred others terribly, have not really hurt me early enough or badly enough to warrant hidden attack. And, while I was a priest and a religious scholar, I was quite happy. When I wasn’t, I left. I sense in myself no hidden agenda of either excuse or revenge.” Crossan, “Odyssey,” 7. In another setting, Crossan writes, “In 1969 I left the order and the priesthood and managed, as I hoped, to disentangle being a priest from being a scholar. So, I am often asked, is it all revenge? You intend to attack the Roman Catholic Church and/or Christianity in general and/or the Bible in particular? I cannot find anywhere in my heart a desire or need to attack on any of those fronts.” Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 214.

Crossan is absolutely correct to argue that a scholar's integrity rests upon his freedom to "say honestly what they have learned and to say clearly what they have discovered."<sup>53</sup> At the same time, however, the integrity of a voluntary religious or philosophical community or institution rests upon a shared doctrinal core which is supported by members of the institutional hierarchy or community leadership. Individuals join the local Humanist and Atheist Society because they share the Society's belief in the non-existence of supernatural deities; leaders within the movement are expected to uphold the central tenets of the Society. The Society could certainly tolerate the membership of individuals who reject (or perhaps just redefine) central articles of faith; but they cannot so tolerate such fundamental dissension within the ranks of leadership. Similarly, leaders within local Marxist chapters can rationally be expected to support the central elements of Communist teaching; leaders within the nineteenth-century American abolitionist movement were required to share in their opposition to the institution of slavery. If a leader came to reject some of the doctrinal core, he or she could reasonably be expected to willingly resign his or her position. In the unlikely event that such a leader refused to voluntarily leave, it would be reasonable to expect the organization to force them out in order to maintain the core commitments of the group.

To bring the issue closer to Crossan's heart, the Jesus Seminar, co-founded by Crossan and Robert Funk, is committed to certain theological tenets concerning the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the rise of early Christianity. First, "Jesus of Nazareth did not refer to himself as the Messiah, nor did he claim to be a divine being . . . These

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<sup>53</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 96.

are claims that some people in the early church made about Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> Second, “at the heart of Jesus’ teaching and actions was a vision of life under the reign of God (or, in the empire of God) in which God’s generosity and goodness is regarded as the model and measure of human life.”<sup>55</sup> Third, Jesus did not hold “an apocalyptic view of the reign (or kingdom) of God.”<sup>56</sup> Fourth, “in Jesus’ teaching the reign of God is a vision of what life in this world could be, not a vision of life in a future world that would soon be brought into being by a miraculous act of God.”<sup>57</sup> Fifth, “although the Gospel of John has been an important source for Christian theology and piety, it is of little use as a source of information about the historical Jesus.”<sup>58</sup> Alternative lists of Jesus Seminar dogma can and have been compiled.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Roy W. Hoover, “Introduction,” in *Profiles of Jesus*, ed. Roy W. Hoover (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002), 3. Polebridge is the publishing arm of the Westar Institute, the parent organization of the Jesus Seminar. *Profiles of Jesus* was published as the culmination of the first twelve years of the Jesus Seminar’s deliberations; it contains essays by fourteen different Jesus Seminar Fellows on the basic contours of their best historical reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth. In his introduction to the compilation, Hoover notes that the profiles “offer some differing perspectives on Jesus,” but also notes that “they also are in agreement about certain matters of crucial importance in any attempt to gain an informed view of him as a figure of history.” *Ibid.*, 3. The subsequent list of agreements is fairly minimal, but has far-reaching consequences. It is provided here simply as testimony to the core tenets of faith held by Fellows of the Jesus Seminar.

<sup>55</sup>Hoover, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>For example, the introduction to the Jesus Seminar’s *Five Gospels* lists “the seven pillars of scholarly wisdom,” which necessarily (from their perspective) govern historical Jesus research. Those seven pillars are (1) sharp distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith; (2) the Synoptic gospels are much closer to the historical Jesus than the spiritualized Jesus of John; (3) Markan priority; (4) identification of Q as a hypothetical source for Matthew and Luke; (5) recognition that Jesus was thoroughly non-eschatological; (6) distinctive between oral culture and print culture; (7) the Gospels must be assumed to be embellished, mythical narratives expressing the church’s faith rather than historical accounts. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 2-5.

Greg Boyd identifies the core tenets of the Jesus Seminar’s reconstructed Jesus: (1) non-apocalypticism; (2) taught and lived subversive forms of social behavior; (3) utilized aphoristic wit and wisdom; (4) had no consciousness of being in any way divine or messianic; (5) salvation was pursuing and

Given the Jesus Seminar's core beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth, one does not expect to find William Lane Craig or N. T. Wright amongst their membership. One can be nearly certain, additionally, that such evangelical (or in the Jesus Seminar's estimation, fundamentalist)<sup>60</sup> will not be found within the Fellows of the Seminar. Indeed, the fourteen scholars published in the Seminar's *Profiles of Jesus* all share the core commitments listed above. Is that somehow discreditable? No—on the contrary, the Jesus Seminar is a voluntary scholarly *and* theological society; it is therefore quite appropriate to expect all its core members (teaching members, or in this case, full Fellows) to share, defend, and promote the same doctrinal core.

No one forces scholars to join the Jesus Seminar; just as no one forced Crossan to join the Servite Order. No one expects Jesus Seminar fellows to agree on every iota of Jesus' person, words, and works; just as no one expects ordained Catholic scholar-monks to agree on every theological detail. But in addition, no one expects just anybody to assume a prominent role as a Jesus Seminar Fellow; just as no one expects just anybody to be able to assume the dual role of a professor and an ordained monk. On the contrary, one expects Jesus Seminar Fellows to adhere to the core doctrine held in common by the Seminar; just as one should expect ordained Servite seminary professors to adhere to the core doctrines of the Order.

As a scholarly monk, a priest-professor who had freely and intentionally taken monastic vows, Crossan was voluntarily committed to the purpose and doctrinal core of the Servites and the Roman Catholic Church. Naturally, no one had the prerogative to

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achieving the kingdom of God here and now; (6) never intended to begin an organization or new religion; (7) his death had no salvific significance. Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 62.

tell Crossan what he could or could not believe, discover, conclude, or promulgate through his writing. At the same time, however, Crossan had voluntarily relinquished his freedom to disseminate conclusions which were fundamentally at odds with the doctrinal core of his chosen monastic order. Crossan had vowed to adhere to and uphold the teaching of the Catholic Church. His scholarly endeavors, however, led him to conclusions which were outside the bounds of institutional Catholicism. When it became clear to all involved that Crossan's fundamental theological conclusions were contrary to the Order's, it became incumbent upon Crossan to voluntarily leave.

Crossan's 1969 departure from the Servite Order, then, was not a lamentable resignation forced by infringements upon his academic freedom; rather, it was the natural termination of a freely-chosen teaching position with a voluntary religious institution. Crossan's departure resulted from emerging disagreements over central doctrinal tenets. Crossan has legitimate concerns about the way he was treated by hierarchical superiors prior to his 1969 dispensation. But, contrary to the implicit picture he customarily draws, the fundamental issue surrounding his departure from the Servite Order was not academic freedom or scholarly integrity; rather, it was institutional integrity and the nature of voluntary religious orders. Crossan entered the Servite Order of his own accord, and took monastic vows voluntarily. He evidently did not object to the vows or the doctrinal commitments at that time.<sup>61</sup> When he no longer shared the doctrinal commitments, and could no longer adhere to the vow of monastic obedience, he needed to leave. His departure reflected his (change in?) theological commitments.

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<sup>60</sup>Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, 1.

<sup>61</sup>If he had, it would have been incumbent upon him, for personal integrity, to refrain from entering the Order or taking vows in the first place.

## From Priest-Professor to Public Intellectual

Crossan received his dispensation from the Servite Order and married Margaret in the summer of 1969, ending his time as a scholarly monk, and marking his official transition from the monastery to non-sectarian academia.<sup>62</sup> Crossan contacted several schools about the possibility of teaching there, including Notre Dame and Loyola, both of whom had earlier approached him. He found himself regularly rebuffed: “It was never a question of my competence, but only of my ex-priest status and/or my controversial orthodoxy.”<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Crossan was hired at DePaul University in Chicago in time for the 1969 fall semester, and has remained there ever since.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to his full-time teaching duties at DePaul, John Dominic Crossan has been a remarkably prolific researcher, writer, and speaker. He began publishing articles focusing on Jesus’ parables<sup>65</sup> and historical-critical study of the Gospels,<sup>66</sup> culminating in his first (post-Servite) book, *In Parables*, published in 1973.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 89-91.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>64</sup>“It is a tribute to DePaul’s integrity that it was willing to judge me in terms of academic competency rather than dogmatic orthodoxy. There I remain, out of gratitude and loyalty, but more out of profound respect for that integrity.” Crossan, “Almost the Whole Truth,” 6.

<sup>65</sup>E.g., John Dominic Crossan, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 451-65; idem, “Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus,” *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72): 285-307; idem, “Parable as Religious and Poetic Experience,” *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973): 330-358.

<sup>66</sup>E.g., John Dominic Crossan, “Redaction and Citation in Mark 11:9-10 and 11:17,” *Biblical Research* 17 (1972): 33-50.

<sup>67</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Crossan continued to publish extensively, with a particular focus upon literary criticism and parable interpretation.<sup>68</sup>

In the midst of teaching and publishing, personal tragedy struck. Margaret Dagenais, Crossan's wife of fourteen years, suffered a serious heart attack on April 30, 1983. She died on June 4 the same year after another heart attack.<sup>69</sup> Three years later, Crossan married Sarah Sexton.<sup>70</sup> Sarah was an adult learner in Crossan's DePaul classes who graduated in 1981. Though married at the time, Sarah was divorced in 1984; the two started dating shortly thereafter, fell deeply in love, and were married in August 1986.<sup>71</sup>

In the later 1980s, Crossan's focus shifted toward historical Jesus research in particular. He delved into a comprehensive study of extant sources of the Jesus tradition, with an emphasis upon extracanonical gospels, letters, and fragments.<sup>72</sup>

The best-selling *Historical Jesus* serves as the fulcrum of John Dominic Crossan's career.<sup>73</sup> First, it marked the culmination of the previous twenty years of Crossan's scholarship. Crossan had always been fascinated by and focused upon the

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<sup>68</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975); idem, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); idem, *Finding Is the First Act: Trove Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable* (Missoula: Scholars, 1979); idem, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury, 1980); idem, *A Fragile Craft: The Work of Amos Niven Wilder* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981); and idem, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983). Numerous articles from the same time frame also focus on literary criticism, particularly articles published in *Semeia*, a journal co-founded by Crossan dedicated to experimental and cutting-edge literary interpretation of the Bible.

<sup>69</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 123.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>72</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); idem, *Sayings Parallels: A Workbook for the Jesus Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); idem, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>73</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).



person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth; in *The Historical Jesus*, he brought his previous two decades of literary and historical criticism to bear in constructing his vision of Jesus as a peasant Jewish cynic. Second, it brought Crossan into the limelight both academically and publicly. Crossan's early work on literary criticism and extracanonical gospels had garnered the attention of other scholars.<sup>74</sup> *The Historical Jesus*, however, brought Crossan considerably more visibility:

Crossan was catapulted from relative scholarly obscurity to notoriety in 1991, when *New York Times* religion editor Peter Steinfels decided to review simultaneously two very different books about the historical Jesus, one by Crossan and the other by John Meier. . . . In their wisdom, the editors of the *Times* decided to put Steinfels's double review on the front page. And that was it.<sup>75</sup>

The *New York Times* review of *The Historical Jesus* launched the book to the top of the religious best-seller chart, where it remained for six months. His publisher, Harper San Francisco, sponsored a lengthy tour to promote the book, and Crossan appeared in numerous bookstores and newspapers, and on many television and radio programs, presenting his fundamental conclusions regarding Jesus. Thus, *The Historical Jesus* moved Crossan from the relative obscurity of teaching and publishing in the academic world to prominence as a public intellectual.

*The Historical Jesus* thus served as a fulcrum in Crossan's academic career both in culminating his prior scholarship and launching his public career. It also provided the theoretical, concrete, and responsive basis for Crossan's research and writing for the subsequent two decades. Questions hinted at but not dealt with in *The*

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<sup>74</sup>See, e.g., Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," the publication of Brown's SBL presidential address which strongly questioned Crossan's hypotheses concerning *The Gospel of Peter* presented in *Four Other Gospels*.

<sup>75</sup>Shanks, "The Bad Boy of Historical Jesus Studies," 24, 26.

*Historical Jesus* were examined in future works.<sup>76</sup> In future works, Crossan would also engage scholars who responded to his historical Jesus research in writing or in public dialogue.<sup>77</sup> Crossan retired from his full-time teaching responsibilities at DePaul in 1995, but remains on faculty as Professor Emeritus. John and Sarah Crossan moved from Chicago to Florida, where he continues to write and lecture.

Over the course of Crossan's forty-year (post-Servite) academic career, he has authored twenty books, co-authored another six (three with Marcus Borg, two with Jonathan Reed, and one with Richard Watts), contributed forty-eight chapters to compilations, and published another sixty-three articles in academic and popular journals. He has lectured at fifty-six scholarly conferences, been invited to deliver nearly one hundred and fifty academic lectures, and presented over two hundred and fifty popular lectures and addresses.<sup>78</sup> He continues to write and speak prolifically,<sup>79</sup> and his scholarly

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<sup>76</sup>E.g., Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, dealing with how the life and death of Jesus eventually resulted in the Christian Church of the third and fourth centuries.

<sup>77</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, responded to Raymond Brown's critiques. Luke Timothy Johnson's critiques and alternative proposals were engaged in a lengthy dialogue; see Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Werner H. Kelber, *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict*, The Rockwell Lecture Series (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999). Perhaps Crossan's most noteworthy interaction has been with N. T. Wright. See, e.g., N. T. Wright, "Taking the Text with Her Pleasure: A Post-Post-Modernist Response to J Dominic Crossan *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*," *Theology* 96 (1993): 303-10; N. T. Wright, "A New Birth? An Article Review of John Dominic Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): 72-91; and John Dominic Crossan, "Blessed Plot: A Reply to N T Wright's Review of *The Birth of Christianity*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): 92-112. The two also headlined the inaugural Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 2005; their dialogue was later published in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

<sup>78</sup>Information derived from John Dominic Crossan, "Professional Resume," [on-line], accessed 21 September 2010, <http://www.johndominiccrossan.com/Professional%20Resume.htm>; Internet.

<sup>79</sup>Crossan has a further book currently under contract with HarperOne, *Parables: How Jesus with Parables became Christ in Parables*, to be published in 2011. His public lecture schedule for 2010 included twenty-one engagements, including the Greer-Heard point-counterpoint Forum at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in conjunction with the Southwest regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society.

conclusions are widely disseminated through his books, popular lectures, and public appearances.<sup>80</sup>

Simply put, John Dominic Crossan has been arguably the most prominent, popular, persuasive, and prolific historical Jesus scholar of the past fifty years. N. T. Wright, despite sharp criticism and disagreement with his conclusions, hails Crossan as the pre-eminent figure in contemporary historical Jesus research.<sup>81</sup> John Dominic Crossan has, indeed, come a long way from Tipperary; from humble roots in 1930s rural Ireland to prominent Irish-American historical Jesus scholar.

### **A Long Way from Rome: A Theological Sketch**

The thesis of this dissertation is that John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection is driven not by methodology or textual evidence, but rather by the logic of his theological worldview presuppositions. That is, Crossan's resurrection destination is determined by his theological starting point. Crossan acknowledges the influential role of presuppositions in historical Jesus research:

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<sup>80</sup>Crossan has also been featured on 36 television programs, been interviewed live on 246 radio shows, and had his work featured in 28 popular magazines and 128 newspapers.

<sup>81</sup>“Crossan towers above the rest of the renewed ‘New Quest’, in just the same way as Schweitzer and Bultmann tower above most of twentieth-century scholarship, and for much the same reasons. He, like them, has had the courage to see the whole picture, to think his hypothesis through to the end, to try out radically new ideas, to write it all up in a highly engaging manner, and to debate it publicly without acrimony. With enemies like these, who needs friends.” N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 65. Christopher Tuckett similarly disputes many of Crossan's conclusions while lauding his scholarship: “Crossan has earned high praise and much comment for many aspects of his work, including his ability and willingness to exploit to the full many sociological and anthropological studies in seeking to build up a portrait of Jesus.” Tuckett, “The Historical Jesus, Crossan and Methodology,” in *Text und Geschichte: Facetten Theologischen Arbeitens aus dem Freundes- und Schulerkreis*, ed. Stefan Maser and Egbert Schlarb (Marburg: Elwert, 1999), 257-58.

Methods for historical Jesus research depend on gospel presuppositions. . . . The validity of one's Jesus-conclusions stand or fall with that of one's gospel-presuppositions. If mine are wrong, then all is delusion.<sup>82</sup>

Conclusions and decisions about the historical Jesus are built, *by everyone*, atop their presuppositions about the gospels. Mistakes about foundations can bring superstructures tumbling down either partially or totally. . . . Wrong presuppositions, wrong conclusions.<sup>83</sup>

Crossan is stating, rightly, that assumptions about the nature, composition, and reliability of the gospels are crucial. In that manner, where one ends up is determined largely by where one begins. At various points in his scholarship, Crossan delineates his gospel starting-points, and admits that much of his reconstruction depends upon the legitimacy and accuracy of those starting-points.<sup>84</sup>

What Crossan calls "gospel presuppositions" are not, however, presuppositions *per se*.<sup>85</sup> That is, they are not *a priori* commitments that he brings to his scholarship. Rather, he has adopted the historical views of certain scholars, tested them through his own study of the Gospels, deemed them to be reliable and trustworthy, and thereafter accepted them as conclusions of study and the basis from which to engage in further scholarship. In this way, his "gospel presuppositions" are both conclusions *from* and foundational starting points *for* his study of the historical Jesus. Crossan states,

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<sup>82</sup>John Dominic Crossan, "What Victory? What God? A Review Debate with N. T. Wright on *Jesus and the Victory of God*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997): 351.

<sup>83</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 96. Emphasis original.

<sup>84</sup>Crossan provides five "gospel presuppositions" in Crossan, *Jesus*, xii-xiii; ten in Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 7-10; and six in idem, *The Birth of Christianity*, 109-12, 119-20. Crossan regularly insists, however, that he did not "simply accept those presuppositions from two hundred years of previous scholarship," but spent the 1960s "confirming them" for himself. Crossan, "The Final Word," *Colloquium* 31 (1999): 148.

<sup>85</sup>Thus, I will not designate them gospel presuppositions in this dissertation; rather, I will call them material investments, a term that will be fully discussed and defined in chapter 4.

By *presuppositions* I do not mean positions beyond current debate or even future change. Neither do I mean theological commitments. Rather, I mean historical judgments based on present evidence and requiring constant future testing against new theory, method, evidence, or experience. I have learned these presuppositions from scholarly tradition, have studied them internally, have tested them externally, and have found them consistently more persuasive than their alternatives. But if they are wrong, then everything based on them is questionable; and if they are *proved* wrong, then everything based on them will have to be redone.<sup>86</sup>

Crossan's perception of the importance and influence of material investments seems both reasonable and accurate. Accordingly, chapter 4 of this dissertation will examine and evaluate a number of Crossan's gospel material investments. First, however, it is necessary to delve deeper, and examine the theological starting-points which lie beyond the gospel starting-points. The thesis of this dissertation is that Crossan's theological presuppositions, his *a priori* commitments about the nature of the world, faith, and God, strongly direct his gospel material investments and drive him inexorably to embrace a metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection.

### **Theological Presuppositions: Inviolable Starting-Points**

While Crossan appreciates the influence of gospel starting-points, his scholarship generally neglects or downplays the role that *theological* presuppositions play in reconstructing the historical Jesus. Indeed, at times Crossan seems to confuse gospel hypotheses with fundamental theological presuppositions. He argues (correctly, I believe) that his "surface disagreements"<sup>87</sup> with William Lane Craig on the historicity of Christ's resurrection stem from the fact that they "start from a different theological-

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<sup>86</sup> Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 109. Emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup>By "surface," Crossan does not mean *inconsequential*, but rather *readily apparent*. That is, the surface disagreements are those that are clearly evident to the reader or listener. Craig holds to a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, while Crossan interprets the resurrection as a metaphor for Jesus' continued presence amongst his followers' community.

historical nexus.”<sup>88</sup> However, Crossan is not, despite appearances, referring to core worldview presuppositions; rather, he is taking about different material investments that evangelical and liberal scholars make regarding the gospels. Thus, according to Crossan, Craig “believes that everything in the Gospels that can be taken literally and historically should be so taken. *I consider that to be a theological presupposition* based on an a priori belief about what divine inspiration must do.”<sup>89</sup> What about Crossan’s own theological-historical nexus? Crossan insists that critical scholars (like himself) think “that some stories that could be taken literally were intended to be and should be taken symbolically instead. I . . . consider [this] position to be a *historical judgment*.”<sup>90</sup>

It is interesting to note that Crossan makes *historical judgments* while Craig employs *theological presupposition*. Crossan acknowledges the difficulty: “Group A [evangelical scholars] might well say that Group B’s [Crossan’s] position is simply an alternative, a priori theological presupposition. . . . That is an honest discussion which deserves to be continued, and it is my hope that it can be continued.”<sup>91</sup> The honest discussion, Crossan states, “will require abstention from caricature on both sides. It does not help to argue that one’s opponents are less logical, rational, or critical than oneself when, in fact, they are just as logical, rational, and critical *but work from divergent presuppositions*.”<sup>92</sup> If, however, Crossan acknowledges that he and Craig are working

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<sup>88</sup>Crossan, “Reflections on a Debate,” 148.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

from divergent presuppositions, why does he classify his own starting-point as a historical judgment and Craig's as a theological presupposition?

It is even more illuminating to note Crossan's confusion regarding the nature of presuppositions. Crossan and Craig do indeed approach the canonical Gospels with different governing assumptions. But their contrary positions regarding appropriate Gospel hermeneutics are based on deeper theological presuppositions. Crossan, again, seems unaware of this.

Crossan has acknowledged that his gospel starting-points are not inviolable; his fundamental theological presuppositions, however, are in a different category. That is, his self-identified theological presuppositions serve as an inalienable foundation for his scholarship in a way that his "gospel presuppositions" do not. In the remainder of this chapter, three of Crossan's self-acknowledged theological presuppositions will be examined—religious pluralism, human finitude, and divine consistency. Each of them will be shown to be inviolable precept for Crossan, held without apparent examination or critical reflection. That is, Crossan's theological presuppositions are foundational but unquestioned; they are uncritically accepted and applied. Crossan will be shown to have inherited these theological presuppositions from the streams of deistic philosophy and liberal biblical scholarship examined in chapter 2. The impact that each theological presupposition has upon Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection will be evaluated. Crossan's theological presuppositions will be shown to inevitably direct his gospel starting-points, his methodology, and his conclusions about the historical Jesus, particularly the resurrection.

## The Holy and Religious Pluralism

Crossan argues in favor of religious pluralism, insisting that the major world religions are equally valid responses to divine reality.<sup>93</sup> Crossan holds that religion is like

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<sup>93</sup>“I see—whether Christians like it or not, whether I as a Christian like it or not, or whether Muslims like it or not—that religions are equally valid ways of experiencing the Holy.” Crossan, quoted in Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan,” 517.

Crossan’s religious pluralism builds upon the theoretical and practical work of John Hick and Paul Knitter in particular. John Hick, *The Rainbows of Faith: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1995); idem, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985). Knitter, Hick, and, following them, Crossan, argue that the differences between the world’s religions are outweighed by their fundamental similarities in structure, orientation, and goals. Pluralism seeks to promote mutual tolerance and respect between religions, but only at the cost of watering down or downright rejecting each religion’s distinctive elements.

Religious pluralism has academic proponents and popular followers. Pluralism has also attracted vigorous critique and engagement across a spectrum of scholars. Most recently, Boston College professor of religion Stephen Prothero, no ally of traditional Christianity, stridently rejects the notion that religions are fundamentally the same. “It [is] fashionable to affirm that all religions are beautiful and all are true. This claim . . . is as odd as it is intriguing. No one argues that different economic systems or political regimes are one and the same. Capitalism and socialism are so obviously at odds that their differences hardly bear mentioning. . . . Yet scholars continue to claim that religious rivals . . . are, by some miracle of the imagination, essentially the same.” Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 1. Prothero argues that the notion that “all religions are the same . . . is a lovely sentiment but it is dangerous, disrespectful, and untrue.” Ibid., 2-3. Instead, he argues, “The world’s religions . . . diverge sharply on doctrine, ritual, mythology, experience, and law.” Ibid., 3. Ultimately, religious pluralism “is neither accurate nor ethically responsible. God is not one. Faith in the unity of religions is just that—faith. And the leap that gets us there is an act of the hyperactive imagination.” Ibid.

The strongest, most comprehensive, and most insightful critique of religious pluralism, however, comes from the pen of Harold Netland, professor of religion and intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001). Netland traces the birth and growth of pluralism (ibid., 23-123), as well as the development of Hick’s pluralistic theology (ibid., 158-78), before turning a critical eye to pluralism (ibid., 181-246). Netland notes, “Diversity in appearance, behavior or belief often is rooted in fundamental differences in the respective religious worldviews. . . . And since each religion typically regards its own beliefs as true, such conflicts produce what is often called the problem of conflicting truth claims.” Ibid., 181. Thus, “Careful examination of the basic tenets of the various religions demonstrates that, far from teaching the same thing, they have radically different perspectives on the religious ultimate, the human predicament, and the nature of salvation. Any attempt to produce an essential unity in outlook among the many religions will result in distorting at least some of the actual beliefs of followers of the various traditions.” Ibid., 183. Religious pluralism as espoused by Hick (and Crossan) is inevitably “reductionistic,” reinterpreting “troublesome doctrines so as to accommodate them within his theory. But to the extent that major religious traditions do not find their beliefs – as they are understood within the respective traditions – adequately accounted for by Hick’s analysis, his model as a general theory about the religions is called into question.” Ibid., 232. Hick, like Crossan, can only argue that all religions are fundamentally the same by radically reinterpreting and redefining the central tenets of the various world religions, thereby rendering them unrecognizable to proponents. “When the meanings of [religious] terms within their religious traditions are retained, it becomes absurd to suppose that they all denote the same religious ultimate.” Ibid., 240. See also idem, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Netland’s critique of religious pluralism is both



language: human beings are hard-wired for both in the abstract, but each is realized as a concrete particular.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Crossan hypothesizes that religions are all,

Trinitarian in structure. . . . There is, first of all, that *ultimate referent* known in supreme metaphors. . . . There is, next, some *material manifestation* . . . where that ultimate referent is met and experienced. There is, finally, at least one *faithful believer* to begin with and eventually to end with.<sup>95</sup>

Elsewhere, Crossan identifies the trinitarian structure as “metaphoricity, locality, and particularity,” but it seems that the terminology is interchangeable while the meaning is fundamentally unaltered.<sup>96</sup>

According to Crossan, early Christians found in Jesus the *material manifestation* of the *ultimate referent*, and thus became *faithful believers* proclaiming God in Christ. Crossan insists that the *ultimate referent* should not be conceived of exclusively in theistic terminology. Thus, Crossan prefers to avoid terminology such as “God” in religious studies, preferring the “common rubric of the Holy.”<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere,

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incisive and persuasive. Crossan’s presupposition of religious pluralism ought to be rejected as “dangerous, disrespectful, and untrue.” Prothero, *God is Not One*, 2-3.

<sup>94</sup>Crossan acknowledges his “presupposition” that religion is “a permanent and necessary interaction with the mystery that surrounds us. . . . Religion, for me, is like language. We are not hard-wired for this one or that one but we are hard-wired for the process itself.” John Dominic Crossan, “A Future for the Christian Faith,” in Robert Funk et al., *The Once and Future Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2000), 115. See also Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 99-100.

<sup>95</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “Some Theological Conclusions from My Historical Jesus Research,” *Living Pulpit* 3 (1994): 18. Emphasis original. Crossan’s “Trinitarian structure” of all religions, interestingly, empties Christian Trinitarianism of its distinctive emphases. A Christian who embraces the Triune Godhead represented by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would almost certainly find Crossan’s Triune “ultimate referent, . . . material manifestation, . . . and faithful believer” utterly alien and unrepresentative. Crossan has again, it seems, embraced a traditional doctrine (Trinity) only by radically redefining it, in the process removing its historical, orthodox content.

<sup>96</sup>Crossan, “A Future for the Christian Faith,” 116. The ultimate referent in his earlier work can only be referenced through metaphors, the material manifestation of the Holy occurs in a specific locality, and faithful believers possess the particular faith in the metaphor (ultimate referent) through the locality (material manifestation). Crossan’s earlier terminology is more infused with meaning; but the latter triad is an effective short-hand once one grasps his basic understanding of religion.

<sup>97</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 101. It should be emphasized that Crossan only avoids specifically theistic “God” terminology when in academic religious studies context, or in dialogue with

Crossan identifies four major metaphors used to refer to the Holy—“person (Christianity); state of being (Buddhism); order in the universe but no orderer (Confucianism); and power (primal religion).”<sup>98</sup> In Crossan’s estimation, particular religious responses to the Holy (whichever metaphor is used) are equally valid.

Religion represents, for me, some response to what I'm going to put down in the widest terms I can use, ‘the mystery that surrounds us.’ . . . I see religions as very much like languages. English and Russian are equally valid languages, equally valid to express whatever they want to express. I see . . . that religions are equally valid ways of experiencing the Holy. But they're also equally particular, just like a language.<sup>99</sup>

The world’s major religions are equally valid responses to the Holy, and use different metaphors to describe and relate to the Holy.<sup>100</sup> As a consequence, Crossan holds that the metaphors and parables used by various religions should be accepted on the same terms. Thus, the narrative of Jesus’ miraculous conception in Matthew and Luke must be treated on a par with the divine conceptions of Caesar Augustus, Alexander the Great, and the Buddha. “Either all such divine conceptions . . . should be accepted

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followers of other religions. When writing as a Catholic Christian or speaking to an audience about the historical Jesus, Crossan is comfortable using “God” as an appropriate referent to the Holy, since the terminology is understood and accepted within the Christian theistic tradition.

<sup>98</sup>From the 2005 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum dialogue featuring Crossan N. T. Wright, cited in R. Douglas Geivett, “The Epistemology of Religion Belief,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 104.

<sup>99</sup>Halsted, “The Unorthodox Orthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan,” 517.

<sup>100</sup>Crossan’s religious pluralism is based, in part, upon his understanding that God (‘the Holy’) is fundamentally unnameable and unidentifiable. In reflecting upon Moses’ calling at Mount Sinai (Exodus 3), Crossan writes, “God’s reply to Moses’s question is, in effect, ‘My name is the unnameable one.’ But that is a contradiction in terms. It both gives and does not give a name—it is a bush that both burns and does not burn—at the same time. In other words, it is a warning to Moses and us that we cannot ever fully, adequately, or completely name the Holy One. God is fundamentally unnameable.” John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 56.

literally and miraculously or all of them should be accepted metaphorically and theologically.”<sup>101</sup>

**Religious pluralism and Jesus’ resurrection.** What are the implications of Crossan’s view of human religiosity for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? On the surface, there is no essential link between them; one could theoretically accept the basic validity of all human religions and still affirm the traditional conception of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Crossan, however, insists on the fundamentally metaphorical nature of the

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<sup>101</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 28. Crossan goes on, “It is not morally acceptable to say directly and openly that our story is truth but yours is myth; ours is history but yours is lie.” Questions immediately arise: Why? And why not? Why should all divine conception stories be accepted on the same terms? Why must they be either all literal or all metaphorical? Why is it unethical to call one fiction and another history? If *in historical fact* one is fiction and another history, I would hold it to be unethical to treat them the same. The crucial question seems to be their status as a historical truth-claim. If both stories are intended to be metaphorical (e.g., Aesop’s fables, which Crossan is fond of citing), then of course it is inappropriate to interpret one literally and the other metaphorically. But if one, or both, are presented as historical truth-claims, not metaphorical fables, then they must be interpreted and evaluated accordingly.

For example, consider two stories warning of the dangers of humiliating defeated enemies. One, an Aesopian fable, portrays an alpha male lion humiliating a defeated younger rival, only to see the younger rival grow in strength while nursing a bitter hatred toward the victorious alpha male. Eventually, the younger rival is as strong as his enemy, and vanquishes him in a battle which devastates and scatters the pride. The other story, an historical account of the first half of the twentieth century, relates the humiliation of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles, and traces how the wounded German spirit paved the way for the rise of militant nationalism and eventually the Nazi tyranny which cast a shadow over all of Europe. Both stories contain powerful meaning and convey truth; but one of them is intended as an historical account while the other is an intentional metaphor. Interpreting them on the same grounds violates both. Crossan’s insistence that the narratives of divine conception in Greco-Roman paganism, early Christianity, and Buddhism must be accorded the same status (in his eyes clearly metaphorical) assumes without argument that the stories must all have been intended as metaphorical parables.

C. S. Lewis argues cogently that those who perceive the canonical Gospels as primarily mythical are too unacquainted with the genre of myth to make an educated judgment on the issue. He notes the similarities between Christian and pagan depictions of dying-and-rising saviors or gods, but then notes, “the differences between the Pagan Christs . . . and the Christ Himself is much what we should expect to find [if the former are myths and the latter myth come true]. The Pagan stories are all about someone dying and rising, either every year, or else nobody knows where and nobody knows when. The Christian story is about a historical personage, whose execution can be dated pretty accurately, under a named Roman magistrate, and with whom the society that He founded is in a continuous relation down to the present day. It is not the difference between falsehood and truth. It is the difference between a real event on the one hand and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other. It is like watching something come gradually into focus; first it hangs in the clouds of myth and ritual, vast and vague, then it condenses, grows hard and in a sense small, as a historical event in first century Palestine.” C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 83-84). The pagan stories bear the hallmark of myth; the Gospel stories do not. See also idem, “On Story,” in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 90-105; and J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 38-89.

world's great religions. Religions must utilize metaphor to express the "Holy," but the metaphor will necessarily be incomplete—the metaphors of personhood, state of being, orderliness, and primal power are equally incomplete divine metaphors. In his 2005 dialogue with N. T. Wright, Crossan "stressed that each of these metaphors is valid; none is more intrinsically valid than the other. Nevertheless, there are times when each one breaks down."<sup>102</sup> Divine metaphors are inherently incapable of fully expressing the nature of the Holy.<sup>103</sup>

Metaphoricity is thus an essential, inevitable element of every religion. The particular expression of religious faith in a locality necessarily invokes metaphors to describe the essentially mysterious divine reality (the Holy) which believers encounter. Crossan explicitly ties religious metaphoricity and particularity to Jesus' resurrection:

To be human is to be absolutely particular, that is, absolutely relative or relatively absolute. In anything that is of supreme importance to us . . . there is an inevitable slippage from *a* to *the*. . . one's faith or one's religion . . . must be experienced as *the* manifestation of the Holy, but we must never forget or deny that it is actually *a* manifestation for me and *for us*. To be human is to live in *a* as *the*; to be inhuman is to deny that necessary slippage. . . .

When I think about Jesus as the manifestation of God, I am not just referring to his words alone, or even to his deeds alone, but to both of those as facets of a lived life and a somewhat inevitable death. . . . The resurrection of Jesus means for me that the human empowerment that some people experienced in Lower Galilee at the start of the first century in and through Jesus is now available to any person in any place at any time who finds God in and through that same Jesus. Empty tomb stories and physical appearance stories are perfectly valid parables expressing that faith, akin in their own way to the Good Samaritan story. They are, for me, parables of resurrection not the resurrection itself. Resurrection as the continuing experience of God's presence in and through Jesus is the heart of Christian faith.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Crossan, quoted in Geivett, "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief," 104.

<sup>103</sup>See further Rudolf Otto's reflections on the un-nameable *mysterium tremendum* (terrible or fearful mystery). Rudolf Otto, "The Numinous," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 146-61.

<sup>104</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 216. Emphasis original.

In other words, early Christians experienced the Holy in and through Jesus, and their particularized experience of the divine manifestation continued after Jesus' death. The early Christian community used metaphorical resurrection terminology as a parable to describe their experience. Given the essentially metaphorical nature of human religiosity in general, Crossan is somewhat inexorably driven to redefine the traditional conception of Jesus' resurrection as a metaphor for the community's otherwise-inexplicable experience of the presence of the Holy as they continued to practice what Jesus taught and exemplified in his lifetime. After pressing Crossan on his theological conception of God, Geivett concludes:

His view is pluralistic. . . . The term *God* is a metaphor . . . pretty much the same way *resurrection* is a metaphor when speaking of the 'resurrection of Jesus.' In other words, it is not literally true that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, and neither is it true that there is a God—omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent—who might be in a position to will and accomplish the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. No wonder Crossan disagrees with Wright about the nature of the resurrection. No wonder he concludes that Jesus did not literally rise bodily from the dead. For what is denied by his metaphysical commitments precludes the *possibility* of a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus by God.<sup>105</sup>

### **Human Finitude: Post-Mortem Extinction**

What happens to us after we die? Crossan answers this age-old philosophical question about mortality quite simply: "Do I personally believe in an afterlife? No, but to be honest, I do not find it a particularly important question one way or the other."<sup>106</sup>

Furthermore, Crossan insists that the question of post-mortem existence did not concern Old Testament Jews either.<sup>107</sup> Rather, "for most of their history before that

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<sup>105</sup>Geivett, "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief," 104. Emphasis original.

<sup>106</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 131.

<sup>107</sup>Chapter 5 of this dissertation will examine the question of Jewish afterlife beliefs in more detail. For now, I will simply present Crossan's position.

first common-era century, the Israelites and/or the Jews disbelieved in an afterlife.”<sup>108</sup> Israelites would certainly have been aware of the afterlife beliefs of their pagan neighbors (particularly the Egyptians),<sup>109</sup> but chose to reject afterlife belief in favor of the belief that “life below under God above was enough, was adequate, and was all there was.”<sup>110</sup> The rise of afterlife (resurrection) belief in Judaism was, to Crossan, a “breakdown rather than breakthrough in her faith in God.”<sup>111</sup> As the Maccabean martyrs had their bodies tortured and brutalized in the second century B.C., some Jews began professing a bodily resurrection of the righteous as the means by which God’s justice would be vindicated.<sup>112</sup>

While Crossan can understand faith in future resurrection as a response to intense suffering and persecution, he laments its effect upon later Christianity.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, he insists that belief in future resurrection prevents Christians from truly experiencing the divine reality in their lives: “My concern in this is a conviction that only by a full and glad acceptance of our utter finitude can we experience authentic transcendence. Immortality, no matter how carefully qualified as divine gratuity, strikes me as a

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<sup>108</sup>Crossan, “The Resurrection of Jesus in Jewish Context,” *Neotestamentica* 37 (2003): 34. “After death all individuals, good and bad alike, go down to Sheol which was, quite simply, the Grave writ large, the End with emphasis.” Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Including “immortality, eternal life, reincarnation, or any idea which negates the terminal finitude of death as the end of individual human existence.” Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 146.

<sup>110</sup>Crossan, “The Resurrection of Jesus in Jewish Context,” 35.

<sup>111</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 147.

<sup>112</sup>“Bodily resurrection is not about the survival of us but about the justice of God.” Crossan, “The Resurrection of Jesus in Jewish Context,” 42. “I emphasize that, for those who first proposed it, what created that after-life interpretation and especially its *bodily* understanding was not a philosophical vision of human destiny but a theological vision of divine character. When and how would the justice of God be vindicated above the battered *bodies* of martyrs?” Ibid., 43.

<sup>113</sup>“I am unable to accept the afterlife of apocalyptic vision except as a crisis-response, a narcotic theology to stop the pain of meaningless suffering and of hopeless persecution.” Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 148.

genuflection before our own hope, a worship of our own imagination.”<sup>114</sup> The heaven and hell conceived by historical Christianity, Crossan insists, are not alternative destinies in the afterlife (which, it must be remembered, does not exist), but rather “options for life here below, options for a life based on justice or injustice in this world. They are not actualities for afterlife on high, but possibilities for this life on earth.”<sup>115</sup> Crossan, then, holds to the absolute extinction of the human person at death.<sup>116</sup>

**Port-mortem extinction and Jesus’ resurrection.** Crossan only acknowledges his theological presupposition that human existence ceases at physical death in popular works aimed at a lay audience; he never confesses it in his scholarly works even when discussing his personal and theological presuppositions. Furthermore, when Crossan does acknowledge his presumption of human finitude, he neither explains how he arrived at that position, nor critically examines the perspective. Post-mortem extinction is simply presupposed without comment or defense. Crossan is not seeking to hide or minimize his presumption of post-mortem extinction. Rather, I believe Crossan does not acknowledge his assumption of human finitude in his scholarly work simply

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>115</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 202. Crossan goes on to say, “They distract from what I understand to be the challenge of Jesus about the Kingdom of God . . . the will of God for this earth. On earth, as in heaven. Heaven is in very good shape; it is earth that is our responsibility.” Elsewhere, Crossan writes, “I am sure that we are called to do the will of God ‘on earth, as in heaven.’ Heaven, however, I leave up to God. Earth is where our responsibility lies.” Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 131. Given that Crossan does not acknowledge heaven as an actuality, or a location, it is difficult to discern precisely what he means by claiming that “heaven is in very good shape,” or that he leaves heaven “up to God.” Is he relegating sovereignty over a non-existent heaven to a metaphorical God?

<sup>116</sup>“Sarah [Crossan’s second wife] says she hopes I am wrong about that afterlife stuff. But, be that as it may, my own hope is for a church empowered by divine justice that will take on the systemic normalcy of human violence. A church, in other words, that will oppose rather than join that process. That is more than enough hope for me. The rest, I am afraid, is parable at best and fantasy at worst.” Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 202. Elsewhere, Crossan writes, “But if we build the meaning of this present life on its being eternal, I’m pretty sure we’re wrong. Or if we use the prospect of eternal life to dull us to the present world and its injustices, we’re wrong.” Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 131.

because he does not recognize the profound influence that it has upon his scholarly project. But the presupposition of post-mortem extinction has immense implications upon Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection.

First, if human existence ceases at death, then the dead are not raised. Crossan states unambiguously, "I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time, including Jesus, brings dead people back to life."<sup>117</sup> When the Gospel of John portrays Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Crossan simply confesses that "I do not think this event ever did *or could* happen."<sup>118</sup> Thus, Crossan interprets the raising of Lazarus as "the process of general resurrection . . . incarnated in the event of Lazarus' resuscitation."<sup>119</sup>

Second, if there is no life after death and if no one, at any time, in any place raises anyone else from the dead, then *the resurrection of Jesus Christ absolutely cannot be a literal bodily resurrection*.<sup>120</sup> The orthodox, historical definition of the resurrection of Jesus is simply not in Crossan's pool of live options if life ceases at death.<sup>121</sup> Thus, as Wolfhart Pannenberg observes, "The negative judgment on the bodily resurrection of

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<sup>117</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 77. The same phrase, without "including Jesus," appears in Crossan, *Jesus*, 95. In both contexts, Crossan is describing how the story of Lazarus' resurrection or resuscitation is not (cannot be) a historical account of a literal event but rather a metaphorical incarnation of "the process of general resurrection," how "Jesus brought life out of death."

<sup>118</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, 94. Emphasis original.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>120</sup>Paul Rhodes Eddy, "Response to William Lane Craig on 'John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus,'" in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 284.

<sup>121</sup>After describing various difficulties in the New Testament accounts of the resurrection, C. E. B. Cranfield turns to what, in his opinion, is the strongest objection against the historicity of Christ's resurrection: "The most important objection of all is, without doubt, simply the apparent sheer, stark, utter impossibility of the thing. . . . For the vast multitudes of modern men and women, to whom it seems perfectly obvious that death is the end, the manifest, incontrovertible, irreversible termination of a human life, the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead is nonsense, its folly apparent as soon as it is uttered." C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 10, ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 385.



Jesus as having occurred in historical fact is *not a result* of the historical critical examination of the Biblical Easter tradition, *but a postulate* that precedes any such examination.”<sup>122</sup> The orthodox resurrection is *a priori* ruled out of court. Again, Crossan’s denial of human post-mortem existence is consistent (appearing explicitly in both earlier<sup>123</sup> and later<sup>124</sup> works) and appears without explanation or defense; thus, it can reasonably be assumed that this theological presupposition preceded his historical Jesus research and publication.

Third, if there is no life after death, then legitimate Christian faith cannot be eschatological or apocalyptic—that is, it cannot look forward to any type of post-mortem vindication. God will *not* one day intervene to set things right and resurrect his faithful people to eternal life in paradise. Only God’s people can create heaven on earth; indeed, that is our calling and commission.<sup>125</sup> Thus, a denial of the afterlife leads Crossan to redefine, deny, or otherwise reject the abundance of eschatological material in the New Testament, a great deal of which purportedly emanates from the mouth of Jesus himself in the Gospels.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Wolfgang Pannenberg, “History and the Reality of the Resurrection,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 64. Emphasis added.

<sup>123</sup>E.g., Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate* (1976).

<sup>124</sup>E.g., Crossan, *Who Is Jesus?* (1996); and idem, *A Long Way from Tipperary* (2000).

<sup>125</sup>“I admit a total disinterest in afterlife options. . . . they distract from what I understand to be the challenge of Jesus about the Kingdom of God. . . . my own hope is for a church empowered by divine justice.” Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 202. See also Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 131-32.

<sup>126</sup>Richard Hays notes that Crossan’s methodology is entirely circular. First, we know that Jesus did not utter eschatological warnings or prophecies. He was, rather, a wisdom teacher of parabolic subversion. How do we know that? Because the apocalyptic eschatology attributed to Jesus reflects later church tradition. How do we know that material attributed to Jesus must have come from later church tradition instead? Because the historical Jesus never uttered eschatological warnings, prophecies, or promises. See Richard B. Hays, “The Corrected Jesus,” *First Things* 43 (1994): 45-46. Crossan’s attribution of apocalyptic material to later church tradition became a trademark of the Jesus Seminar, which he co-founded with Robert Funk. Critiques of the Jesus Seminar’s methodology and conclusions regarding

Fourth, if human life ceases at death, and Jesus' resurrection therefore cannot be a literal historical reality, then Christian resurrection belief must be explained in other terms. Crossan identifies himself as a Catholic Christian and affirms the resurrection.<sup>127</sup> Having rejected the metaphysical possibility of physical life after death, he is forced to redefine resurrection. Thus the resurrection becomes for Crossan metaphorical rather than literal, symbolic rather than bodily.<sup>128</sup> The metaphorical definition of the resurrection is driven not the textual and historical evidence but rather by the logical force of Crossan's underlying theological convictions.<sup>129</sup>

### **Divine Consistency: Deism in Disguise**

Crossan's theological tenets of religious pluralism and human finitude point to the true core of his theological worldview, what other theologians and philosophers often call naturalism or deism,<sup>130</sup> but Crossan himself terms divine consistency. "It [divine

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apocalypticism are abundant. See, e.g., Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 58-60; and Howard Clark Kee, "A Century of Quests for the Culturally Compatible Jesus," *Theology Today* 52 (1995): 21-26.

<sup>127</sup>When asked whether Jesus was raised from the dead, Crossan responds, "I don't even have to hesitate—Yes." Crossan, quoted in Halsted, "The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan," 519.

<sup>128</sup>Witherington suggests, "It is a ploy of desperation to suggest that Christian faith would not be much affected if Jesus were not actually raised from the dead in space and time. This is the approach of those desperate to maintain their faith even at the expense of the historical reality of the facts." Ben Witherington III, "Resurrection Redux," in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 139.

<sup>129</sup>Crossan's theological presupposition that human life ceases absolutely at death raises problematic conceptual issues for his metaphorical account of the resurrection. If no one ever is raised from the dead, then Jesus was not raised from the dead either. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, how can Jesus now be unbounded by time and space and present with his followers everywhere? According to Crossan, there is nothing that lives on, no possibility that one can be raised after death. So what part of Jesus lives on? How is Jesus present with his disciples today? It appears as if Crossan's affirmation of the resurrection is somewhat of a platitude. Crossan does not really believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and lives on—he is dead and gone, but his *mission* lives on.

<sup>130</sup>E.g., William Lane Craig identifies Crossan as a naturalistic deist in his debate with Crossan, in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 169. Geivett identifies Crossan as a non-theistic naturalist in Geivett, "The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief," 102-03.

consistency] does not concern what God *can* do but what God *does* do, in the first century or the twentieth century or any century.”<sup>131</sup> This aspect of Crossan’s theological worldview needs to be scrutinized closely, as it is an item of concern and uncertainty.<sup>132</sup> Accordingly, I will work through Crossan’s divine consistency in three steps.

First, Crossan insists that he is not a naturalist, and that furthermore he accepts the existence of miracles today and in the first century.

I have visited Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal, healing shrines of the Christian Virgin Mary. I have also visited Epidauros in Greece and Pergamum in Turkey, healing shrines of the pagan god Asklepios. The miraculous healings recorded in both places were remarkably the same. . . . What do I conclude? Faith heals! That is as sure as anything we can ever know. Certain diseases for certain people under certain circumstances can be healed by faith in that very possibility.<sup>133</sup>

Throughout his writing on the historical Jesus, Crossan affirms his belief that Jesus worked miraculous healings.<sup>134</sup> “Faith heals, and that’s a fact.”<sup>135</sup> Jesus is not, however, the only one able to enact miraculous healings: “The power of healing is a gift of God built permanently into the fabric of the universe.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 215. Emphasis original. Crossan repeats this phrase explaining his understanding of divine consistency quite frequently. “I have made certain judgments about what I’m going to call ‘divine consistency’—how God works in the world. Not what God ‘can’ do—that I bracket completely—but what God ‘does’ do. I don’t think it was different in the first century from the twentieth.” Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan,” 515. “I leave absolutely open what God *could* do, but I have very definite thoughts about what God *does* do. . . . I also presume divine consistency: what God does now is what God always did. God ‘intervened’ no more and no less in the world of the early first century than that of the late twentieth century.” Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 76-77.

<sup>132</sup>Geivett comments, “Crossan’s worldview [re: theism] is not so easily identifiable. . . . I do not yet understand Crossan’s conception of the God he speaks of in his writings.” Geivett, “The Epistemology of Resurrection Belief,” 101-02.

<sup>133</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 64.

<sup>134</sup>Any discussion of Jesus and miraculous healing is absent from Crossan’s pre-1991 publications, most likely as the bulk of his early work focuses on establishing and interpreting the authentic *words* (not *deeds*) of Jesus.

<sup>135</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 297.

<sup>136</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 69.

Thus, Crossan rejects labels of deism and naturalism. Typically, a deist believes in a closed universe—that no agency outside the known physical universe can exert causality within it. Deism acknowledges the existence of a Creator God who is transcendent to the universe, but rejects the actuality of God’s continued involvement or agency within the universe. Naturalism can be either deistic or atheistic—deistic naturalism is simply deism; atheistic naturalism goes one step further and denies the objective existence of a transcendent Creator God. In atheistic naturalism (naturalism for short), then, no external agent interacts within the physical universe simply because there is no such transcendent agent to begin with. Crossan rejects all such labels, insisting that he does not “believe we live in a closed universe.”<sup>137</sup> At the outset, therefore, Crossan insists that he is neither a deist nor a naturalist, but to the contrary embraces the possibility and actuality of miracles in an open universe.

As a second step in identifying Crossan’s deistic tendencies, however, we must acknowledge that Crossan does to miracles what he does to the resurrection: he accepts them, but only in a radically redefined sense. After affirming Jesus’ healing ministry, Crossan asks:

What, however, if the disease could not be cured but the illness could somehow be healed? This is the central problem of what Jesus was doing in his healing miracles. Was he curing the disease through an intervention in the physical world, or was he healing the illness through an intervention in the social world? I presume that Jesus, who *did not and could not cure that disease or any other one*, healed the poor man’s illness by refusing to accept the disease’s ritual uncleanness and social ostracization. Jesus thereby forced others either to reject him from their community or to accept the leper within it as well. . . . Such an interpretation may seem to destroy the miracle. But *miracles are not changes in the physical world so much as changes in the social world*.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>138</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, 82. Emphasis added.

Crossan believes in miracles, to be certain; but miracles are *social*, not *physical*. Crossan presumes, without argumentation or defense, that Jesus “did not and could not cure” biological diseases. Building upon anthropological studies of shamans and other faith healers, Crossan draws a sharp distinction between disease and illness. Illnesses, which Jesus could and did heal, “are *experiences* of disvalued changes in states of being and in social function”; diseases, which Jesus could not and did not cure, “are *abnormalities* in the *structure* and *function* of bodily organs and systems.”<sup>139</sup> Crossan is quite emphatic about the separation between the two: “Jesus and his followers healed illness. They never, in my opinion, cured disease.”<sup>140</sup>

What of Crossan’s explicit affirmation of an open universe?<sup>141</sup> As it turns out, the open universe has suffered the same fate as the resurrection of Jesus and the possibility of miracles: denial through redefinition. What Crossan identifies as an open universe is actually a universe where not everything is (yet) understood by rational scientific and philosophical inquiry. Whereas Crossan appears to be affirming the possibility (even regularity) of divine interaction with the physical universe, in actuality he is simply pointing out gaps in human knowledge and understanding. Thus, Crossan writes, more fully, “I do not believe we live in a closed universe *where we understand*

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<sup>139</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 293. Emphasis original. Crossan identifies and stresses the distinction between disease and illness throughout his historical Jesus scholarship. In *The Historical Jesus* (1991), he cites George Peter Murdock’s studies distinguishing disease and illness. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 319. In *Who Is Jesus* (1996), Crossan insists that “Jesus healed the illness, rather than the disease.” Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 68. See also John Dominic Crossan, “The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant,” *Christian Century* 108 (1991): 1197, where Crossan asserts, “Whatever the actual *disease*, the *illness* [of the leper] was in the separation from family and village . . . That was the illness and that was what Jesus healed; the disease, as such, was not cured.”

<sup>140</sup>Crossan, “The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant,” 1197.

<sup>141</sup>“I do not believe we live in a closed universe.” Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 75. “We live in a confusedly open universe.” Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 303.

*everything completely.*”<sup>142</sup> Those who embrace a closed universe are not, according to Crossan’s definition, deists or naturalists; rather, they believe that “*we know all that could happen normally or naturally.*”<sup>143</sup>

In Crossan’s “open” universe, miracle-claims arise due to “marvels,” phenomena which cannot be physically explained by witnesses:

A marvel is something for which I or we have no adequate explanation at the moment. And there are far more marvels around than we usually admit. . . . What is objectively present is a marvel, something we wonder about because we have no adequate explanation. When people declare that a marvel is a miracle, they are making an act of faith, they are declaring that, *for them*, God has acted directly and immediately in this situation. . . . That is, by definition an act of faith, an ultimate interpretation beyond proof or disproof.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, Crossan’s embrace of an open universe in which miracles are possible and actual is dependent upon his redefinition of terms.

We have seen that Crossan explicitly affirms his belief in the possibility of miracles in our open universe; we have also seen that Crossan redefines both miracles and the notion of an open universe. Thus, we arrive at the third step in identifying and critiquing Crossan’s theological presupposition of naturalism (deism). When miracles are defined and understood in their classical sense as violations or suspensions of the ordinary workings of the natural order by a transcendent (divine) agency, Crossan explicitly and emphatically denies the possibility of miraculous occurrences.

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<sup>142</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 75. Emphasis added.

<sup>143</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 303. Emphasis original.

<sup>144</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 75. Emphasis original. Having distinguished between marvels and miracles, and having redefined an open and closed universe, Crossan suggests that “as long as we live in a confusedly open universe *where even our securest knowledge is relativized* by its being ours, it is hard to see how to know a marvel from a miracle.” Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 303. Emphasis added.

In his wide-ranging and illuminating interview with Crossan, James Halsted asks, “In June 1994, you were interviewed by Jeffrey Lyons of the *Chicago Tribune*. In the article you are quoted as saying that God does not violate the laws of nature. How do you understand the ‘laws of nature’?” Toward the end of his response, Crossan asserts: “Jeff Lyons said I don’t believe in miracles. Well, no, I don’t believe in his type of miracles.”<sup>145</sup> Crossan’s response would be unproblematic, except that Lyons’ definition of miracles accords with common understanding (God working directly in the physical world through divine agency), while Crossan’s represents a significant redefinition.<sup>146</sup>

I have already cited Crossan’s emphatic and unapologetic rejection of the possibility that Jesus miraculously cured diseases. Crossan is asked, “Is that a prejudice against miracles that invalidates your reading of gospel claims about Jesus?”<sup>147</sup> In response, Crossan states quite bluntly, “First of all, everyone draws a line of credibility

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<sup>145</sup>Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan: An Interview,” 515.

<sup>146</sup>Definitions of miracles commonly invoke Crossan’s sense of incomprehensibility. Thus, the fourth-century church father Augustine defined a miracle as “whatever appears that is difficult or unusual above the hope and power of them who wonder.” Augustine, cited in Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 7. However, such definitions usually proceed to describe a miracle as something beyond human power, wrought instead by deity. Hence, Thomas Aquinas expanded upon Augustine’s definition: “What is done by divine power, which, being infinite, is incomprehensible in itself, is truly miraculous.” Aquinas, cited in *ibid.*, 12. Aquinas insists that miracles are not contrary to nature, since God’s involvement in nature is ubiquitous; miracles thus should be described as being “beyond or different from the usual order of nature.” Aquinas, cited in *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary*, ed. Linda Zagzebski and Timothy D. Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 565. Hume’s classic definition was given already in chapter 2: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.” Antony Flew gives a twentieth-century version of Hume’s definition: “Miracles necessarily constitute achievements by exercises of supernatural power of what is naturally impossible. . . . It [a miracle] must involve an overriding of a law of nature, a doing of what is known to be naturally impossible by a Power which is, by this very overriding, shown to be supernatural.” Antony Flew, “Neo-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous,” in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 46. Contemporary theistic philosopher Richard Purtill defines a miracle as “an event (1) brought about by the power of God that is (2) a temporary (3) exception (4) to the ordinary course of nature (5) for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history.” Richard L. Purtill, “Defining Miracles,” in *In Defense of Miracles*, 72.

<sup>147</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 76.

somewhere.”<sup>148</sup> In other words, the healing miracle-claims in the Gospels are, in Crossan’s worldview, simply in-credible. For example, Crossan says, “When we get to Lazarus coming out of the tomb after four days dead, should that be taken literally? That is the point to me. *That is why the churches are losing credibility.*”<sup>149</sup> The Church is becoming an intellectual laughing-stock because, Crossan implies, it affirms the historicity of miracles which the modern scientific worldview has rendered unbelievable.

Whether acknowledged or not, conscious or not, Crossan’s fundamental theological worldview is deeply indebted to the strains of deism and naturalism which culminated in Hume’s critique of miracles. Hume defined miracles as violations of the laws of nature, and insisted that since the laws of nature are universally upheld, miracles therefore could not occur. Crossan uses softer terminology, but the impact is the same. Instead of Hume’s universally-applicable laws of nature, Crossan acknowledges his personal presupposition of “natural consistency.”<sup>150</sup> The laws of nature are regular and unbroken; thus, “when I read that Augustus was born of a divine-human, miraculous, virgin birth, virgin conception—or that Jesus was—I do not accept either account as historical.”<sup>151</sup> A virginal conception and birth would transgress the normal operation of nature, violating “natural consistency;” thus, it is in-credible within Crossan’s worldview.

Having identified his personal presumption of the incredibility of miracles, the operation of natural consistency, and divine consistency, Crossan acknowledges them as fundamental operative presuppositions. “These are presuppositions or, if you prefer,

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan,” 514. Emphasis added.

<sup>150</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 76.

<sup>151</sup>Halsted, “The Orthodox Unorthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan,” 515.



prejudices, but so, of course, are the opposite opinions.”<sup>152</sup> Given the significance of these worldview presuppositions, one would expect Crossan to acknowledge them when discussing the presuppositions which influence his historical Jesus scholarship. Again, however, these presuppositions are only acknowledged in popular works and interviews. Crossan is apparently unaware of the significant influence that fundamental worldview presuppositions exert upon his research and writing.

**Divine consistency and Jesus’ resurrection.** Crossan’s theological worldview, then, affirms the possibility of miracles within our open universe. The open universe, however, is radically redefined, so that rather than being a universe open to the periodic or regular personal causality of a transcendent agent, it is simply a universe in which we do not understand the natural causes of all that happens. Miracles are similarly redefined. Instead of the suspension or violation of the regular workings of the natural universe by a divine agent, miracles are simply unexplained phenomena which believers ascribe to the agency of God—perhaps akin to the Greeks’ ascription of lightning to Zeus’ thunderbolt. When Crossan is pressed to assess miracles as classically understood, he consistently and emphatically rejects them as lacking credibility in a modern worldview. What is the best description or definition of a worldview which denies the possibility of personal, direct divine interaction in the world?

Crossan’s debate with William Lane Craig contains a fascinating exchange. Craig asks Crossan, “what evidence would it take to convince you [that Jesus was risen from the dead as a historical fact]?” Crossan responds, “It’s a theological presupposition

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<sup>152</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 77.

of mine that God does not operate that way.”<sup>153</sup> Craig accuses Crossan of a thinly disguised naturalism wherein miracles in the Gospels are simply ruled out of court.

Crossan . . . at first emphatically declares that he absolutely rejects naturalism. But then in his rebuttal he takes back with the left hand what the right has given: ‘The supernatural *always* . . . operates through the screen of the natural.’ But that *is* naturalism. Naturalism holds that every event in the space-time order has a cause which is also part of the space-time order. There are no events which are the immediate products of supernatural causes. Naturalists need not be atheists. The deists, for example, were theistic naturalists: God acts in the world only mediately through natural causes. Now this is exactly Dr. Crossan’s position.<sup>154</sup>

Crossan may redefine deism as divine consistency, but he does appear to be, functionally, a deistic naturalist.

What are the implications of Crossan’s deism, or divine consistency, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? In the first place, Crossan holds that the nature miracles of Christ reported in the gospels are metaphysically impossible. Jesus could *not* have multiplied the fish and the loaves or walked on water. These nature miracles must be re-interpreted—hence they become apologetic appeals for authority within the early church. More importantly, “in terms of divine consistency, [Crossan does] not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time, including Jesus, brings dead people back to life.”<sup>155</sup> And if no one brings dead people back to life, then logically, the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical event is presuppositionally impossible.<sup>156</sup> Craig notes,

Now what is the significance of this theological presupposition for the historical Jesus? Very simply, it rules out in advance the historicity of events like the

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<sup>153</sup>Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 61. Crossan goes on to confess, “What would it take to prove to me what you ask? I don’t know, unless God changes the universe.” Ibid., 62.

<sup>154</sup>Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” 169. Emphasis original.

<sup>155</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 77.

<sup>156</sup>Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” 177; see also Richard Bauckham, “God Who Raises the Dead: The Resurrection of Jesus and Early Christian Faith in God,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, ed. Paul Avis (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993), 153.

resurrection since there are no natural causes which could plausibly serve as the ‘screen’ or intermediate cause whereby God effects such an event. The resurrection so transcends the powers of natural agents in the world that it would require an immediate act of God—in other words, a miracle—in order to occur, and this Dr. Crossan rules out *a priori*. Thus his antisupernaturalism determines his skepticism concerning the historicity of the New Testament witness to the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>157</sup>

### **Conclusion: Theological Presuppositions and Jesus’ Resurrection**

Crossan’s metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the result of his gospel material investments and historical research; rather, it is required and demanded by the theological worldview which he brings to the texts. Crossan’s presupposition of religious pluralism treats the doctrinal commitments of various religions as different, equally valid but incomplete metaphors for their experience of the Holy. Affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection thus can only be determinative for Christians. A bodily resurrection which occurred as a historical event, however, would transcend the boundaries of particularity and locality, and is thus ruled out *a priori*.

Crossan’s presupposition of post-mortem extinction absolutely and irrevocably rules out the possibility of Jesus’ literal resurrection. If life ceases at death, then the dead are not raised. If the dead are not raised, then Jesus was not raised either.<sup>158</sup> Thus, Jesus’ resurrection *a priori* cannot be a literal bodily resurrection as a historical event. Instead, it becomes, for Crossan, a metaphorical expression of how Jesus’ disciples continued to

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<sup>157</sup>Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” 169-70. In his doctoral dissertation, Brent Schlittenhart arrives at a similar conclusion: “For Crossan, the miracles of Jesus must be understood along ‘anthropological lines.’ . . . The healings by Jesus are understood as psychosocial effects rather than supernatural effects. . . . The [Jesus] Seminar’s denial of the resurrection flows more from the assumptions of a modernistic mind-set, which embraces the impossibility of a miracle like the resurrection.” Brent Schlittenhart, “The Eschatology of the Jesus Seminar: The Non-Apocalyptic Character and Mission of Jesus” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 20, 23.

experience divine empowerment after his death as they lived out his teaching and mission.

Finally, Crossan's presupposition of deistic naturalism excludes the possibility of divinely-caused miracles, and specifically disallows the possibility of resurrection from the dead. Crossan's embrace of a metaphorical explanation for Christ's resurrection is directly and inexorably caused by his underlying theological presuppositions. Each presupposition on its own directly and inexorably forces Crossan to reject the historical, orthodox understanding of Christ's resurrection as a bodily raising and a historical event. In combination, his core theological worldview presuppositions press him towards a metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection.

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<sup>158</sup>In that sense at least, Crossan agrees with the natural reading of Paul's appeal in 1 Cor 15:13—"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised."

## CHAPTER 4

### HERMENEUTICS, METHODOLOGY AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

The 1991 publication of *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* represents the fulcrum of Crossan's scholarship and academic career. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Crossan published extensively in literary criticism and biblical hermeneutics, focusing particularly on the interpretation of Jesus' parables.<sup>1</sup> In the later 1980s, Crossan's focus shifted toward historical Jesus research.<sup>2</sup> He pursued a comprehensive study of extant sources of the Jesus tradition, emphasizing extracanonical documents.<sup>3</sup> The best-selling *Historical Jesus* marked the culmination of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); idem, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975); idem, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); idem, *Finding Is the First Act: Trove Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable* (Missoula: Scholars, 1979); idem, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury, 1980); idem, *A Fragile Craft: The Work of Amos Niven Wilder* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981); and idem, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983). Numerous articles from the same time frame also focus on the literary nature of the Gospels—e.g., idem, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 451-65; idem, "Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72): 285-307; idem, "Parable as Religious and Poetic Experience," *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973): 330-58; idem, "The Servant Parables of Jesus," *Semeia* 1 (1974): 17-62; idem, "The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable," *Semeia* 2 (1974): 82-112; idem, "A Metamodel for Polyvalent Narration," *Semeia* 9 (1977): 105-47; idem, "Paradox Gives Rise to Metaphor: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Parables of Jesus," *Biblical Research* 24-25 (1979-1980): 20-37; and idem, "A Structuralist Analysis of John 6," in *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism Presented in Honor of William A. Beardslee*, ed. Richard A. Spencer (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 235-49.

<sup>2</sup>His constant interest and engagement in historical Jesus research is indicated by the subtitle of *In Parables*. Thus, Crossan's transition does represent an abrupt shift, but rather a change in focus.

<sup>3</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); idem, *Sayings Parallels: A Workbook for the Jesus Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); and especially idem, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

the previous twenty years of Crossan's scholarship. Crossan's later historical Jesus work does not abandon, repudiate, or transcend his earlier conclusions regarding biblical interpretation and literary criticism; rather, his early hermeneutics informs and directs his later scholarship, which in turn presupposes and builds upon his prior hermeneutical conclusions.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of the current chapter is to evaluate the mutual interaction between Crossan's presuppositions, hermeneutics, and historical methodology. This chapter will begin with a relatively brief sketch of Crossan's hermeneutics and the interplay of hermeneutics and presuppositions. The major focus of the chapter, however, will be Crossan's well-defined methodology for historical Jesus research. After outlining his triple-triadic methodology, attention will turn to the material investments<sup>5</sup> which Crossan insists all scholars have to make in order to flesh out their methodology and arrive at a reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Four of Crossan's material investments will be analyzed—concerning the dating and reconstruction of Q and the *Gospel of Thomas*; the existence and importance of *Secret Mark*; the existence and importance of

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<sup>4</sup>Crossan's interpreters have differed, however. Robert Stewart concurs with my assessment, finding continuity between the early and later Crossan in his doctoral dissertation. Robert Byron Stewart, "The Impact of Contemporary Hermeneutics on Historical Jesus Research: An Analysis of John Dominic Crossan and Nicholas Thomas Wright" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000). Stewart's dissertation was later published in book form—Robert B. Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus: The Impact of Hermeneutics on the Jesus Research of John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008). Donald Denton, on the other hand, identifies a break in Crossan's scholarship, with his later historical Jesus research moving away from the structuralist conclusions of his earlier hermeneutical work. See Donald L. Denton, Jr., *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies: An Examination of the Work of John Dominic Crossan and Ben F. Meyer* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004). Denton is right to identify 1991 as the transitional point in Crossan's scholarship, but my contention is that Crossan transitions through, not away from, his hermeneutics and literary criticism.

<sup>5</sup>Material investments are scholarly judgments that must be made at every step of methodological application. Thus, for example, in the identification of sources for the Jesus tradition, material investments (scholarly judgments) must be made regarding the dating and independence of both canonical and extracanonical sources.

the *Cross Gospel*; and the date, purpose, and narrative freedom of the author of the Gospel of Mark. The chapter will conclude by assessing the impact of Crossan's theological worldview presuppositions upon his material investments and determination of relative plausibilities. Crossan's rigorous methodology will be shown to be directed by his theological presuppositions, predetermining a rejection of the historically orthodox understanding of Jesus' resurrection. Crossan's hermeneutical post-structuralism, meanwhile, directs him towards a parabolic or metaphorical understanding of both language and history, strongly influencing his alternative reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection as a powerful, but unhistorical, metaphorical parable (or parabolic metaphor).

### **Crossan's Hermeneutics: Structuralism and Deconstructionism**

In Crossan's first post-Servite full-length manuscript,<sup>6</sup> he insists that there is no history beyond language. His interest is in the historical Jesus; but Jesus is recoverable solely through his language, particularly his parables.<sup>7</sup> The historical Jesus is constructed through recovering his authentic words. From the beginning of his academic career, Crossan has emphasized recovering, to the greatest extent possible, the words of the historical Jesus, because "one might almost consider the term 'Jesus' as a cipher for the reconstructed parabolic complex itself."<sup>8</sup> Given the centrality of Jesus' parables to

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<sup>6</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>7</sup>"The term 'historical Jesus' really means the language of Jesus and most especially the parables themselves." Crossan, *In Parables*, vii.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, vii.

understanding the historical Jesus, Crossan then emphasizes the need to comprehend the nature of parables themselves.

Jesus' parables, according to Crossan, are best understood as "poetic metaphor."<sup>9</sup> Metaphorical language reveals truths that are "not reducible from a language in cipher to a clear language."<sup>10</sup> Parabolic metaphors are not expressible in propositional form; rather, they engage the listener in the parabolic world through ornament (beauty), illustration, and participation.<sup>11</sup> Crossan further asserts that authentic religious experience is expressible solely through poetic metaphor; thus, Jesus uses his parables to express "what is most important about Jesus: his experience of God."<sup>12</sup>

Crossan continues to develop his linguistic hermeneutic in *The Dark Interval*.<sup>13</sup> Structuralism, according to Crossan, holds that "reality is structure and especially linguistic structure, that reality is the structure of language."<sup>14</sup> Crossan rejects historical objectivism, the view that history relates "a world out there objectively present before and apart from any story concerning it," in favor of the structuralist view that "story create[s] world so that we live as human beings in, and only in, layers upon layers of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>11</sup>"The value of metaphor [is] in explaining to a student something which is new to one's experience. . . . The thesis is that metaphor can also articulate a referent so new or so alien to consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself. The metaphor here contains a new possibility of world and of language so that any information one might obtain from it can only be received *after* one has participated through the metaphor in its new and alien referential world." Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 22. "It is becoming increasingly clear that the specific language of religion, that which is closest to its heart, is the language of poetic metaphor in all its varied extension." Ibid., 18.

<sup>13</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975).

<sup>14</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 10.



interwoven story.”<sup>15</sup> Reality, Crossan says, “is neither *in here* in the mind nor *out there* in the world; it is the interplay of both mind and world in language. Reality is relational and relationship. Even more simply, reality is language.”<sup>16</sup> Structuralism is not, however, world-denying, or inherently skeptical. Crossan does not argue that we cannot come to know reality; rather, he argues, “what we know *is* reality, *is* our reality here together and with each other.”<sup>17</sup>

Crossan’s structuralism has grave implications for traditional religions, propositional religious truth, and transcendental experience.

If there is only story, then God, or the referent of transcendental experience, is either *inside* my story and, in that case, at least in the Judaeo-Christian tradition I know best, God is merely an idol I have created; or, God is *outside* my story, and I have just argued that what is ‘out there’ is completely unknowable. So it would seem that any transcendental experience has been ruled out, if we can only live in story.<sup>18</sup>

Crossan’s hermeneutic structuralism helps explain his reluctance to respond directly to William Lane Craig’s line of questioning during their 1996 debate. Craig, a historical realist, asks Crossan, “I would like to know, for you, what about the statement that God exists? Is that a statement of faith or fact?”<sup>19</sup> Crossan first responds, “it’s a statement of faith for all those who make it.”<sup>20</sup> Craig then suggests that Crossan’s structuralism holds that “God’s existence is simply an interpretive construct that a

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 37. Emphasis original. Denton summarizes Crossan’s structuralist literary theory, “He states plainly that reality is exhausted by the structure of language and story. Story *creates* world, rather than telling of a world that exists apart from story. Structure, specifically linguistic structure, constitutes reality.” Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies*, 25.

<sup>17</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 40. Emphasis original.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 40-41. Emphasis original.

<sup>19</sup>Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 49.

<sup>20</sup>Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 49.

particular human mind—a believer—puts onto the universe. But in and of itself the universe is without such a being as God.”<sup>21</sup> Crossan protests that Craig misunderstands his structuralist perspective: “What you’re trying to do is imagine a world without us. Now unfortunately, I can’t do that. . . . We know God only as God has revealed God to us; that all we could ever know in any religion.”<sup>22</sup> Reality, including the transcendent God, can only be known within our linguistic constructs—hence, for Crossan, it truly is a “meaningless question” to ask whether God existed “during the Jurassic age, when there were no human beings.”<sup>23</sup>

Structuralism initially suggests an inability to experience transcendence, but Crossan insists that is not the final word. Human beings cannot directly encounter God due to the limitations imposed by language: “Transcendental experience is found *only* at the edge of language and the limit of story.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus’ parables exemplify this “edge of language,” drawing the listener (or reader) into the world of the parable, overturning (or negating) expectations and values, unnerving rather than reassuring.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>23</sup>Crossan’s answer (“meaningless question”) to Craig’s question; *ibid.*, 51. In his most recent work, Crossan insists that: “Theists may insist that ‘God exists,’ and atheists may counter that ‘God does not exist,’ but, although the verb ‘exist’ can be used literally of creatures (with or without the negative), it can be used only metaphorically of the Creator. The cloud of unknowing is pierced only by the gleam of metaphor.” John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 35.

<sup>24</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 46. Emphasis original. Stewart elaborates in a vivid illustration, “Crossan appeals to the early Wittgenstein and argues that the relationship of language to transcendence is similar to that of a raft (language) adrift on the sea (reality) seeking the keeper of the lighthouse (God?) on the solid shore.” Crossan proceeds to deconstruct the dry land and even the sea, leaving only the raft. “The result is that there is only language.” Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 29.

<sup>25</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 55-56.

In *Raid on the Articulate*,<sup>26</sup> Crossan furthers his foray into structuralism and deconstructionism.<sup>27</sup> He begins by insisting that in biblical studies, literary criticism is not only an equal partner in research, but even “theorizes a little truculently about the primacy of language over history.”<sup>28</sup> Language, not history, is the master paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Crossan continues to insist that Jesus’ parables are the key to understanding his message and meaning, but introduces *paradox* as a further interpretive key: “Paradox confess[es] our awareness that we are making it all up within the supreme game of language. Paradox is language laughing at itself.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, paradox expresses the highest level of existence. Finally, “parable is paradox formed into story.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus’ parables are examples of paradox formed into story, consistently reversing the expectations of his hearers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

<sup>27</sup>For example, Crossan emphasizes the pre-eminence of *play* within human imagination and reality. “I have accepted play, well known to us in the microcosm of game and sport, as a supreme paradigm for reality. Reality is the interplay of worlds created by human imagination.” Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 28. Furthermore, “I am presuming in all this that it is the playful human mind which establishes and imposes structure. I do not think of structure as already existent in ‘reality-out-there’ and discovered or acknowledged by our obedient minds. What is there before or without our structured play strikes me as being both unknowable and unspeakable.” Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, xiii.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., xiv. In a 1977 article, Crossan proposes that contemporary biblical criticism needs to acknowledge that “structural analysis is logically prior to historical analysis.” Crossan, “Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Biblical Criticism,” *Biblical Research* 22 (1977): 45.

<sup>30</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 93.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>32</sup>Crossan’s identification of paradox within Jesus’ parables is prefigured in his earlier work. In *In Parables*, Crossan identifies three categories within Jesus’ parables—parables of *advent*, which stress the kingdom as the gift of God; parables of *reversal*, in which the recipient’s world is overturned; and parables of *action*, where hearers are empowered to live out the kingdom of God. See Crossan, *In Parables*, 36. Parables of advent are the subject of chapter 2 (37-51), chapter 3 treats parables of reversal (52-76), and chapter 4 covers parables of action (77-117). The Parable of the Good Samaritan is Crossan’s favorite example of a parable of reversal—“When good (clerics) and bad (Samaritan) become, respectively, bad and good, a world is being challenged and we are faced with polar reversal.” Ibid., 63. “The literal point

Part of the paradoxical reversal of expectations, according to Crossan, is the inevitable rejection of the notion that “the Holy has a great and secret master plan for the universe in process of gradual but inevitable realization.”<sup>33</sup> That was the reluctant conclusion, he claims, of twentieth-century existentialism: “I consider existentialist nausea to be the ontological disappointment of one who, having been taught that there is some overarching logical meaning beyond our perception, has come at length to believe there is no such fixed center toward which our searchings strive.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, “the Holy has no such plan at all and that is what is absolutely incomprehensible to our structuring, planning, ordering human minds.”<sup>35</sup> The embrace of paradox and structuralism entails accepting the fundamental paradox, namely that “if perception creates reality, then perception (mine, yours, ours together) must also be creating the perceiver (me, you, us together).”<sup>36</sup>

Crossan’s early work thus focuses on deconstructing the comfortable expectations of North American “classicism and rationalism.”<sup>37</sup> An Emily Dickinson poem serves as a fitting epigraph for Crossan’s early structuralism as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

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confronted the hearers with the necessity of saying the impossible and having their world turned upside down and radically questioned in its presuppositions. The metaphorical point is that *just* so does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into human consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions.” Ibid., 64.

<sup>33</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 44.

<sup>34</sup>Crossan, “Metamodel for Polyvalent Narration,” 111.

<sup>35</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 44.

<sup>36</sup>Crossan, “Metamodel for Polyvalent Narration,” 110.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>38</sup>The poem first appears in Crossan’s 1975 *The Dark Interval*, 42-43, and serves as the epigraph for his 1979 *Finding is the First Act*.

Finding is the first Act  
 The second, loss,  
 Third, Expedition for  
 the 'Golden Fleece.'  
 Fourth, no Discovery—  
 Fifth, no Crew—  
 Finally, no Golden Fleece—  
 Jason—sham—too.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Dark Interval*, Crossan sums up the emphatic closure pronounced by Dickinson's ending: "In that 'sham' one hears the chilling slam as the door closes on the classical vision of a fixed center out there somewhere. . . . with the loss of credibility in a fixed reality independent of us, there soon followed the loss of faith in a God whose chief role was to guarantee that reality's validity."<sup>40</sup> Language, not God, constructs and structures reality; even the transcendent can only be experienced on the outer boundaries of linguistic experience. The core of language is paradoxical parable: Crossan "rejects the quest for order and purpose in interpretation and prefers instead to stand 'on the brink of Nonsense and Absurdity and not be dizzy.'"<sup>41</sup>

In *Cliffs of Fall*,<sup>42</sup> Crossan suggests three elements universally present in Jesus' parables, "narrativity, metaphoricity, [and] paradoxicality."<sup>43</sup> Parabolic narrative is essentially short, and unavoidably metaphorical.<sup>44</sup> Crossan makes it clear that "he

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<sup>39</sup>Citation from Dickinson's *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, vol. 2, No. 870, 647-58.

<sup>40</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 43.

<sup>41</sup>Stewart, *Quest for the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 33, quoting Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 33.

<sup>42</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

<sup>43</sup>Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 2. Later, Crossan changes his designations somewhat, identifying brevity, narrativity, and metaphoricity as the core elements of parable. See Crossan, "Parable as History and Literature," *Listening* 19 (1984): 6.

<sup>44</sup>Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 2, 6.

understands all language as metaphorical.”<sup>45</sup> He insists upon “the unavailability of this language-other-than-metaphorical, this non-figurative, non-metaphorical, literal, and proper language.”<sup>46</sup> Accepting the linguistic theses of Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida, Crossan identifies metaphorical and literal poles of language. Against Ricoeur, however, Crossan insists that literal language does not eventually give rise to metaphorical language; rather, it is the other way around. Language is inherently metaphorical, and only becomes structured, ordered, or literal over time.<sup>47</sup> Thus, while there is a paradoxical polyvalency (multiplicity of meaning) within all language, this is not so much indicative of Ricoeur’s “surplus of meaning,” but rather of Derrida’s “void of meaning.”<sup>48</sup> Parable succeeds as the pre-eminent linguistic device due to its inherent tendency to paradox, metaphor, and polyvalence: “It is precisely the *absence* of a fixed, literal, univocal, or univalent language that releases the inevitability and universality of metaphor itself. And this absence is the foundation and horizon of all language and of all thought.”<sup>49</sup>

To summarize, Crossan embraces structuralism, asserting that language constructs reality. There is no fixed, objective referent to which language (story) points; rather, the referent itself is created by the structure of language. Language is inherently

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<sup>45</sup>Stewart, *Quest for the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 33.

<sup>46</sup>Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 6.

<sup>47</sup>Stewart, *Quest for the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 33.

<sup>48</sup>Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 9-10.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. Denton comments, “The absence of a fixed, literal, univocal, referential language leads to the inevitability of metaphor. Since there is no absolutely literal language against which metaphor may be identified, all language is metaphorical. This carries the implication of the polyvalence of language. The absence of a fixed univocal language also means that there is a *void of meaning*, an essential absence, at the core of metaphor.” Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies*, 37. Emphasis original.

metaphorical, with literal meaning attached afterward in humanity's search for order and structure. Paradox and polyvalency is inherent to the human condition, given the lack of divine purpose and governance. Crossan then identifies parables as short narratives filled with paradoxical and metaphorical language, ideally suited to reversing and overturning the expectations and comfort of listeners, and drawing them into the experience of transcendence on the boundaries of language. Jesus' parables, announcing the advent of the kingdom of God, are thus world-reversing (not world-negating), paradoxical, metaphorical challenges.

### **Hermeneutics, Presuppositions, and the Resurrection**

Crossan's structuralism directs his conclusions regarding the historicity of Christ's resurrection. First, Crossan insists that reality is linguistically structured. There is no expressible reality outside that constructed by story. Second, language is essentially, inherently, and unavoidably metaphorical in nature. The metaphorical does not flow out of an originally literal story; rather, literal constructs emerge out of what was originally metaphorical in nature. Applying both tenets to the Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection leads inevitably to the conclusion that the resurrection is a metaphorical construct. Not untrue, not fictional, but metaphorical. It does not refer to a reality "*out there* in the world."<sup>50</sup> We cannot conclude that the resurrection refers to an actual event in ancient history, because we have access to it only through the inherently metaphorical medium of language.

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<sup>50</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 37. Emphasis original.

Donald Denton notes a fundamental tension between Crossan's structuralism and his historical Jesus research. On one hand, Crossan's structuralist hermeneutic "brackets the question of history in relation to the interpretation of the text, because language is seen as a closed, self-referential system."<sup>51</sup> Thus, one cannot take ancient texts to be objectively referring to actual events or persons.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Crossan's historical-critical methodology, which is operative in nascent form even in his earliest work,<sup>53</sup> "seems impervious to these hermeneutical and ontological moves, and continues to operate on the assumption that what is sought is a real historical, extra-linguistic referent, the authentic words of the real historical Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>54</sup> That is, throughout his early work on structuralist interpretation of Jesus' parables, Crossan assumes that there are real, historical parables uttered by the real, historical Jesus of Nazareth, which he as a historical Jesus scholar can at least tentatively recover and decipher. Essentially, Denton argues, Crossan "embraces a hermeneutic that denies the historical referent, and an ontology that denies extra-linguistic reality, along with a historiography that assumes both such a referent and a reality."<sup>55</sup>

Denton concludes that the tension between Crossan's relativistic structuralist hermeneutics and his objectivist historiography became untenable; hence, the later

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<sup>51</sup>Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies*, 40.

<sup>52</sup>"Any reference to historical persons or events is imposing an illegitimate extra-linguistic referent onto language." Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>E.g., Crossan, *In Parables*, 3-5; Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, xiv-xv.

<sup>54</sup>Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies*, 40.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 40-41.



Crossan abandons structuralism altogether.<sup>56</sup> It seems, however, that Crossan's later historical Jesus research does not abandon structuralism, so much as assumes, incorporates and moves beyond it.<sup>57</sup> Many of the tenets of structuralism remain essential to Crossan's research and writing. Thus, Crossan insists that his reconstruction of the historical Jesus is neither final nor authoritative.<sup>58</sup> Instead, he insists, "there will always be divergent historical Jesus-s, that there will always be divergent Christ-s built upon them, but I argue, above all, that the structure of Christianity will always be: *this is how we see Jesus-then as Christ-now*."<sup>59</sup> Historical Jesus research and resulting portraits, for Crossan, are inherently polyvalent, just as his earlier scholarship insisted that Jesus' parables were inherently polyvalent. There is no such thing as *the* historical Jesus, arrived at finally, conclusively, and authoritatively. Instead, there are only reconstructions which update the Jesus of history into the Christ of faith for that day.

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<sup>56</sup>“It is difficult to avoid the impression that Crossan himself became aware of difficulties encroaching upon his historical method as a result of his post-structuralist hermeneutic. . . . after [*Cliffs of Fall*], post-structuralist theory effectively disappears from Crossan's historical work.” Ibid., 41.

<sup>57</sup>In places, Crossan's later work explicitly embraces his earlier structural literary theory. “Keep . . . at the back of your mind . . . the suggestion of the great Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges that ‘it may be that universal history is the history of a handful of metaphors.’ Is it possible that we can never escape metaphors, the small ones we readily recognize and the huge ones we do not even notice as such but simply call reality?” Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 32.

<sup>58</sup>“This book, then, is a scholarly reconstruction of the historical Jesus. And if one were to accept its formal methods and even their material investments, one could surely offer divergent interpretative conclusions about the reconstructable historical Jesus. But one cannot dismiss it or the search for the historical Jesus as *mere* reconstruction, as if reconstruction invalidated somehow the entire project. Because there is *only* reconstruction. For a believing Christian both the life of the Word of God and the text of the Word of God are alike a graded process of historical reconstruction, be it red, pink, gray, black, or A, B, C, D. If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in.” John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 426. Emphasis original.

<sup>59</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” in *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 20. Emphasis original.

Furthermore, Crossan's commitment to recovering a portrait of the historical Jesus is not a new arrival with *The Historical Jesus*. Rather, it is present from the beginning in his structuralism as well. In the Preface to *In Parables*, Crossan insists that he is interested in recovering the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus, however, is understood in thoroughly structuralist terms.

The book is not concerned, however, with either the religion of Jesus or the faith of Jesus. Neither is it concerned with the psychological self-consciousness or even the theological self-understanding of Jesus. The term 'historical Jesus' really means the language of Jesus and most especially the parables themselves. But the term is necessary to remind us that we have literally no language and no parables of Jesus except and insofar as such can be retrieved and reconstructed from within the language of their earliest interpreters. One might almost consider the term 'Jesus' as a cipher for the reconstructed parabolic complex itself.<sup>60</sup>

The historical Jesus, then, is known by his words, particularly his parables. And his parables are always treated by Crossan as inherently paradoxical, metaphorical, and polyvalent, in accordance with his structuralist literary theory.

Crossan's commitment to objective historical-critical biblical scholarship is clearly enunciated in the preface to *Raid on the Articulate*. After insisting that he situates his own scholarship "within this challenge posed by structuralist literary criticism to the monolithic ascendancy of historical criticism in biblical studies,"<sup>61</sup> Crossan states that he "also presumes, acknowledges, and appreciates the results of historical investigation into the teachings of Jesus." Thus, he will "never use texts except those supported as authentic by the vast majority of the most critical historical scholarship."<sup>62</sup> Throughout

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<sup>60</sup>Crossan, *In Parables*, vii.

<sup>61</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, xiv.

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

Crossan's scholarship, then, there is a mutual interface between structuralist hermeneutics and historical-critical methodology.

It is instructive, however, to inquire as to the purpose and focus of Crossan's hermeneutics, particularly the direction of his deconstructionism. In his autobiography, Crossan acknowledges that the decade of the 1960s marked a period of intentional questioning.<sup>63</sup> His doctoral and post-doctoral studies had trained him to "think critically,"<sup>64</sup> and the Vatican II era fostered a questioning of hierarchical authority and teaching. Crossan openly acknowledges that he actively questioned and challenged official Catholic sexual morality and ecclesiastical authority.<sup>65</sup> Along with morality and authority, however, Crossan questioned established church doctrine. Two doctrines in particular which Crossan rejected, at some unacknowledged point in his questioning decade, are the core worldview tenets of life after death and religious particularity.<sup>66</sup>

Throughout his published works, Crossan consistently rejects the possibility of life after death. In *The Dark Interval*, Crossan identifies the unbreakable limit of "our inevitable mortality."<sup>67</sup> According to Crossan, Old Testament Judaism rightly rejected the myriad of afterlife possibilities expressed in other ancient cultures and religions:

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<sup>63</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary: A Memoir* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 75-77.

<sup>64</sup>John Dominic Crossan, "Exile, Stealth, and Cunning," *Forum* 1, no. 1 (1985): 61. He laments, however, the tendency of his critical thinking to get him into trouble with ecclesiastic authorities!

<sup>65</sup>Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 76.

<sup>66</sup>It may not be fully accurate to suggest that at some point Crossan *rejected* core Catholic doctrines. Crossan embraced Catholic Christianity, as he puts it, uncritically in his youth—he believed, but without examining or evaluating the content of his beliefs. So far as I am aware, he never explicitly identifies a conscious moving away from these core doctrinal stances—rather, he just states that he does not accept them. Crossan does not indicate that at one point in time he *did* consciously embrace either doctrine, so it is entirely possible that Crossan never believed in life after death, and that the first time he encountered the doctrine he found it lacking and did not accept it.

<sup>67</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 13.

“Immortality, eternal life, reincarnation, or any idea which negates the terminal finitude of death as the end of individual human existence.”<sup>68</sup> Hallucinatory drugs seek to bring a sense of pleasure and meaning when there is none; in the same way, Crossan argues, belief in an afterlife acts solely as “a narcotic theology to stop the pain of meaningless suffering and of hopeless persecution.”<sup>69</sup> Life ends at death, period.

My concern in this is a conviction that only by a full and glad acceptance of our utter finitude can we experience authentic transcendence. Immortality, no matter how carefully qualified as divine gratuity, strikes me as a genuflection before our own hope, a worship of our own imagination.<sup>70</sup>

Crossan’s rejection of Christian particularity (exclusivism) and his commitment to normative religious pluralism emerges early in *In Parables*. Crossan explains the participatory nature of metaphorical parables, insisting that they are particularly helpful when people “seek to express what is permanently and not just temporarily inexpressible, what one’s humanity experiences as Wholly Other.”<sup>71</sup> Reflecting on the experiences of mystics in various religious traditions, Crossan suggests, “the specific language of religion, that which is closest to its heart, is the language of poetic metaphor in all its varied extension.”<sup>72</sup> Hence the significance of Jesus’ metaphorical parables: Jesus expresses his intimate religious experience of the Wholly Other in the only language available—metaphor and parable.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 146.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 148-49.

<sup>71</sup>Crossan, *In Parables*, 12.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 22, 33.

In *The Dark Interval*, Crossan insists that experience of the transcendent is only available on the boundaries of language, and identified transcendent referents (e.g., the Judeo-Christian God) are either internal creations (and hence idols) or unknowable external mysteries.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the slamming door in Dickinson's poem represents, as Crossan opaquely implies, the death of the classical Christian conception of God.<sup>75</sup> The death of God refers not to the extermination of an objectively existent supernatural being, but rather the acknowledgement that the concept of God is merely a linguistic construct designed to bring order out of chaos, meaning out of emptiness.

There is, indeed, a divine reality which Crossan can alternatively call "the Holy," the "transcendental," the "Wholly Other," or "God."<sup>76</sup> But the divine reality is inherently inexpressible; attempts to define or describe human experience of the divine inevitably break down. Thus, the only language appropriate to such attempts is poetic metaphor, i.e., parable. Accordingly, particular expressions of and religious responses to the Holy are equally valid:

Religion represents, for me, some response to what I'm going to put down in the widest terms I can use, 'the mystery that surrounds us.' . . . I see religions as very much like languages. English and Russian are equally valid languages, equally valid to express whatever they want to express. I see . . . that religions are equally valid ways of experiencing the Holy. But they're also equally particular, just like a language.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, 40-41.

<sup>75</sup>"In that 'sham' one hears the chilling slam as the door closes on the classical vision of a fixed center out there somewhere. . . . with the loss of credibility in a fixed reality independent of us, there soon followed the loss of faith in a God whose chief role was to guarantee that reality's validity." Ibid., 43.

<sup>76</sup>Crossan calls divine reality "the Holy" in *Raid on the Articulate*, 44; the "transcendental" in *The Dark Interval*, 46; the "Wholly Other" in *In Parables*, 12; and "God" in *In Parables*, 33.

<sup>77</sup>Crossan, quoted in James Halsted, "The Unorthodox Orthodoxy of John Dominic Crossan: An Interview," *Cross Currents* 45 (1995-1996): 517.

The world's major religions are equally valid responses to the Holy, and use different metaphors to describe and relate to the Holy. As a consequence, Crossan holds that the metaphors and parables used by various religions should be accepted on the same terms.<sup>78</sup>

In summary, Crossan's hermeneutical structuralism holds that language is the sum of reality and is inherently metaphorical. Parable is the only available way to express human experience of the inexpressible divine. Thus, when religions describe transcendental experience, they necessarily use metaphorical parables. The metaphor of God incarnate, then, speaks of early Christians experiencing the unutterable divine presence through the person, ministry, and mission of Jesus Christ.

Most significantly for present purposes, the metaphor of Jesus' resurrection speaks of early Christians continuing to experience that divine presence as they sought to live out his parabolic Kingdom of God in community together. Crossan's fundamental worldview presuppositions—the validity of various religions as authentic expressions of transcendental experience, and total human extinction at death—rule out the historically orthodox understanding of Jesus' resurrection as a supernaturally-wrought bodily resurrection. Crossan's structuralist hermeneutic, with its stress on metaphorical parable as the only available language to express divine experience, inexorably drives Crossan to a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection. Crossan's elaborate historical Jesus

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<sup>78</sup>Crossan emphasizes the fundamentally metaphorical nature of language *about God* throughout his academic scholarship. In his most recently published work, a meditation upon the Lord's Prayer, Crossan writes, "First, I look at the role and power of metaphor in general, but especially in religion and theology. Can we ever imagine God except in metaphor—whether it is named or unnamed, overt or covert, conscious or unconscious? And is it not wiser to have our deepest divine image publicly expressed, so it can be recognized, discussed, criticized, and maybe even replaced?" Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 31-32.

methodology will flesh out his resurrection reconstruction, but the die has been cast by the combination of his theological worldview and structuralist hermeneutic.

### **Crossan's Triple-Triadic Historical Jesus Methodology**

The publication of *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* in 1991 represented a transitional point in Crossan's career in three ways. First, it catapulted him from relative public obscurity to nearly-instantaneous public celebrity. Second, it marked the end of his publication on literary criticism. Much of his earlier work is presumed and built upon in later publications, but Crossan never again publishes a manuscript or scholarly article focusing explicitly and strictly on structuralism or literary theory. Third, it outlined the critical historical-Jesus methodology Crossan had been developing for years.

In describing his historical-critical methodology, Crossan first describes the pressing need for conscious, well-defined methodology in Jesus studies. Along with many other scholars, Crossan notes that historical Jesus research has resulted in a stunning diversity of reconstructions: political revolutionary, magician, charismatic, rabbi, Pharisee, Essene, eschatological prophet.<sup>79</sup> The diversity of portraits produced by scholars "attempting to envision Jesus against his own most proper Jewish background" is, according to Crossan, "an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the

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<sup>79</sup>Crossan mentions the portraits from S. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner's, 1967); Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); Bruce Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1984); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1985); and E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxvii-xxviii.

suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.”<sup>80</sup>

The solution, according to Crossan, is not to produce another portrait of the historical Jesus, no matter how persuasive or compelling. Rather, the key is to “raise most seriously the problem of methodology and then follow most stringently whatever theoretical method was chosen.”<sup>81</sup> He compares historical Jesus research to archaeological research:

Methodology in Jesus research at the end of this century is about where methodology in archaeological research was at the end of the last. When an archaeologist digs into an ancient mound more or less at random, takes what looks most precious or unique, and hurries home to some imperial museum, we have not scholarly archaeology but cultural looting. Without scientific stratigraphy, that is, the detailed location of every item in its own proper chronological layer, almost any conclusion can be derived from almost any object. But although contemporary archaeology knows very well the absolute importance of stratigraphy, contemporary Jesus research is still involved in textual looting, in attacks on the mound of the Jesus tradition that do not begin from any overall stratigraphy, do not explain why this or that item was chosen for emphasis over some other one, and give the distinct impression that the researcher knew the result before beginning the search.<sup>82</sup>

Crossan’s emphasis upon publicly accessible methodology is laudable. The comparison of historical Jesus research with archaeology is somewhat problematic, given that the latter is a necessary component within (but not the totality of) the former. It must also be emphasized, however, that Crossan’s own historical Jesus research betrays prominent elements of what he decries, “the distinct impression that the researcher knew the result before beginning the search.”

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<sup>80</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxviii.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.



Crossan may not have known precisely what reconstruction of Jesus he would arrive at after his lengthy studies,<sup>83</sup> but at least one potential reconstruction was not within his pool of live options: a supernatural Jesus. For Crossan, Jesus could not have performed the nature miracles or healing (of diseases, not just illnesses) miracles ascribed to him in the Gospels, and certainly did not literally rise from the dead in bodily form. Crossan was not, under any circumstances, going to arrive at the historically orthodox portrait of Jesus of Nazareth. That possibility was ruled out of court, quite consciously and explicitly, by Crossan's underlying theological worldview presuppositions.<sup>84</sup>

First, Crossan insists that no one, including Jesus, is able to heal the biological diseases underlying human illnesses; this is a reflection of Crossan's commitment to divine and natural consistency, which denies the causative interaction or intervention of the supernatural within the natural order.<sup>85</sup> Second, Crossan rules out the possibility of both life after death<sup>86</sup> and the resuscitation of the dead.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Crossan's historical Jesus research is not as undetermined as he suggests: it is strongly influenced by his underlying

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<sup>83</sup>Although some scholars argue that Crossan's resulting portrait is all-too-predictable given his personal background and ideology. See, e.g., Frans Jozef van Beeck, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus: Origins, Achievements, and the Specter of Diminishing Returns," in *Jesus and Faith*, 95-96.

<sup>84</sup>Unfortunately, Crossan never acknowledges in his scholarship that such a portrait was in fact ruled out by his governing presuppositions; he gives the impression instead of having his Jesus reconstruction driven by rigorous application of his methodology in as neutral a fashion as possible.

<sup>85</sup>"Was he curing the disease through an intervention in the physical world, or was he healing the illness through an intervention in the social world? I presume that Jesus, who *did not and could not cure that disease or any other one*, healed the poor man's illness by refusing to accept the disease's ritual uncleanness and social ostracization." John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 82. Emphasis added. See further chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>86</sup>"Do I personally believe in an afterlife? No, but to be honest, I do not find it a particularly important question one way or the other." John Dominic Crossan and Richard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 131. See also chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>87</sup>"I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time, including Jesus, brings dead people back to life." Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 77; see also John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus*, 95. See also chapter 3 of this dissertation.

theological presuppositions, which themselves are neither critically examined nor defended in his historical Jesus work.

Crossan describes his historical methodology as a triple triadic process.<sup>88</sup> The first triad (I) involves applying interdisciplinary insights from anthropology (A), history (B), and literary studies (C).<sup>89</sup> The Jesus historian must interpret the textual materials in light of the nature and proper interpretation of ancient texts (I.C), remembering the religio-cultural context of first-century Palestine embedded within a Hellenistic Roman Empire (I.B), without losing sight of universal anthropological precepts (I.A). Crossan explicitly depends and draws upon anthropological studies of several different scholars;<sup>90</sup> but he does not engage with the contrary propositions or frameworks suggested by other scholars.

For example, he depends heavily upon Allan Young's differentiation between illness and disease,<sup>91</sup> but does not consider studies that reject or downplay such a

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<sup>88</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxviii-xxix. Crossan calls the three triads "campaign, strategy, and tactics," leading Hal Childs to ask, "Why does he characterize his method with military terms? What kind of epistemological position does this suggest? To attack an enemy and emerge a winner? . . . this imagery does not only suggest careful planning at several levels. It also suggests a certain kind of struggle in which an adversary must be conquered." Hal Childs, *The Myth of the Historical Jesus and the Evolution of Consciousness*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, No. 179 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 29.

<sup>89</sup>"The first triad involves the reciprocal interplay of a macrocosmic level using cross-cultural and cross-temporal social *anthropology*, a mesocosmic level using Hellenistic or Greco-Roman *history*, and a microcosmic level using the *literature* of specific sayings and doings, stories and anecdotes, confessions and interpretations concerning Jesus." Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxviii. Emphasis original.

<sup>90</sup>E.g., Crossan identifies his chapter on "Magic and Meal" (*The Historical Jesus*, 303-53) as the key chapter of the book, and discusses applying his triple-triadic methodology to that subject matter in dependence upon the scholarship Ioan Lewis on ecstatic religion; Allan Young on the differentiation between illness and sickness; Peter Worsley on non-Western medicine; John Hull on Hellenistic magic; and David Aune on magic in early Christianity.

<sup>91</sup>Allan Young, "The Anthropologies of Illness and Sickness," *Annual Review of Archaeology* 11 (1982): 257-85.

dichotomy.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere, Crossan turns to Gerhard Lenski's hypotheses about social stratification and rates of literacy in agrarian societies.<sup>93</sup> Using Lenski's theory and the Greek word for carpenter (τεκτον), Crossan concludes, "since between 95 and 97 percent of the Jewish state was illiterate at the time of Jesus, it must be presumed that Jesus also was illiterate."<sup>94</sup> Crossan neither engages nor acknowledges contentions by other scholars that literacy rates amongst Jewish males were considerably higher than other ancient cultures; that Jesus' multiply-attested disputations with religious leaders and scholars imply religious literacy; and that Nazareth quite possibly had a synagogue school where Jesus would have received rabbinic instruction.<sup>95</sup> Crossan simply ignores such arguments in his own historical Jesus research. Indeed, Crossan seems somewhat triumphant about his refusal to openly engage contrary positions: "I spent no time citing

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<sup>92</sup>John Meier rejects the stark distinction between illness and sickness, noting that "Major types of [Jesus'] healings involved persons with paralyzed limbs, persons suffering from blindness (or some impairment of vision), persons suffering from various skin ailments ('leprosy'), and persons who were deaf and/or mute. . . . One notices that persons suffering from some sort of bodily paralysis or some sort of impairment of vision loom large among these candidates." John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 726-27. Crossan never considers whether the illness/sickness distinction can be extended throughout Jesus' healing miracles. It seems to work quite well for the healing of skin diseases—Crossan insists that Jesus has healed the sickness by accepting the leper into his community while not curing the underlying illness. With the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12, Crossan ignores the physical aspect of the encounter (despite assigning it a positive historical status in *The Historical Jesus*, 441) and only discusses the explicit challenge to "the religious monopoly of the priests" over healing and sin (*The Historical Jesus*, 324).

<sup>93</sup>Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968).

<sup>94</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, 25.

<sup>95</sup>On archaeological evidence for the size of Nazareth, see Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 56-57. Geza Vermes suggests that the Aramaic word for carpenter (*naggar*) lying behind the Greek τεκτον can metaphorically refer to a "scholar or learned man," suggesting a possible double entendre when applied to Jesus. See Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 21. William Stegner comments on Crossan's position, "Note that in this debate Crossan focuses on the Gentile world for his social model and places Jesus within that model by the use of a Greek word. In contrast, Jewish scholars emphasize the Jewish background of Jesus . . . and . . . the Jewishness of Jesus." William Richard Stegner, "Some Personal Reflections on the Jesus Seminar," *Asbury Theological Journal* 52 (1997): 76.

other scholars to show how wrong they are. Those who are cited represent my intellectual debts and suggest where the reader may go for wider argumentation.”<sup>96</sup>

Crossan insists that the anthropological, historical, and literary levels of study and analysis “must cooperate fully and equally for an effective synthesis.”<sup>97</sup> But how rigorously does he enact the methodology if he declines to engage alternative positions in his construction of the macrocosmic understanding of cross-cultural and cross-temporal (read: universal) anthropology and the mesocosmic background of first-century Palestine? Is Crossan himself guilty of the type of “looting” that he deplores in nineteenth-century archaeology and twentieth-century biblical studies, in picking and choosing the scholars and positions which he then presents as the full and accurate picture of anthropology and history?

The influence of Crossan’s own structuralist hermeneutic is most apparent in the microcosmic level of this first triad (I.C). Robert Stewart demonstrates that approaching historical Jesus studies with different conceptions of what constitutes a text, how texts function, the reader’s role in interpretation of texts, and what constitutes a legitimate reading of a text will inevitably lead to divergent historical reconstructions of what the historical Jesus was, said, and did.<sup>98</sup> The focus of the rest of this chapter, however, is upon the second (II) and third (III) triads in Crossan’s methodology.

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<sup>96</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiv.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, xxix.

<sup>98</sup>Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 1-2. Stewart proceeds to analyze Crossan’s post-structuralist hermeneutics in comparison with N. T. Wright’s critical realist hermeneutic, arguing that their divergent conclusions grow, in large part, out of their divergent hermeneutics. I agree with Stewart’s assessment, but insist that underlying both hermeneutics lies the deeper influence of fundamental worldview presuppositions. That is, the divergent hermeneutics which determine different conclusions are themselves produced by different theological presuppositions.

Crossan's second triad (II) "focuses specifically on [the] textual problem derived from the very nature of the Jesus tradition itself,"<sup>99</sup> and describes the process by which he arrives at "an inventory of Jesus' statements."<sup>100</sup> First (II.A), he collects "all the major sources and texts, both intracanonical and extracanonical," and places them "in their historical situation and literary relationship."<sup>101</sup> Crossan collects extant (and hypothesized non-extant) documents that contain sayings of or about Jesus and makes determinations as to the date and provenance of their writing, and their literary relationship (dependence, independence, or interdependence) with other Jesus sources. A crucial appendix lists the fifty-two extant sources which Crossan deems integral to reconstructing the historical Jesus.<sup>102</sup> Curiously, Crossan omits several New Testament letters from his inventory, including 2 Corinthians, 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Ephesians, and Hebrews. Included in Crossan's inventory of sources are six hypothesized non-extant documents,<sup>103</sup> four fragmentary papyri,<sup>104</sup> and five non-extant

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<sup>99</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxi.

<sup>100</sup>Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 42. Note the emphasis upon Jesus' *words*, as opposed to his *deeds*. Crossan's earlier work on literary interpretation has not been supplanted, merely supplemented. The essential Jesus is still a man of many words, but few historically-recoverable actions.

<sup>101</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxi.

<sup>102</sup>Appendix 1: An Inventory of the Jesus Tradition by Chronological Stratification and Independent Attestation, in Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-50.

<sup>103</sup>The *Sayings Gospel Q*, *Miracles Collection* ("now embedded within the Gospels of Mark and John"), *Apocalyptic Scenario* ("now embedded in *Didache* 16 and Matt 24"), *Cross Gospel* ("now embedded in the *Gospel of Peter*"), *Dialogues Collection* ("now embedded within the *Dialogue of the Savior*"), *Signs Gospel/Book of Signs* ("now embedded within the Gospel of John"). See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-30.

<sup>104</sup>*Egerton Gospel*, *Papyrus Vindebonensis Greek 2325*, *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224*, and *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840*. See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 428-30.

documents known only from citations and marginal notes within other early Christian literature.<sup>105</sup>

Crossan acknowledges casually that “every step of that inventory is more or less controverted”<sup>106</sup> and requires the application of “scholarly judgment and an informed decision.”<sup>107</sup> What Crossan does not acknowledge, however, is how making different scholarly judgments about the nature of Jesus material will lead to the very “stunning diversity” of Jesus portraits that Crossan calls such an “academic embarrassment.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, Crossan seems unaware of the influence that underlying worldview presuppositions may exert upon the informed decisions that must be made regarding the dating and relationship of Jesus sources.

In the second step of this second triad (II.B), Crossan places each of Jesus sources into one of four historical strata (A.D. 30-60, 60-80, 80-120, and 120-150). An unspoken but implicit part of this step involves separating the various statements ascribed to Jesus into “complexes” or groups that share core thematic emphases.<sup>109</sup> Each complex

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<sup>105</sup>*Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of the Egyptians, Secret Gospel of Mark, Gospel of the Nazoreans, and Gospel of the Ebionites.* See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 428-33.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.* Indeed, this is particularly true of Crossan’s own identification and dating of Jesus source material, and will be the subject of the following sections of this chapter.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, xxxiv.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, xxviii. See, for example, Dennis Ingolfsland, “Q, M, L and Other Sources for the Historical Jesus,” *Princeton Theological Review* 4.3 (1997): 17-22. Ingolfsland asks: “What would the result be if 70 A.D. were the first strata cutoff date rather than 60 A.D., if the questionable sources were removed from consideration, and if Mark, ‘M,’ ‘L,’ and Paul were given their proper weight?” *Ibid.*, 18. Ingolfsland proceeds to reconstruct a portrait of the historical Jesus on the basis of his first strata sources; *ibid.*, 20-22. He concludes, “This study has shown that even when a high degree of skepticism is applied to the selection of first strata sources, the criterion of multiple attestation can demonstrate that the essential outline of the Gospel story must come from the very earliest followers of Jesus if not from Jesus himself. The picture of Jesus which emerges from such a minimal study is substantially closer to the Gospel accounts than the reconstructions offered by Crossan and numerous others in the third quest for the historical Jesus.” *Ibid.*, 22

<sup>109</sup>Crossan spent the better part of the 1980s so separating material in the Jesus tradition. The outcome was his very useful guide, *Sayings Parallels: A Workbook for the Jesus Tradition* (Philadelphia:

of Jesus materials is then assigned a number (1 through 4), corresponding with the earliest stratum in which it appears.<sup>110</sup>

In the third step of the second triad (II.C), Crossan determines the number of independent attestations each complex receives from the various textual sources. “This loops back to the inventory but presents that now stratified data base in terms of multiplicity of independent attestation for each complex of the Jesus tradition within those sources and texts.”<sup>111</sup> Determining independent attestation is another project fraught with scholarly judgment. How different do accounts of Jesus’ parables have to be in order to be counted as an independent attestation? How much variation in detail is permitted before an account is designated a separated attestation?

At the end of the second triad of Crossan’s methodology, each individual Jesus complex receives a dual designation (X/Y) representing its earliest stratum (X) and number of attestations (Y). Generally speaking, materials with a low X and high Y have the greatest likelihood of reflecting the historical Jesus.<sup>112</sup>

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Fortress, 1986). Crossan took material from 24 sources with sayings ascribed to Jesus and distilled 503 separate complexes of Jesus material in 4 categories (parables, aphorisms, dialogues, and stories). Interestingly, Crossan’s database of textual sources grew, from 24 in *Sayings Parallels* (1986) to 52 in *The Historical Jesus* (1991). Some of the difference is accounted for by positing second editions of various sources in *The Historical Jesus*’s inventory (e.g., the *Gospel of Thomas* has a first edition in the 50s, with a later second edition; the canonical Gospels of Mark and John are similarly ascribed second editions). Additionally, however, some of the hypothetical but non-extant documents presumed in *The Historical Jesus* are neither discussed nor categorized in *Sayings Parallels* (e.g., *Dialogue Collection*, *Signs Gospel*).

<sup>110</sup>Of the 552 total Jesus complexes Crossan isolates, approximately one-third (186) of them first appear in the first stratum; another one-third (178) appear first in the second stratum; one-quarter (123) appear in the third stratum; and the final 35 complexes are attested only in the latest (fourth) stratum. See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 434-50.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Brent Schlittenhart, “The Eschatology of the Jesus Seminar: The Non-Apocalyptic Character and Mission of Jesus” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), 42-45. Crossan states the principle clearly, “My *methodological* rule of thumb is that the lower the number left of that stroke and the higher the number to its right, the more seriously the complex must be taken.” *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiv.

The third triad (III) “focuses on the methodological manipulation of that inventory already established according to chronological hierarchy of stratification and numbered hierarchy of attestation.”<sup>113</sup> In the first step within the final triad (III.A), Crossan lists the complexes according to the earliest stratum in which they appear. Crossan rightly emphasizes “the tremendous importance of that first stratum . . . data chronologically closest to the time of the historical Jesus.”<sup>114</sup> He suggests that a hypothesized reconstruction of the historical Jesus must be derived primarily from material contained within this earliest stratum: “judgments on the second, third, and fourth levels [are] made on, after, and in light of conclusions concerning that crucial first stratum.”<sup>115</sup> It is clear, therefore, that judgments about what belongs in the first stratum of textual material will be of crucial importance in Crossan’s historical Jesus.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, two aspects of Crossan’s stratification become both controversial and influential. First, why is the first stratum cut off at 60 A.D.? Crossan acknowledges no Jesus source material prior to the 50s; if each stratum is designated twenty to thirty years, the first stratum could legitimately be designated 50-80 A.D., or 40-70 A.D. Crossan’s cut-off seems arbitrarily chosen. Second, Crossan’s relatively late dating of canonical materials (Matthew, Luke, and Acts) and radically early dating of non-canonical materials (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Cross Gospel*, *Egerton Gospel*) leads inevitably to an extra-canonical bias in his reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Nothing that appears solely in

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<sup>113</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxii.

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

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Crossan’s own determination of which sources belong in which strata appears in part in his earlier work, particularly Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, and idem, *The Cross That Spoke*.



the canonical Gospels hearkens to the earliest stratum of Jesus materials; therefore, it does not and cannot form the empirical foundation from which hypotheses are made concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Crossan has explicitly sought to avoid a pro-canonical bias in his Jesus research, but has either implicitly or unknowingly replaced a pro-canonical bias with an anti-canonical bias.

The second step in the final triad (III.B) involves “hierarchy of attestation.”<sup>117</sup> Within the four stratified lists arrived at in step one, Crossan orders the complexes according to the number of times they independently appear in the texts. In Crossan’s judgment, only one-third of the Jesus complexes have “more than one independent attestation;”<sup>118</sup> the vast majority are only single attested. Material that is multiply attested, particularly if it shows up in the earliest stratum, “must be given very, very serious consideration.” Indeed, Crossan “postulates that, at least for the first stratum, everything is original until it is argued otherwise.”<sup>119</sup> Again, this demonstrates the immense importance of Crossan’s stratification of source material, and the extra-canonical bias inherent in his inventory of sources.

In the final step of the third triad (III.C), Crossan brackets singularities—all complexes with single attestation are set aside as probably not hearkening back to the historical Jesus.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxii.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 434. Of the total 522 complexes, 138 are judged to be more than singly attested: 33 have multiple attestation; 42 have triple attestation; and 105 have double attestation.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., xxxii. Nonetheless, only 14 of 29 multiply attested complexes found in the first stratum are ultimately accepted by Crossan as hearkening back to the historical Jesus. Seven are designated unhistorical, which the final 8 are metaphorical. See *The Historical Jesus*, 434-36.

<sup>120</sup>“This entails the complete avoidance of any unit found only in single attestation even within the first stratum. It is intended as a safeguard and an insurance.” Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxii. See also Childs, “The Myth of the Historical Jesus and the Evolution of Consciousness,” 37-38. Nonetheless,

Finally, in addition to the (X/Y) designation, Crossan indicates whether his “scholarly judgment” considers the complex “originally from Jesus (+) or not (-).”<sup>121</sup> Certain complexes are deemed metaphorical (+/-): the saying or event did not happen in historical time and space, but nonetheless represents something profoundly (if only metaphorically) true of the historical Jesus as expression by the early Christian community. Needless to say, complexes like the resurrection of Jesus are deemed metaphorical.<sup>122</sup> Significantly, the designation of historicity (or metaphoricity) is not part of Crossan’s rigorous methodology—it comes after the triple triadic process is complete.

Crossan acknowledges the necessity of scholarly judgment, or “material investment,”<sup>123</sup> at every step of his historical Jesus methodology, but proposes his methodology as an acceptable formal structure for all Jesus scholars. He recognizes that “different scholars might invest those formal moves with widely divergent sources and texts,” but suggests that at least “historical Jesus research would . . . have some common methodology instead of a rush to conclusion that could then be only accepted or denied.”<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, the different material investments (scholarly judgments or informed decisions) scholars will make regarding identification, dating, and relationship of various textual sources will both lead to divergent portraits of the historical Jesus *and result from divergent foundational presuppositions*. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the material investments that Crossan makes at each juncture, assessing their impact upon

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Crossan cannot bring himself to “bracket” complex 447, *The Good Samaritan*, even though it only appears in one attestation in the third stratum. See *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiii, 449.

<sup>121</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiv.

<sup>122</sup>Stewart, *The Quest of the Hermeneutical Jesus*, 52-54.

<sup>123</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiv.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

his reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection. Furthermore, it is worthwhile considering the impact of Crossan's underlying theological presuppositions upon his material investments, and adjudicating the persuasiveness of his scholarly judgment.

### **Crossan's Material Investments: Starting Points, Sources, and the Jesus Inventory**

Crossan's triple-triadic historical Jesus methodology is a helpful skeletal framework which must be fleshed out through making material investments or scholarly judgments concerning textual sources and starting points. Crossan's Jesus Inventory, laid out in Appendix 1 of *The Historical Jesus*, is a crucial element in his reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Crossan's judgments concerning the dating and relationship of textual sources strongly influence the resulting portrait of Jesus. But right from the outset, there are significant questions concerning Crossan's material investments.

First, what extant textual evidence belongs properly in Crossan's first stratum (30-60 A.D.)? Scholarly debate rages over the earliest possible dates of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Peter*. Crossan places the first edition of both in his first stratum, along with the *Sayings Gospel Q*. None of the four canonical gospels make the cut. Crossan has quite appropriately been accused of exercising an anti-canonical bias in his dating of various sources.<sup>125</sup> Later in this chapter, Crossan's assessment of canonical and extracanonical gospels will be evaluated, particularly the dating and dependence of

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<sup>125</sup>See Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God? Recovering the Real Jesus in an Age of Revisionist Replies* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 70-81. Boyd concludes: "Crossan's case for the historical Jesus as a Cynic sage thus hangs upon his case for preferring certain noncanonical documents such as 'Q' and *GosThom* over the extant New Testament documents. For his view to be embraced, one must accept both his arguments for the existence and/or priority of these noncanonical works as well as his view that Paul, Mark (as the earliest canonical Gospel), and Acts are fundamentally unreliable." Ibid., 87.

the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Cross Gospel* (the hypothesized earliest core now embedded within the *Gospel of Peter*), *Secret Mark*, and the hypothesized Q-Gospel.

Second, why do only four Pauline epistles (1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians) show up in Crossan's first stratum? Why does Crossan not assign 2 Corinthians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Philippians, Titus, and Philemon to *any* of the four strata?<sup>126</sup> Do they have absolutely nothing to contribute to our textual evidence for the historical Jesus? Unfortunately, Crossan neither explains nor defends his scholarly judgments regarding the New Testament epistles—he simply states them.<sup>127</sup> More troublingly, why do even the four acknowledged first-stratum Pauline epistles play such an inconsequential role in Crossan's portrait of the historical Jesus?<sup>128</sup> Nearly twenty years after the publication of *The Historical Jesus*, Crossan (writing with Marcus

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<sup>126</sup>Crossan acknowledges seven authentic Pauline epistles: Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), xiii, 105-06; John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 145. That makes his failure to include Philippians, 2 Corinthians, and Philemon in his original Jesus inventory all the more puzzling, since authentic Pauline epistles must fall either in the first stratum or the early second stratum—to omit them altogether is difficult to fathom. Second Thessalonians, Titus, and Ephesians are puzzling omissions as well. Granted, Crossan does not perceive them as authentic Pauline epistles; he does, however, include the 'pseudonymous' letters of 1 and 2 Timothy within his inventory of Jesus source material. Why are 2 Thessalonians, Titus, and Ephesians excluded from consideration?

It is also interesting to note that despite his insistence that biblical scholars need to admit to and openly defend their scholarly presuppositions, Crossan does not do so with regard to the New Testament epistles. Instead, he merely notes, "we accept . . . the general scholarly consensus that the following six letters [1-2 Timothy, Titus, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians] are inauthentic and post-Pauline." Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 106. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the "general scholarly consensus" with regards to 2 Thessalonians being post-Pauline is only "weak." Crossan requires scholars who disagree with such material investments to defend their positions, but seems to feel it is enough for him to state his position as representing scholarly consensus and leave it at that.

<sup>127</sup>Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 105-06; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-30.

<sup>128</sup>*The Historical Jesus* contains very little discussion of Paul's epistles. Philippians, Philemon, and 2 Corinthians are all acknowledged by Crossan as authentically Pauline, yet are not even mentioned in *The Historical Jesus*. Romans 8:15 is the only citation of that substantial letter, and even that verse is only mentioned in passing. First Thessalonians receives two brief citations; 5:2 is cited briefly, while 4:13-18 is quoted only to demonstrate Paul's invocation of a 'Son of Man' (Dan 7) figure without using the Son of Man terminology. Galatians is briefly mentioned on four occasions. First Corinthians is the only Pauline letter which merits any substantial discussion, with over twenty index citations.

Borg) can assert that Paul's letters, "written in the 50s of the first century . . . are the earliest documents in the New Testament. . . . Thus the genuine letters of Paul are the oldest witness we have to what was to become Christianity."<sup>129</sup> Why do these earliest witnesses of Christianity exert so little influence over Crossan's historical reconstruction of Jesus? Crossan is primarily a scholar of the Gospels, and his non-Pauline focus is particularly evident leading up to and including *The Historical Jesus*. Crossan eventually turns to Pauline studies;<sup>130</sup> but by this time his portraits of Jesus of Nazareth and the rise of early Christianity have already been set in black ink.

Third, how does Crossan determine how many independent attestations each Jesus complex has in the extant textual material? Crossan hypothesizes that most of his extracanonical sources (e.g., *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Didache*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Egerton Gospel*, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224, and *Gospel of Thomas*) are independent of the canonical Gospels. Thus, any mention of a Jesus complex in these sources counts as an independent attestation. The canonical Gospels, however, count for only one, at most two, independent attestations of Jesus complexes. When it comes to the key passion and resurrection narratives, Crossan argues that the Gospels do not contain *any* independent attestation, as they all follow (and expand upon) the *Cross Gospel* (extracted from the *Gospel of Peter* as the historical core and original narrative). Later, this chapter will examine and critique the means by which Crossan identifies multiple attestations in the Jesus tradition, focusing particularly on

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<sup>129</sup>Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 14.

<sup>130</sup>Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*; Borg and Crossan, *The First Paul*.

Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel*. Again, there is a subtle anti-canonical bias at work in Crossan's operative methodology.

Fourth, how does Crossan exercise his scholarly judgment (not to be confused with "acute scholarly subjectivity")<sup>131</sup> in determining whether a given Jesus complex is historical (+), unhistorical (-), or metaphorical (+/-)? I have already argued that Crossan's rejection of the historicity of miraculous healings in the Gospels and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is based upon the inexorable logic of his underlying worldview presuppositions, entirely apart from his consideration of the historical evidence and/or his interpretation of the biblical texts. Furthermore, Crossan's reconstruction of the historical Jesus depends heavily upon his presumption that the canonical Gospels reflect an ongoing process of creative adaptation and addition. Thus, the contemporary scholar (i.e., Crossan himself) has to peel away the layers of later Christian accretions in order to discover the historical kernels at the core of the tradition. Later in this chapter, I will critique Crossan's presumptions about the nature of the canonical Gospels.

### **Ambiguous Terminology: Presuppositions, Hypotheses, and Material Investments**

Before proceeding, however, it is important to clarify Crossan's terminology. The way that historical Jesus scholars treat the dating, nature, and literary relationship of source material is crucial in determining the resulting portrait of Jesus of Nazareth. But what exactly is the nature of the material investments that scholars have to make?

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<sup>131</sup>See again Childs, *The Myth of the Historical Jesus and the Evolution of Consciousness*, 38; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiv.

Crossan's language throughout his published works is varied, and can lead to confusion if not carefully parsed.

First, he uses three terms apparently interchangeably—material investments, scholarly judgments, and informed decisions.<sup>132</sup> These terms refer to the positions that scholars hold regarding the extant sources. For example, is Mark to be dated ca. 50 A.D., or closer to 70 A.D.? Is the *Gospel of Thomas* a first-century document, or was it written in the latter half of the second century? Is Mark used by Matthew and Luke as a source document in writing their gospels? Are the accounts of Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea in Mark and John independent accounts, or do they stem from the same oral or written source? Each of those decisions affects one's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and scholars must take a stand—that is, they must make a material investment, having used their scholarly judgment to reach an informed decision. So far, everything is relatively clear.

Second, however, Crossan uses different terms in different settings to describe the type of material investment that he and other scholars make. His preferred approach seems to be to call such scholarly decisions either Gospel presuppositions or consensus scholarly conclusions. In *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994), Crossan offers to “give you some background, *some general conclusions accepted by most critical scholars today*.”<sup>133</sup> Crossan continues to speak of “scholarly consensus” and “conclusions”

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<sup>132</sup>All three phrases are found in the preface to Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxii-xxxiv.

<sup>133</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, xii. Emphasis added. Of the five consensus conclusions that follow, the fifth one is not actually a conclusion regarding the nature of the Gospels, but rather an interpretive addition: “Finally, and in summary, what those first Christians experienced as the continuing presence of the risen Jesus or the abiding empowerment of the Spirit gave the transmitters of the Jesus tradition a creative freedom we would never have dared postulate had such a conclusion not been forced upon us by the evidence.” Ibid., xiii.

regarding the Gospels (canonical and extra-canonical) in *Who Killed Jesus?* (1995).<sup>134</sup>

By 1996, Crossan has begun using a new preferred designation—Gospel

presuppositions.<sup>135</sup> He makes it clear that his Gospel presuppositions are not inviolable

precepts; rather, they are starting-points for his historical Jesus research.<sup>136</sup> Crossan

continues to use the designation “Gospel presuppositions” in *The Birth of Christianity*

(1998)<sup>137</sup> and a symposium with biblical scholars in New Zealand (1999).<sup>138</sup> In many

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<sup>134</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 9, 25. “A massive scholarly consensus agreed . . . that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a major source in composing their own gospels.” Ibid., 25. Crossan proceeds to note the general scholarly consensus on the two-source theory, positing that Matthew and Luke also used a source originally designated *Quelle* (German for source). In the same context, Crossan presents (implicitly as another item of “massive scholarly consensus”) a much more contentious theory: “The Q Gospel was completed, most likely in two major steps, by the middle of the first century and was probably composed in Galilee and its immediate environs.” Ibid., 25.

<sup>135</sup>“Here is one presupposition: the Gospel of Mark was used by the Gospels of Matt and Luke. . . . A second presupposition for which there is also a massive consensus of scholarship . . . is that in the data of the New Testament Gospels covering Jesus’ words and deeds, there are three successive layers.” Crossan, “Opening Statement,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 34.

<sup>136</sup>Crossan insists that a Gospel presupposition is not “something that cannot be challenged. It simply means something that I started from.” Ibid., 33. In his subsequent reflection upon the debate with William Lane Craig, Crossan notes that his further Gospel presupposition that “some stories that could be taken literally were intended to be and should be taken symbolically instead . . . [is] a historical judgment,” while Craig’s position that “everything in the Gospels that can be taken literally and historically should be so taken . . . [is] a theological presupposition.” Crossan, “Reflections on a Debate,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 148.

<sup>137</sup>“Presuppositions are . . . simply historical conclusions reached earlier but taken for granted here.” John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 95. “I have . . . three presuppositions concerning relations between the intracanonical gospels.” Ibid., 109. Later, Crossan outlines six major “source presuppositions” that govern his historical Jesus research, adding that they are “crucial decisions about sources [that] form the foundation of this book.” Ibid., 199. Note how Crossan delineates the decisions he has made about source material as Gospel presuppositions.

<sup>138</sup>“One’s fundamental decisions about Gospel relationships will change everything thereafter. . . . I did not, by the way, simply accept those *presuppositions* from two hundred years of previous scholarship, I spent the decade of the 60s confirming them for myself.” John Dominic Crossan, “The Final Word,” *Colloquium* 31 (1999): 148. Emphasis added.



other works, Crossan simply states the material investments he has made, without designating them by any such terminology.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, Crossan uses a plethora of terms to refer to scholarly stances, whether consensus or contentious, regarding the nature, dating, and relationship of source materials about Jesus. Crossan variously calls these stances material investments, scholarly judgments, informed decisions, Gospel presuppositions, starting points, hypotheses, conclusions, or scholarly consensus. Furthermore, Crossan often uses the same term to refer to stances that have vastly different standings in the academy of biblical studies. For example, in *The Birth of Christianity*, Crossan helpfully summarizes and outlines six governing Gospel presuppositions.<sup>140</sup> One of them, the priority of Mark, is uncontroversial, and widely accepted within critical scholarship. A second, the existence of *Q*, is relatively uncontroversial in its bare assertion that it was used as a source by both Matthew and Luke. Crossan, however, goes further, and asserts both that “it is a gospel in its own right . . . [and that] it is also possible to discern redactional layers within its compositional history.”<sup>141</sup> The existence of *Q* as a source document is widely accepted by biblical scholars;<sup>142</sup> its existence as a full-fledged Gospel is somewhat

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<sup>139</sup>E.g., John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 7-10, where the ten top “exegetical discoveries” are basically a summary of Crossan’s previous Gospel presuppositions; Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary*, 146-55. See also Crossan, “Blessed Plot: A Reply to N. T. Wright’s Review of *The Birth of Christianity*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): 95, where Crossan identifies the “foundational divergence in our view of the materials” (their Gospel presuppositions) as the source for their divergent reconstructions of Jesus. In “Our Own Faces in Deep Wells: A Future for Historical Jesus Research,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 284, Crossan presents Gospel presuppositions as simple asserted fact.

<sup>140</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 119-20.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>142</sup>Though certainly not universally accepted; see, e.g., Eta Linneman, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is ‘Scientific Theology’?*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 18-41; also Linneman, “The Lost Gospel of Q—Fact or Fantasy?” *Trinity Journal* 17 (1996): 3-18.

controversial. The speculative recovery of clear stratification within the hypothesized reconstructed Q Gospel is highly debatable. The remaining four Gospel presuppositions in *The Birth of Christianity* (the dependence of John upon the Synoptics; and the independence of the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Didache*, and the *Cross Gospel* from canonical influence) are to varying degrees controversial in biblical scholarship. The point is not that Crossan's stances are untenable or necessarily incorrect, but rather that stances of varied academic acceptance are presented in the same broad strokes, as if they carry the same weight of scholarly consensus.

I think it is helpful to use a more consistent terminology for all of Crossan's stances on Jesus source material. Thus, I will adopt a term suggested by Crossan himself, and identify them all as *material investments*. A material investment is a scholarly decision, whether based upon one's own investigation and conclusions or inherited from one's intellectual debtors (or both), regarding the status, historical value, dating, provenance, authorship, stratification, and/or literary relationship of texts related to Jesus of Nazareth. Material investments thus include what Crossan identifies variously as scholarly judgments, informed decisions, acute scholarly bias, presuppositions, and consensus academic conclusions related to sources in the Jesus tradition. Material investments may be broadly shared by the guild of biblical scholarship, or they may represent minority views or even idiosyncratic positions held by the individual scholar against almost the entirety of the rest of the biblical scholarship community.

### **A Catalogue of Crossan's Material Investments**

Presenting a catalogue of Crossan's material investments is not a simple task. Since the publication of *The Historical Jesus* in 1991, Crossan has framed his material

investments in various ways. What follows, then, is not an exhaustive list; neither is it a cumulative list derived from one written source. Rather, it is a patchwork, listing out various material investments presented in diverse published works in a semblance of coherent order. This section will not contain any direct critical analysis, but rather will simply take note of several of Crossan's material investments. In the section that follows, four crucial material investments that have strong bearing upon Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection will be scrutinized. Here the purpose is simply to present a broad cross-section of Crossan's material investments in as broad, straightforward, and direct a fashion as possible.

1. The Gospel of Mark was written around 70 A.D., but was preceded by a suppressed version, *Secret Mark*, which contains a narrative resembling the raising of Lazarus in John 11.<sup>143</sup> Mark does not record the recollections of the Apostle Peter as Christian tradition holds,<sup>144</sup> but rather writes from a Galilean Christian perspective *against* the Petrine Church in Jerusalem.<sup>145</sup>
2. The Gospel of Matthew was written around 90 A.D., using, "apart from other data, the Gospel of Mark and the *Sayings Gospel Q* for its prepassion narrative, and the Gospel of Mark and the *Cross Gospel* for its passion and resurrection account."<sup>146</sup>
3. The Gospel of Luke was written after Matthew but before John, possibly in the 90s A.D., as the first in a two-volume project.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 105; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 428-29.

<sup>144</sup>Despite the fact that Crossan notes at one point that Mark is written "from the original store of Petrine tradition." Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 99.

<sup>145</sup>John Dominic Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord (Mark 16:1-8)," in *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14-16*, ed. Werner H. Kelber (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 146-52. Crossan accepts "the general hypothesis" that Mark writes against "theological opponents characterized by (1) interest in miracles and apparitions rather than in suffering and service; (2) very little sympathy with the Gentile mission especially insofar as this questioned the validity of the Law; (3) an appeal to the authority of the Jerusalem mother Church, based both on the family of Jesus and on the original disciples of Jesus: the twelve, the inner three, and Peter in particular." Ibid., 146.

<sup>146</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 430.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 431.

4. The Gospel of John, written in the early years of the second century A.D., is dependent upon the Synoptic Gospels and the *Cross Gospel* for its passion and resurrection account, and incorporates a *Signs Gospel* in its prepassion account.<sup>148</sup>
5. The Gospel of Matthew and Luke both use the Gospel of Mark,<sup>149</sup> the *Sayings Gospel Q*,<sup>150</sup> and the *Cross Gospel* as written sources.<sup>151</sup>
6. The canonical Gospels “are all by anonymous authors, none of whom knew Jesus personally.”<sup>152</sup> Each contains three layers of material:<sup>153</sup> original tradition, which hearkens back to Jesus; a second layer which “creatively adapted the sayings and works of Jesus;”<sup>154</sup> and a third representing the writer’s narrative and theological freedom.<sup>155</sup>
7. The *Gospel of Thomas* (at least the first edition of it) was written in the 50s A.D.,<sup>156</sup> thus predating the canonical tradition, and is entirely independent from the canonical gospels.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, Thomas is written by a community of Christians independent of the Jerusalem/canonical tradition, exemplified by a focus on the life

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<sup>148</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 119.

<sup>149</sup>Crossan, “Opening Statement,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 33-34.

<sup>150</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 110.

<sup>151</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 133; Crossan works this thesis out most fully in Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*. The bulk of the manuscript discusses the individual pericopes in *The Cross Gospel* (*Gospel of Peter*), arguing that the original text was used by the canonical passion-resurrection accounts.

<sup>152</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 20-21.

<sup>153</sup>Crossan, *Jesus*, xiii.

<sup>154</sup>Crossan, “Opening Statement,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 33-34.

<sup>155</sup>“What those first Christians experienced as the continuing presence of the risen Jesus or the abiding empowerment of the Spirit gave the transmitters of the Jesus tradition a creative freedom we would never have dared postulate had such a conclusion not been forced upon us by the evidence.” Crossan, *Jesus*, xiii.

<sup>156</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 428. Crossan’s dating of *Thomas* has gotten progressively earlier over the years. In his first mention of *Thomas*, Crossan suggests a date “from the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century.” John Dominic Crossan, *Scanning the Sunday Gospel* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 139.

<sup>157</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 35-37. Crossan’s position on *Thomas*’ independence has also moved over the years. Initially, Crossan leaves the question of dependence open, with the strong implication that *Thomas* is later than and only possibly independent of the Synoptic tradition—see Crossan, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,” 456-57. By 1979, Crossan is relatively convinced that *Thomas* must have an independent version of Jesus’ parables—see Crossan, *Finding is the First Act*, 105-06. By 1983, *Thomas*’ independence is asserted explicitly and unconditionally: “I consider this version, like all of *Thomas*, to be independent of the intracanonical Gospels.” John Dominic Crossan, “Mark 12:13-17,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 399. Emphasis added. See also Crossan, *In Fragments*, x: “I consider that the *Gospel of Thomas* is completely independent of the intracanonical Gospels.” Thereafter, *Thomas*’ independence serves as a presupposition for Crossan’s historical Jesus research.

and teaching of Jesus and an entire lack of interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>158</sup>

8. The common source used by Matthew and Luke, Q, is not only an independent tradition of sayings of Jesus; rather, it is a full-fledged but no longer extant *Sayings Gospel Q*, written in the 50s A.D.<sup>159</sup> within a Christian community with no interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, the textual contents of the *Sayings Gospel Q* can be confidently reconstructed, including its stratified layers and redactional history. The reconstructed earliest layer of *Q* contained no eschatological pronouncements or Son of Man self-references; those were placed on Jesus' lips by later editors of *Q*.<sup>161</sup> The *Sayings Gospel Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas* represent a stream of early Christian tradition dubbed the *Life Tradition* by Crossan, which was interested solely in the life and teaching of Jesus and did not focus on his death and resurrection.
9. A *Miracles Collection* was compiled in the 50s A.D., and used independently by both Mark and John.<sup>162</sup>
10. The *Cross Gospel*, now embedded within the second-century *Gospel of Peter*, was written around 50 A.D., and serves as the sole source for the canonical passion-resurrection narratives.<sup>163</sup>
11. An *Apocalyptic Scenario* was composed in the 50s A.D. and is now embedded within *Didache* 16 and Matthew 24.<sup>164</sup> Positing the existence of the independent *Apocalyptic Scenario* allows Crossan to maintain the complete independence of the *Didache*,<sup>165</sup> which Crossan holds was written in the late first century.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Crossan, "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity," 4-7. Crossan speaks of "Thomas-type Christians," who used no titles for Jesus except "the Living Jesus;" Crossan insists that "there is not a hint in the *Gospel of Thomas* of any interest in death or resurrection and such would probably have been irrelevant to Jesus as *Wisdom speaking*." Ibid., 5. Emphasis original.

<sup>159</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-28.

<sup>160</sup>Crossan, "Our Own Faces in Deep Wells," 294.

<sup>161</sup>Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 8.

<sup>162</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 429.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid. See more fully Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*; and *Four Other Gospels*, 133-80.

<sup>164</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 429.

<sup>165</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 119; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 9-10.

<sup>166</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 429; Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 56. Crossan's dating of the *Didache* has also moved over the course of his career. As late as 1986, he argued that it was written early in the second century A.D.; see Crossan, *Sayings Parallels*, xix.

Again, this catalogue of Crossan's material investments is far from exhaustive, and attempts to isolate material investments which have a bearing upon Crossan's reconstruction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>167</sup> While each could be critiqued on various fronts, four of Crossan's material investments will be examined herein: the hypothesized Life Tradition which Crossan juxtaposes with the intracanonial death-resurrection tradition, identifiable now in the *Sayings Gospel Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*; the existence, dating, and literary relationship of *Secret Mark* and the *Cross Gospel*; and the date, purpose, and literary creativity of the Gospel of Mark.

**Life vs. death traditions: Dating and reconstructing *Q* and *Thomas*.** John Dominic Crossan argues that early Christianity was marked by diversity and plurality.<sup>168</sup> Proclamation of Jesus as Lord took various forms in different settings and communities. Some Christian communities produced written expressions of their conception of Jesus—i.e., gospels. The canonical Gospels are four such examples, but there were others. Two in particular, the *Sayings Gospel Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, play a key role in Crossan's understanding of early Christianity, as they evidence what Crossan terms the

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<sup>167</sup>Further lists and explanations of Crossan's material investments appear in Crossan, *Sayings Parallels*, xvii-xx; idem, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-30; and idem, *The Birth of Christianity*, 91-120.

<sup>168</sup>Biblical scholars generally acknowledge an element of diversity in the early Church, as both Paul and John respond to both internal and external opponents in their epistles. Crossan, however, embraces the more extensive thesis promulgated by Walter Bauer—see, e.g., Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). Bauer hypothesized that early Christianity was marked by radical theological diversity, with emerging orthodoxy eventually imposing itself and snuffing out alternative visions of Jesus of Nazareth. In Bauer's thesis, embraced enthusiastically by Crossan, heresy preceded orthodoxy—the first-century church did not have a widely-agreed upon theological vision of the person and work of Jesus Christ. For a contemporary rebuttal of the Bauer hypothesis, see Andreas J. Kostenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

*Life Tradition*.<sup>169</sup> The Life Tradition “shows no interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but sees him as speaking for Wisdom, or better, living according to Wisdom and empowering others to do so, then, now, and always.”<sup>170</sup> The Death Tradition, exemplified by the canonical Gospels and the Pauline epistles, upheld the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death and proclaimed the centrality of his resurrection. Crossan insists that we must “distinguish two traditions in earliest Christianity, one emphasizing the sayings of Jesus and the other emphasizing the death and resurrection of Jesus.” Furthermore, we must not allow any “overt ascendancy of *either* over the other.”<sup>171</sup> Crossan thus juxtaposes the Death Tradition over against the Life Tradition, holding them as legitimate but plural responses to Jesus of Nazareth.

For Crossan, the Life Tradition represents the “discovery of another kerygma—one which had no special place for the death of Jesus.”<sup>172</sup> In those communities, Jesus was remembered and celebrated in a way which did not refer to “a saving death and a vindicating resurrection.”<sup>173</sup> The Life Tradition “predominated among the hamlets and small towns of Galilee and Syria,” in contrast to the urban birthplace of the Death Tradition.<sup>174</sup> Finally, the Life Tradition produced Sayings Gospels (*Q* and *Thomas*) rather than Biography Gospels (the canonicals) or Discourse Gospels (e.g., the

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<sup>169</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 415, 521, 572-73.

<sup>170</sup>Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” 12.

<sup>171</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 415.

<sup>172</sup>John S. Kloppenborg and Leif E. Vaage, “Early Christianity, Q, and Jesus: The Sayings Gospel and Method in the Study of Christian Origins,” *Semeia* 55 (1991): 6.

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 573.

*Apocalypse of James*).<sup>175</sup> The diverse strains and traditions of the early Church waged a “war of gospel types” in which Biography Gospels emerged victorious; other gospels fell by the wayside in the face of canonical ascendancy.<sup>176</sup>

If Crossan is correct in his assessment of early Christian diversity and the existence of an entire stream of Christian tradition with no interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus, then his metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection may gain more plausibility.<sup>177</sup> If a whole stream of early Christianity focused on Jesus’ life to the exclusion of his death and resurrection, then perhaps Crossan is correct in insisting, “the resurrection was *one way, but only one way*, Jesus’ earliest followers . . . explained the continuation rather than termination, the expansion rather than the contraction, of faith in Jesus as the manifestation of God.”<sup>178</sup> It is necessary, then, to explore the material investments which Crossan makes that facilitate his depiction of early Christian diversity. The material investments that Crossan makes regarding the *Sayings Gospel Q* and the

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<sup>175</sup>Crossan, “Our Own Faces in Deep Wells,” 294-97; *The Birth of Christianity*, 31-33.

<sup>176</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 36.

<sup>177</sup>Then again, it may not. One could argue that it is perfectly natural that there existed early followers of Jesus who held to his way of life and his teaching. These followers perhaps did not even know that Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for that fateful Passover, only to be executed and raised from the dead three days later. Perhaps such followers even preserved a body of Jesus’ teaching in written form as early as the mid-30s A.D., perhaps even in a full-fledged document like the proposed *Q Gospel*. Such followers did not reject, deny, or minimize Jesus’ resurrection—they simply did not know about it. Perhaps, further, such followers began to hear the proclamation of Jesus’ atoning death and bodily resurrection either through their own visits to the temple in Jerusalem for Jewish festivals or through the growing evangelistic ministry of the nascent Church. Perhaps, when they heard of Jesus’ death and resurrection, such followers began to enthusiastically embrace the risen Lord, and joined the Church headed by the apostles in Jerusalem. In the process, they shared with the ‘Death Tradition’ their written remembrances of Jesus’ words and deeds (i.e., the *Q* document), which were then incorporated into the Gospels of Matt and Luke.

<sup>178</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “The Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection,” in *The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1994), 120. Emphasis original.



*Gospel of Thomas* are crucial to his recovery of a unique Life Tradition and his reconstruction of early Christianity.<sup>179</sup>

Crossan's initial material investment, the existence of *Q* as a source for Matthew and Luke, is relatively uncontroversial. Since the late nineteenth century, it has been commonly accepted that Matthew and Luke both had access to a written source, *Q*,<sup>180</sup> in addition to the Gospel of Mark, when they penned their Gospels.<sup>181</sup> Crossan's material investment, however, goes much further than the existence of *Q* as a source. Building upon the pioneering scholarship of John Kloppenborg,<sup>182</sup> Crossan insists that *Q* is not only an independent tradition of sayings of Jesus; rather, it is a full-fledged but no longer extant *Sayings Gospel Q*. This full Gospel was written in the 50s A.D.<sup>183</sup> within a Christian community with no interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>Tuckett argues that Crossan's material investment in the *Gospel of Thomas* provides the methodological foundation for his reconstructed Jesus. "The dating of this alleged [early] layer in Th[omas] now gives it unprecedented priority in Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus, for 'Th1' and *Q* are the main sources of any substance in the first stratum. Since it is only material in this first stratum which Crossan is prepared to consider initially as potentially authentic, the result is that the Th material is supremely privileged. Further, since the very definition of Th1 [material which is paralleled in the Synoptic tradition, because the Synoptics used Th] means that it is multiply attested, and Crossan's method is to focus on multiply attested complexes and to bracket off singly attested tradition, the inevitable result is that the Th material emerges as the most significant. Th thus assumes an enormous importance in the reconstruction of Jesus, by virtue of a number of assumptions and presuppositions that remain rather buried and hidden in Crossan's book." Christopher M. Tuckett, "The Historical Jesus, Crossan and Methodology," in *Text und Geschichte: Facetten Theologischen Arbeitens aus dem Freundes- und Schulerkreis*, ed. Stefan Maser and Egbert Schlarb (Marburg: Elwert, 1999), 265.

<sup>180</sup>The postulated source is called 'Q', an abbreviation of the German *Quelle*, for source.

<sup>181</sup>Kloppenborg and Vaage, "Early Christianity, Q and Jesus," 3.

<sup>182</sup>See John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); idem, *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes and Concordance* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1988); idem, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000); and idem, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

<sup>183</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427-28.

<sup>184</sup>Crossan, "Our Own Faces in Deep Wells," 294.

Furthermore, the textual contents of the *Sayings Gospel Q* can be confidently reconstructed by stratified layers.<sup>185</sup> The earliest layer within *Q* “emphasized primarily a lifestyle and missionary activity that, despite the expectation of opposition and even persecution, was remarkably open and hopeful.”<sup>186</sup> The original version of *Q* lacked any titular self-references of Jesus as Son of Man.<sup>187</sup> A second layer was added to *Q*, with references to Jesus as Son of Man<sup>188</sup> and warnings of “dire apocalyptic vengeance against ‘this generation’ for refusing to accept their witness.”<sup>189</sup> According to Crossan, while original *Q* sees Jesus solely as a Wisdom figure, “the apocalypticism added in the second stratum of the *Sayings Gospel Q* emphatically sees Jesus as the coming Son of Man.”<sup>190</sup> Throughout both early and later layers of the *Sayings Gospel Q*, however, is a total and absolute lack of interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: *Q* and the “Q Community” which birthed it were committed to the Life Tradition, to preserving the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus.<sup>191</sup>

Not only is there no allusion to a passion-resurrection kerygma in *Q*, there is no reason internal to *Q* to believe that the cultivation of *Q* material and the composition of the document presupposed the passion and/or resurrection. Nor is there any clear indication in *Q* of either an ‘exalted Jesus’ or ‘the parousia.’<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>“I consider that *Q* is a discourse gospel whose sequential structure and even redactional strata can be plausibly demonstrated, and whose content was adopted, along with Mark, by both Matt and Luke.” Crossan, *In Fragments*, ix. See idem Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 110-11.

<sup>186</sup>Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” 13.

<sup>187</sup>Kloppenborg and Vaage, “Early Christianity, *Q* and Jesus,” 7.

<sup>188</sup>The Son of Man sayings in *Q* represent “a secondary redaction of an older wisdom book.” Kloppenborg and Vaage, “Early Christianity, *Q* and Jesus,” 7.

<sup>189</sup>Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” 13.

<sup>190</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 230.

<sup>191</sup>Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” 15

<sup>192</sup>Richard A. Horsley, “*Q* and Jesus: Assumptions, Approaches, and Analyses,” *Semeia* 55 (1991): 182.

From those material investments, Crossan is able to insist that an early (indeed, the earliest) stream of Christianity bore witness to Jesus as a teacher, as Wisdom personified, but not as an exalted figure whose death atoned for sin and who was bodily raised from the dead on the third day. I suggest, however, that Crossan's material investments in the *Sayings Gospel Q* are highly questionable, and that the data can and should be read differently.

First, it must be acknowledged that *Q* remains a hypothetical and non-extant document. Kloppenborg and Vaage note that nineteenth-century biblical scholars tended to treat *Q* "more as a convenient postulate which facilitated certain explanations of the Synoptic problem than as a monument attesting to a particular moment or moments in the history of early Christianity."<sup>193</sup> Contrary to Kloppenborg and Vaage's, this is a more responsible position. Other ancient gospels are accepted and reconstructed (to a degree) in the absence of extant manuscripts; however, these gospels tend to be reconstructed from explicit citations or lengthy quotations contained within the early church fathers.<sup>194</sup> With *Q*, however, textual reconstruction is substantially more hypothetical—*Q* not only lacks manuscript evidence, it also lacks direct citation or quotation.

Second, while it may be tenable to reconstruct the text of *Q* based upon the common material in Matthew and Luke, it is highly speculative to suggest that the results represent the exhaustive contents of a *Sayings Gospel Q*. Why should one conclude that Matthew and Luke utilized everything contained within their source document *Q*? Given

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<sup>193</sup>Kloppenborg and Vaage, "Early Christianity, Q and Jesus," 3.

<sup>194</sup>The *Gospel of the Hebrews*, for example, is "known only from seven patristic citations"; there are no extant manuscripts or fragments. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 428. From patristic citations, we can indeed reconstruct a partial text of the *Gospel of the Hebrews*; but no one pretends that what we can recover from seven partial citations is the *entire* text of the original Gospel, let alone that we can isolate redactional layers within it.

that they feel free to skip material from Mark,<sup>195</sup> which was also a common source, why should we expect them to treat *Q* differently? Indeed, might we not expect that some of the material in Matthew and Luke commonly designated to their particular sources (*M* and *L* respectively) may not in fact be part of their common source *Q*?<sup>196</sup> To insist, as Crossan does, that we can completely reconstruct the text of *Q* based solely upon Matthew and Luke is to argue dangerously from silence and absence.

Third, and most seriously, it is irresponsible to insist categorically that the *Sayings Gospel Q* lacked any reference to the death and/or resurrection of Jesus.<sup>197</sup> Absence of evidence cannot be taken conclusively as evidence of absence, particularly in the case of a hypothesized non-extant document like *Q*.<sup>198</sup>

Fourth, even if one grants (*data non concessio*) the conjecture that *Q* does not refer explicitly to the death and/or resurrection of Jesus, one need not conclude that *Q* is

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<sup>195</sup>While the majority of Mark's Gospel has parallels in Matthew and (especially) Luke, there are a number of passages that do not show up in the other two Synoptic Gospels. See, for example, the response of Jesus' family to his ministry in Mark 3:20-21 and the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida in Mark 8:22-26. Other passages that appear in Mark but not Matthew or Luke include 3:13-15; 4:21-29; 7:31-37; 9:21-24; 9:42-48; 12:32-34; and 14:51-52.

<sup>196</sup>Matthew and Luke do not use Mark equally as a source. Matthew utilizes many Markan passages that Luke does not—e.g., Mark 6:1-6 (Matt 13:54-58); Mark 6:45-56 (Matt 14:22-36); Mark 7 (Matt 15:1-31); Mark 10:1-12 (Matt 19:1-9); Mark 10:35-45 (Matt 20:20-28); Mark 11:12-14, 20-24 (Matt 21:18-22); Mark 12:28-34 (Matt 22:34-40); Mark 14:27-31 (Matt 26:31-35); and Mark 15:16-20 (Matt 27:27-31). Similarly, Luke uses some sections of Mark that Matthew does not—e.g., Mark 1:21-28 (Luke 4:31-37); Mark 1:35-38 (Luke 4:42-43); Mark 9:38-40 (Luke 9:49-50); and Mark 12:41-44 (Luke 21:1-4). Might they not treat *Q* similarly?

<sup>197</sup>Horsley insists that "neither crucifixion-resurrection kerygma nor messianic titles figure anywhere in *Q*, so far as we know." Horsley, "Q and Jesus," 206. What Horsley does not say is that, "so far as we know," *Q* does not exist as an independent gospel, there was no such thing as a *Q* Community, and the stratification he designates to *Q* is purely conjectural.

<sup>198</sup>Indeed, Crossan argues that the canonical Gospels all use a single source for their passion-resurrection narratives, which he dubs the *Cross Gospel* and finds embedded within the extant *Gospel of Peter*. If this is the case, why not presume, invoking Ockham's Razor, that the *Cross Gospel* is a larger work which included what we now know as *Q*? Perhaps Crossan's postulated *Cross Gospel* was actually a complete canonical-type Gospel, beginning with Jesus' teachings and deeds, and culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection.

uninterested in the events of Easter. Crossan's postulated *Cross Gospel* is purely a passion-resurrection narrative—does that necessitate the conclusion that the *Cross Gospel* had no interest whatsoever in the events of Jesus' life, or the contents of his teaching? Clearly not—rather, it demonstrates an emphasis upon the passion and resurrection for the purposes of the author and his/her audience. Similarly, one can quite readily conceive of the independent circulation of recollections of Jesus' words amongst a community which also embraced faith in a crucified and risen Savior.

Fifth, even if one grants (*data non concessa* again) Kloppenborg's textual reconstruction of the *Sayings Gospel Q*, there is no independent reason to accept his further conjectural stratification. Crossan accepts the stratification of *Q*, insisting that references to Jesus as the apocalyptic Son of Man do not belong to the original layer, but were imposed later. On this front, however, Crossan betrays his prior theological conviction, shared by all Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, that "Jesus was not at all an apocalyptic visionary."<sup>199</sup> Both Mark and *Q* identify Jesus as the Son of Man who will come again; Crossan, however, insists that "the suffering and rising Son of Man is the creation of Mark, and the term was inserted in *Q* by the later editor."<sup>200</sup> This leads Howard Kee to ask: "How does one [i.e., Crossan] differentiate the older from the later versions of *Q*? By the fact that these features are absent from the earlier stage—a triumph of circular reasoning!"<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>John Dominic Crossan, "Materials and Methods in Historical Jesus Research," *Forum* 4, no. 4 (1988): 10.

<sup>200</sup>Howard Clark Kee, "A Century of Quests for the Culturally Compatible Jesus," *Theology Today* 52 (1995): 22.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.* Kee considers the Beelzebub story, contained in independent forms in Mark 3 and *Q* (now in Luke 11 and Matt 12). "In order to remove the clearly apocalyptic connotations . . . which Crossan must admit has a claim to credibility by his standards since it has multiple attestation, he assigns it to 'Q2,'

Finally, even if one grants the existence of *Q*, Crossan's insistence on the existence of a unique *Q* Community is purely speculative. Indeed, the differentiation between Life and Death Traditions represents an unnecessary dichotomy between what was more likely a more cohesive community which embraced *both* the Life and the Death Traditions.<sup>202</sup>

In short, while there may be good reasons to accept the existence of *Q* as a source for both Matthew and Luke, there are better reasons to reject Crossan's further material investments. There is simply no warrant to conclude that *Q* can be confidently and completely reconstructed, let alone separated into redactional layers. There is no compelling reason to suppose that *Q* lacked reference to or interest in the resurrection of Jesus, unless one has already concluded that an early stream of Christianity existed which embraced *only* the Life Tradition.

What of Crossan's material investments in the *Gospel of Thomas*? Three papyrus fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* were discovered around 1900 A.D., dating from "the start, middle, and end of the third century."<sup>203</sup> In 1945, a complete manuscript of the *Gospel of Thomas* was discovered among the Nag Hammadi Codices, probably dating from the fourth century A.D.<sup>204</sup> Scholars generally agree that *Thomas* originated in Syriac-speaking Syria, where "Thomas the Twin was of supreme importance."<sup>205</sup>

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the later editorial stage. The reason for locating it in the later phase of *Q* is, of course, that it has apocalyptic features." Ibid., 23.

<sup>202</sup>See Kostenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, especially 41-102.

<sup>203</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 22.

<sup>204</sup>Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 62; contra Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 19.

<sup>205</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 24. Nicholas Perrin notes that Syrian provenance for the *Gospel of Thomas* is relatively uncontested. Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship between*

The *Gospel of Thomas* is composed of sayings of Jesus, and lacks narrative details; thus, Crossan classifies it, like *Q*, as a “Sayings Gospel”<sup>206</sup> or “Discourse Gospel.”<sup>207</sup> Based on the apparent lack of common order and content between *Thomas* and the canonical Gospels, Crossan argues that *Thomas* is entirely independent of the canonical tradition.<sup>208</sup> Crossan also concludes from his form-critical study of parallel texts that *Thomas* often represents the original stream of gospel tradition.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore,

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*the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron*, Academia Biblica, No. 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 4. Gilles Quispel, one of the most prolific *Gospel of Thomas* scholars, insists that “it is absolutely certain that this apocryphal Gospel originated in Edessa [of Syria], the city of the apostle Thomas. The expression Judas Thomas does not occur anywhere else.” Gilles Quispel, “The *Gospel of Thomas* Revisited,” in *Colloque International sur Les Textes de Nag Hammadi*, ed. Bernard Barc (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1981), 234.

<sup>206</sup>Crossan, “Our Own Faces in Deep Wells,” 294.

<sup>207</sup>“The gospel is composed exclusively of aphorisms, parables, and dialogues of Jesus and is thus a discourse rather than a narrative gospel.” Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 26.

<sup>208</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 35-36; idem, “Mark 12:13-17,” 399; idem, *In Fragments*, x; idem, *Sayings Parallels*, xviii; idem, *Who Killed Jesus*, 27; idem, *The Birth of Christianity*, 119. Christopher Tuckett notes that scholars who argue for the independence of *Thomas* from the Synoptic tradition generally focus on two features, (1) the apparent lack of order in the *Gospel of Thomas*—it is assumed that if Thomas knew the Synoptics, he would not have entirely altered the order of teachings and sayings; and (2) the lack of Synoptic redactional features. Christopher Tuckett, “Thomas and the Synoptics,” *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988): 139-41.

<sup>209</sup>Charles Quarles examines Crossan’s form-critical study of the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12; Matt 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19; *Gospel of Thomas* 65-66) and demonstrates that Crossan’s arguments are suspect. Charles L. Quarles, “The Use of the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Research on the Historical Jesus of John Dominic Crossan,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 517-36. Crossan identifies two features that point to *Thomas* containing the original account. First, the parable in *Thomas* is a more plausible, realistic account. Second, *Thomas* lacks Mark’s allusion to Isa 5’s parable of God as the vineyard owner.

Crossan insists that *Thomas*’s parable is more realistic, while the Synoptic account makes the landlord look like a bumbling naïve fool. Why would the landlord send additional servants after the mistreatment of the first? In *Thomas*’s version, the landlord surmises that perhaps the first servant was not recognized (rather than acknowledged) by the tenants. Furthermore, why does the landlord’s earlier impotence turn to sudden vengeance at the end of the story? See John Dominic Crossan, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 453-57.

Quarles counters with three rebuttals. First, Jesus’ parables often contain unrealistic, implausible aspects; indeed, “such unrealistic features often provide the key to the interpretation of Jesus’ parables.” Quarles, “The Use of the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Research on the Historical Jesus of John Dominic Crossan,” 525. Indeed, Crossan’s own reconstruction of parables originally uttered by the historical Jesus contain similarly unrealistic features. Quarles notes the deliberate and unrealistic exaggeration of agricultural productivity in the parable of the sower as a prime example. *Ibid.*, 525.

Second, Crossan accuses Luke the evangelist of deliberately toning down Mark’s account of the parable of the wicked tenants “in order to keep the story more ‘likely.’” Crossan, “The Parable of the

*Thomas* was most likely written, according to Crossan, within 20 years of the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>210</sup>

Crossan's material investments in the independence and early date of the *Gospel of Thomas* are highly contentious amongst biblical scholars.<sup>211</sup> But both material investments are crucial to Crossan's reconstruction of early Christianity. Most importantly, holding *Thomas* to be prior to the canonical tradition demonstrates the

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Wicked Husbandmen," 453. If Luke can take a pre-existing implausible parable and edit it in order to make it more realistic to the readers, why does Crossan assume that *Thomas*'s 'more plausible' version of the parable must be the most original? Quarles notes, "if Luke can heighten historical plausibility in the story line of a parable in his redaction, one must seriously entertain the possibility that *Thomas* did so as well." Quarles, "The Use of the *Gospel of Thomas*," 526.

Third, Quarles notes that even Crossan's reconstructed original parable is highly implausible: "When the second servant is beaten, however, the violent rebellion of the tenants is clear and should have crushed the optimism of the landowner. Yet rather than sending armed mercenaries to drive the tenants away, he still sends his son, naively expecting the tenants to treat his son with respect. The scenario in *Thomas* is thus only slightly more realistic than that in the Synoptics. . . . Crossan's mention of the 'careful plausibility' of the version of the parable in *Thomas* seems to be an overstatement." Ibid., 527-28.

Crossan also argues for the originality of *Thomas*'s version based on its lack of allusion to Isa 5. Luke's version of the parable almost entirely erases the Old Testament allusion as well, but biblical scholars generally agree that Luke relied on Mark's account in penning his own. Thus, Quarles correctly argues, "If Luke used a version of the parable that included the allusion to the parable in Isaiah and dropped the allusion from his version, it seems presumptuous to argue that the absence of the allusion in *Thomas* demonstrates that it is original. Perhaps *Thomas* was dependent on Luke or, since the allegorical interpretation suggested by the biblical allusion would not support his use of the parable as a warning against the dangerous consequences of material greed, *Thomas* redacted a version of the parable that contained the allusion in a fashion similar to Luke." Ibid., 529. Hence, Crossan fails in his effort to establish from form-critical analysis that *Thomas*'s version of the parable of the wicked tenants hearkens more faithfully back to the historical Jesus.

<sup>210</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 427. Crossan identifies two potential layers, but stresses that the first was "composed by the fifties A.D., possibly in Jerusalem, under the aegis of James's authority," and goes on to emphasize "how much of this collection is very, very early." Ibid., 428. Earlier, Crossan had suggested that *Thomas* should "probably be dated to the second half" of the first century A.D. Crossan, *Sayings Parallels*, xviii. Crossan gives no reason for moving to an earlier date.

<sup>211</sup>Crossan suggests that most scholars have been won over and accept *Thomas*' independence from the canonical tradition. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 37. Neirynck, however, insists that "the debate on dependence/independence of *Thomas* is still very lively." F. Neirynck, "The Apocryphal Gospels and the Gospel of Mark," in *The New Testament in Early Christianity*, ed. Jean-Marie Sevrin (Leuven-Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1989), 133. Regarding *Thomas*'s date, Nicholas Perrin suggests that, contra Crossan, most scholars date *Thomas* in the mid-second century A.D. "Just as there is a general consensus regarding the provenance of GT, there is also a standard judgment as to how one is to *date* this document. . . a date of 140 A.D. to the original autograph, although not intended to be a dogmatic or precise determination, has held the day for most scholars." Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*, 5. It should also be noted that while some biblical scholars date *Thomas* to the first century, such scholars generally concede a *late first century* date, whereas Crossan insists on a date in the 50s A.D. in order to squeeze it into his first stratum. See Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 72.



existence of an early Christian community which had no interest in the miracles or resurrection of Jesus.

The *Sayings Gospel Q* is a hypothetical reconstructed document which Crossan *suggests* does not reference the resurrection; *Thomas* is a real, complete Gospel which we *know* does not emphasize Jesus' resurrection. In fact, since *Thomas* does not mention the resurrection, Crossan is able to argue that the earliest Christian community represented in a collected Gospel (namely Thomas-type Christians represented in *The Gospel of Thomas*) did not believe in the resurrection at all.<sup>212</sup>

Once again, however, there are good reasons to reject the material investments Crossan makes regarding the *Gospel of Thomas*. For one thing, Crossan's argument is circular. First, he argues that *Thomas* is independent of the canonical Gospels in its entirety. Second, he acknowledges elements of *Thomas* which are also present in the canonical Gospels (e.g., the sower of seeds, in *Thomas* 9). Third, he argues that, because *Thomas* is independent of the canonical Gospels, those elements must therefore be placed in the earliest stratum of the *Thomas* tradition in order to deny potential dependence of *Thomas* upon the Synoptic tradition. Neirynck points out, "The primary argument for an early date is the assumption of independence from the canonical Gospels."<sup>213</sup> One

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<sup>212</sup>This conclusion, while a logical possibility, is by no means a firm conclusion. Simply because an early document contains no reference to the resurrection of Christ does *not* necessarily imply that the author (or the community it represents) did not *believe* that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Indeed, *none* of John's letters contain explicit mention of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and yet they are permeated with the ethos of the risen Christ and the eternal life that is received through faith in Him (e.g., 1 John 1:2-2:2; 3:16; 4:1-3; 4:9-11; 5:6-12). I am not arguing that *Thomas* evinces a belief in the resurrection; I merely insist that absence of explicit mention of Jesus' deeds, miracles, and resurrection does *not* in and of itself mean that such belief was absent from the writers of ancient documents.

<sup>213</sup>F. Neirynck, "The Historical Jesus: Reflections on an Inventory," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 70 (1994): 233.

assumption (independence) produces a conclusion (an early date) which then supports the original assumption.

Furthermore, there are good reasons for believing that *Thomas* is late and dependent, rather than early and independent.<sup>214</sup> First, *Thomas* “shows familiarity with late traditions distinctive to Eastern, Syrian Christianity.”<sup>215</sup> Second, Nicholas Perrin has mounted a powerful and persuasive argument that *Thomas* was originally written in Syriac, using Tatian’s *Diatessaron* as a textual source.<sup>216</sup> Third, the Apostolic Fathers evidence no awareness of the *Gospel of Thomas* until the late second century A.D.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>For a fuller treatment, consult Craig A. Evans, Robert L. Webb and Richard A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*; and Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Thomas and St. John’s Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962-1963): 155-77.

<sup>215</sup>Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 71. E.g., only in the *Gospel of Thomas* and later Syriac works like the *Acts of Thomas* is Thomas identified by the longer name “Didymus Judas Thomas.”

<sup>216</sup>The *Diatessaron* was a Syriac harmonization of the canonical Gospels penned by Tatian. Nicholas Perrin argues that the *Gospel of Thomas* is linked by Syriac catchwords and frequently follows the ordering of the *Diatessaron*. See Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian*, 49-168. Perrin identifies over 500 catchwords that link all but three sayings in *Thomas*. Ibid., 169, 171. Thus, he notes, “if the conclusions drawn at the end of Chapter 2 are valid, the widespread judgment as to GT’s disjointed nature must now be replaced by an insistence on the document’s organic unity. This is what the literary evidence suggests.” Ibid., 171.

Perrin further hypothesizes that *Thomas*’s tight structure demonstrates his reliance upon textual sources rather than oral tradition. If *Thomas* was indeed written originally in Syriac, then the author almost certainly utilized Tatian’s *Diatessaron* as his textual source. “Tatian’s harmony was the first gospel record in Syriac and Tatian’s was also the only Syriac gospel in existence in the second century. As far as we know, there was no other resource to which *Thomas* could have turned. Therefore, assuming the validity of my above three points, one must very seriously entertain the possibility that *Thomas* had Tatian’s work in hand. In fact, to put it more strongly, history appears to leave us with no other option.” Ibid., 183-84. Perrin concludes: “Of course, GT’s inclusion of material from Tatian’s *Diatessaron* has important implications for *Thomas* studies. Most obviously, it means that the standard dating of 140 A.D. must be abandoned. If the *Diatessaron* provides a *terminus a quo*, the sayings collection must have been composed sometime after 175 A.D. (and, given the Oxyrhynchus fragments, probably before 200 A.D.). This does not leave much time between the completion of the *Diatessaron* and the writing of GT, but there is nothing implausible about this.” Ibid., 193.

<sup>217</sup>Hippolytus and Origen show awareness of the *Gospel of Thomas* in the early third century A.D.; but Clement, Ignatius, Papias, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Irenaeus only mention the four canonical Gospels. Tatian is particularly significant, as he harmonizes the four canonical gospels in his *Diatessaron*, but neither mentions nor includes *Thomas* in his work. Given that Tatian writes in the same Syriac context that is understood to have produced *Thomas*, Tatian’s apparent ignorance of *Thomas* strongly suggests that the *Gospel of Thomas* had not yet been penned. This further supports Perrin’s thesis.

Crossan's material investments in *Thomas* are possible, but there is good reason to question and reject them. As we have seen, there are even stronger reasons to reject Crossan's material investments in *Q*. But Crossan's historical reconstructions of early Christianity and the resurrection of Jesus depend heavily upon his material investments in *Q* and *Thomas*. The *Gospel of Thomas* represents the only extant textual evidence for a stream of early Christianity which did not emphasize the resurrection. If *Thomas*'s early date and independence are granted, then the hypothesis that the *Sayings Gospel Q* represents the same, or a similar, stream of Christianity becomes plausible. Outside of *Thomas*, there are *no extant* first-century sources, even in Crossan's generous estimation, which either lack explicit mention of the resurrection (where such mention might reasonably be expected), or suggest that the resurrection was not a crucial component of Christian teaching.

It may be going too far to suggest that Crossan is driven to date *Thomas* within the first stratum precisely because he recognizes how much his ultimate theses regarding the life, death, and resurrection of Christ depend upon having such a document there. But one can recognize the unspoken motivation that Crossan would have for dating this extracanonical source earlier than it ought to be. It may, in fact, be a case of conclusions (about the diversity of early Christianity, and particularly about the lack of resurrection focus) determining his interpretation of the evidence (in this case dating *Thomas* so early), rather than the evidence (*Thomas* itself) determining conclusions.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Evans concludes, "It is the desire to have alternative sources, rather than compelling historical evidence for the legitimacy of those sources, that has led to the positive evaluation of these extracanonical sources." Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 60.

**Secret Mark: building on the wind.** In 1958, Morton Smith (1915-1991), professor of ancient history at Columbia University, was cataloguing the library at the Mar Saba monastery in the West Bank. Smith claims that he discovered a copy of a letter from Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 A.D.) addressed to an otherwise-unknown Theodore, in the back of a 1646 edition of the epistles of Ignatius (ca. 50-100 A.D.).<sup>219</sup> Clement's letter refers to the detestable practices of the Carpocratians, apparently a libertine Gnostic Christian sect.

To Theodore. You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For these are the 'wandering stars' referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, 'of the deep things of Satan,' they do not know that they are casting themselves away into 'the nether world of the darkness' of falsity, and, boasting that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. Such men are to be opposed in all ways and altogether.<sup>220</sup>

In his letter to Theodore, Clement also discusses an alternative or amplified version of Mark's Gospel which was not intended for public consumption, but only for highly-placed church leaders.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings. . . . But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former books the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected.

. . . Thus, in sum, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it

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<sup>219</sup>Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 139-43. For a lengthier treatment of 'Secret Mark' and its origins, see idem, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). Other descriptions of Smith's discovery can be found, among other places, in Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 5-12; and Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 91-100.

<sup>220</sup>Quoted in Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 446.

even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.<sup>221</sup>

The amplified, or spiritual, version of Mark's Gospel has come to be known as *Secret Mark* (or alternatively, *Longer Mark*).<sup>222</sup> Clement quotes a passage from this expanded version of Mark's Gospel which Carpocrates "interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies."<sup>223</sup> The pericope from *Secret Mark* which Clement quotes bears resemblance to the raising of Lazarus in John 11:

And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightaway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.<sup>224</sup>

The authenticity of the Clementine letter and *Secret Mark* were questioned almost immediately by numerous biblical scholars.<sup>225</sup> Critics noted a tenuous paper trail:

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<sup>221</sup>Ibid.

<sup>222</sup>Smith himself christened it *Secret Mark*; some contemporary scholars favor *Longer Mark*. See, e.g., John Dart, *Decoding Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2003); and Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

<sup>223</sup>Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 446-47.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 447. For alternative translations, see Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 329; and Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>225</sup>Warning flags were raised also as soon as Smith had published his findings, e.g., by Helmut Merkel, Georg Kummel, Hans Conzelmann, and Quentin Quesnell. See Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Mystery of the Gospel of Mark," *The Second Century* 4 (1984): 71.

a twentieth-century scholar had discovered a seventeenth-century book with an excerpt of a letter from a second-century church father, quoting a portion of an expanded version of Mark's Gospel. Smith's discovery was (and remains) *the only* reference to, or indication of the existence of, *Secret Mark*. A key difficulty in establishing or accepting the authenticity of the Clementine letter and/or *Secret Mark* was the disappearance of the manuscript in question. Smith had photographed the letter, which was then moved to a patriarchal library, photographed again, only to disappear altogether.

Despite widespread scholarly skepticism concerning the authenticity of *Secret Mark*, Crossan provisionally accepts it as an earlier edition of canonical Mark.<sup>226</sup>

My own position is that independent study of the *original* manuscript is absolutely necessary for scholarly certitude; . . . In the meanwhile, however, and pending fuller external study of the manuscript, my own procedure is to accept the document's authenticity as a working hypothesis and to proceed with internal study of its contents.<sup>227</sup>

If one provisionally grants the authenticity of the Clementine letter and the existence of *Secret Mark*, the question of the relationship between canonical Mark and *Secret Mark* necessarily arises. While many scholars suggest that, if authentic, *Secret Mark* represents a later conflation of canonical Mark with the raising of Lazarus in John 11,<sup>228</sup> Crossan insists that *Secret Mark* is the earlier, original version of the Gospel.

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<sup>226</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 100-103; idem, *The Historical Jesus*, 328-331. Crossan makes it clear that he desires for further and independent study of the *Secret Mark* fragments. "The authenticity of a text can only be established by the consensus of experts who have studied the original document under scientifically appropriate circumstances. Twenty-five years after the original discovery this has not yet happened and that casts a cloud over the entire proceedings." Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 100. Unfortunately, further study of the manuscript will never occur.

<sup>227</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 103.

<sup>228</sup>See, e.g., F. F. Bruce's assessment of *Secret Mark* in the Ethel M. Wood Lecture at the University of London in 1974, the year after Smith published his findings. F. F. Bruce, *The 'Secret' Gospel of Mark* (London: Athlone/University of London, 1974). "The pericope inserted between verses 34 and 35 of Mark 10 is Markan in diction, for the simple reason that it is largely a pastiche of phrases from Mark ('contaminated' by Matthaean parallels), coupled with some Johannine material. The story of Jesus' raising

Canonical Mark, rather than being the first edition, represents the censored edition of *Secret Mark*.<sup>229</sup>

Crossan points out that the story in *Secret Mark* contains some obviously homoerotic overtones which may have been exploited by Carpocratians to justify their libertinism.<sup>230</sup> Hence, Crossan argues that canonical Mark, recognizing the questionable elements in the original story, decided to remove them.<sup>231</sup> The canonical editor of Mark could not, however, simply eliminate the offending passages; *Secret Mark* had been used for too long, and the Carpocratians would simply continue to use their expanded version. Instead, canonical Mark “dismembered” the story of the raising of the youth, and “scattered the dismembered elements of those units throughout his gospel.”<sup>232</sup> Then if someone (presumably a Carpocratian) with knowledge of *Secret Mark* accused canonical

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of the young man of Bethany from the tomb at his sister’s entreaty is superficially similar to the incident of the raising of Lazarus in John 11:17-44; but our present story, far from presenting the features of an independent Markan counterpart to the Johannine incident, is thoroughly confused.” Bruce, *The ‘Secret’ Gospel of Mark*, 11. Bruce provisionally accepts Smith’s discovery as a genuine Clementine letter, but concludes, “As for the ‘secret’ Gospel of Mark, it may well have come into being within the Carpocratian fellowship, or a similar school of thought. That Clement thought it went back to Mark himself is neither here nor there, in view of his uncritical acceptance of other apocrypha. The raising of the young man of Bethany is too evidently based—and clumsily at that—on the Johannine story of the raising of Lazarus for us to regard it as in any sense an independent Markan counterpart to the Johannine story (not to speak of our regarding it as a *source* of the Johannine story).” Ibid., 20.

<sup>229</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 328-31; Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 108.

<sup>230</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 108. Carlson, however, argues quite persuasively that the colloquialisms which we naturally read with romantic or erotic overtones (e.g., “loved him,” “be with him,” “remained with him that night,” “taught him the mystery”) are twentieth-century sexual allusions not resonant in the first or second centuries. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, 65-71.

<sup>231</sup>“I consider . . . that canonical Mark is a very deliberate revision of *Secret Mark*. . . . First, canonical Mark eliminated both SGM 2 and 5 as discrete literary units. . . . The reason for this elimination was most likely past Carpocratian usage.” Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 108.

<sup>232</sup>“The reason for this dismembered retention was to offset future Carpocratian usage. Once canonical Mark was accepted, SGM 2 and 5 would thereafter read like units composed from words, phrases, and expressions of that gospel.” Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 108.

Mark of excising the offending story, canonical Mark can respond that *Secret Mark* has actually compiled that story out of elements present in canonical Mark.<sup>233</sup>

Crossan admits that one could argue that *Secret Mark* is a pastiche of elements from within Mark. “After canonical Mark was present, it would be simple to accuse the Carpocratians of having manufactured their version by culling terms and phrases, bits and pieces from Mark.”<sup>234</sup> Why does Crossan not accept this hypothesis?

But how exactly can one decide between *imitation* and *elimination*, between *Secret Mark* having composed units from scattered elements in Mark or Mark having decomposed *Secret Mark* into scattered elements throughout his writing? My basic reason for adopting *elimination* is that those dismembered elements have always caused difficulties for readers of Mark. They do not really fit into their present positions and they have caused incessant problems for ancient readers, such as Matthew and Luke, and for modern interpreters as well.<sup>235</sup>

Crossan’s material investment in *Secret Mark* is essential to his reconstruction of the historical Jesus and his metaphorical understanding of Jesus’ resurrection. First, it is one of two empirical examples Crossan identifies in order to demonstrate the radical editorial freedom which Mark exercised with his sources.<sup>236</sup> Thus, Crossan needs *Secret*

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<sup>233</sup>William Lane Craig notes that this thesis “tends to make Crossan’s hypothesis unfalsifiable, since evidence that does not confirm his theory is reinterpreted in terms of the theory to be actually confirmatory. . . . That is, to critics who assert that the *Secret Mark* passages are not primitive but look like amalgamations drawn from other Gospel stories, Crossan would say, ‘Aha! That’s just what Mark wanted you to think!’” William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 172.

<sup>234</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 120.

<sup>235</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 108. Emphasis original. Crossan identifies twelve literary elements from *Secret Mark*’s miraculous raising of the youth which canonical Mark dismembers and places elsewhere in his censored account. For example, “Bethany” is moved to Mark 11:1, resulting in the awkward “and when they drew near to Jerusalem, to *Bethphage and Bethany*, at the Mount of Olives.” “Son of David, have mercy on me. But the disciples rebuked her” is transferred to Mark 10:47-48; the plea is placed in the mouth of blind Bartimaeus, while the disciples rebuke him. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 112. Other dismembered and scattered literary remains include “rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb” (moved to Mark 16:3); “youth” (moved to Mark 16:5); “raised him, seizing his hand” (moved to Mark 1:31, 5:41, and 9:27); “for he was rich” (moved to Mark 10:17-22). See further *ibid.*, 112-18.

<sup>236</sup>The second example, from the *Cross Gospel/Gospel of Peter*, will be discussed next. The purpose and editorial creativity of Mark the Evangelist will be discussed immediately after.



*Mark* to help prove a more crucial material investment, that the gospel-writers are disturbingly unconcerned about remaining faithful to their textual sources.

Second, *Secret Mark* helps Crossan to discount or reject Mark's resurrection narrative. Crossan hypothesizes that Mark's Gospel originally ended at 15:39<sup>237</sup> with the confession of the centurion. When canonical Mark dismembered the objectionable story in *Secret Mark*, he moved some of the literary remains to the discovery of the empty tomb. Thus, what in *Secret Mark* is Jesus rolling the stone away from the tomb becomes in canonical Mark the stone having been rolled away from Jesus' tomb before the women get there (16:3-4).<sup>238</sup> The "young man" in Mark 16:5 is the translocated "youth" or "young man" from *Secret Mark*.<sup>239</sup> Crossan considers the most obvious displaced remains of *Secret Mark* to be the disrobed youth in Mark 14:51-52, who stands in for the resuscitated youth from *Secret Mark* coming to visit Jesus at night wearing nothing but a linen cloth.<sup>240</sup> Crossan acknowledges that his theory is "rather idiosyncratic," but insists

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<sup>237</sup>"My proposal is that the original version of Mark's Gospel ended with the centurion's confession in 15:39. What comes afterward, from 15:40 through 16:8, was not in *Secret Mark* but stems from canonical Mark. I realize, of course, that such a claim lacks any external or manuscript evidence unless one retrojects the fact that redoing the ending of Mark became a small industry in the early church. The evidence for it is internal and circumstantial, tentative, hypothetical, and clearly controversial." Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 415-16.

<sup>238</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 112. This conjecture contradicts Crossan's assertion that Mark follows the *Cross Gospel* for his passion-resurrection narrative (on this material investment, see the following section of this dissertation). In a section which Crossan judges to be original to the primitive *Cross Gospel*, the *Gospel of Peter* contains a description of the stone being rolled away from Jesus' tomb: "The stone cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered." See the *Gospel of Peter* 9:37, in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 33. Which is it? Was Mark following the *Cross Gospel* in describing the stone being rolled away from the tomb? Or is his description of the stone in 16:4 a result of him needing to move the dismembered remains of the raising of the dead youth in *Secret Mark* somewhere else? Crossan neither notices nor explains the contradiction.

<sup>239</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 112-13. Again, Crossan later contradicts this assertion by arguing that canonical Mark follows the *Cross Gospel* now embedded within the *Gospel of Peter* for his resurrection scene, including the young man in 16:5.

<sup>240</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 116-18.

that the idiosyncrasy resides not with himself, but with Mark the Evangelist.<sup>241</sup> He holds to this material investment fiercely, and claims that it persuades him primarily because it explains elements in Mark which have puzzled biblical scholars for years.

Robert Gundry addresses Crossan's dismemberment thesis, refuting each example of "unnaturally intruding" phrases or words in canonical Mark.<sup>242</sup> The elements which puzzle Crossan have reasonable explanations not requiring a complicated conspiracy by Mark to dismember and scatter the offending pericope.<sup>243</sup> Thus, even if one provisionally grants the authenticity of both the Clementine letter and the *Secret Mark* that Morton Smith claimed to have discovered in Mar Saba, there is no compelling reason to accept either Crossan's material investment that *Secret Mark* predates canonical Mark or Crossan's insistence that canonical Mark dismembers the offending pericope of *Secret Mark* and scatters the remains throughout the rest of his Gospel.

But ought one to accept the authenticity of Morton Smith's discovery in the first place? Or is there reason to believe that the Clementine letter, the cited passages

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<sup>241</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 415-16.

<sup>242</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 613-21. For example, Crossan argued that canonical Mark moved "Son of David, have mercy on me" from the sister's lips in *Secret Mark* to Bartimaeus' lips in Mark 10:47, citing the resulting awkward word order: "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me." Crossan theorizes that the original account had Bartimaeus shout only "Jesus!" Gundry responds, "But this theory succeeds only in creating questions. What precedent is there for an address with the mere 'Jesus'? Why would canonical Mark break up 'Son of David' and 'have mercy on me' and make them straddle 'Jesus' rather than adding them as a unit after 'Jesus' so as to produce a more normal word order?" Gundry, *Mark*, 615.

<sup>243</sup>William Lane Craig writes of Crossan's thesis, "Moreover, one might ask, why in the world would Mark scatter these various figures and motifs throughout his Gospel, rather than just delete them if he found them potentially offensive? Crossan's ingenious answer is that Mark did this so that if someone should come upon a copy of secret Mark with the offending passages, then orthodox Christians could claim in response that the passages were just a pastiche assembled from disparate elements in the original Mark! Now this answer is just scholarly silliness. Not only does it ascribe to Mark prescience of redaction criticism, but, more importantly, it tends to render Crossan's hypothesis unfalsifiable, since evidence ostensibly disconfirmatory of the theory is reinterpreted in terms of the theory itself to be actually confirmatory." William Lane Craig, "John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The*

from *Secret Mark*, or the document in its entirety, are not what Smith claimed they were? Stephen Carlson has argued extensively that the Clementine letter referring to *Secret Mark* was forged by Smith, and then planted in the Mar Saba monastery library where he later “discovered” it.

*Secret Mark* is not what it appears to be. All three components of *Secret Mark*—the pseudo-Markan fragments of a secret gospel, the letter ascribed to Clement of Alexandria, and the physical manuscript itself—are twentieth-century imitations. The manuscript was written in what may appear to be handwriting of the eighteenth century, but the hesitation and shakiness of its strokes and the retouching of its letters, coupled with twentieth-century letter forms, indicate that the handwriting is actually a drawn imitation of an eighteenth-century style.<sup>244</sup> *Theodore*, too, is an impersonation, mimicking the style and vocabulary of Clement of Alexandria but contradicting him with a simile that evokes modern salt-making technology.<sup>245</sup> *Secret Mark* is also an imitation, with its Markan parallels deviating only at its climax, in language that resonates with mid-twentieth-century expressions of sexuality.<sup>246</sup> On three independent grounds and at three different levels, *Secret Mark* is a deliberate, but ultimately imperfect, imitation.<sup>247</sup>

Carlson concludes that Clement’s letter to Theodore is a forgery, and that therefore the *Secret Mark* to which it refers is almost certainly non-existent.

In addition to the three-fold argument indicating Smith’s forgery of the document, Carlson points to the unusual provenance of the book that Smith discovered Clementine letter copied within. The Mar Saba library contained primarily manuscripts, with only ten printed books, including the seventeenth-century edition of the letters of Ignatius containing the hand-written copy of Clement’s letter to Theodorus. The other printed books were all published in Venice; the Ignatius compilation was published in

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*Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 260.

<sup>244</sup> Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, 23-47.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-61.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-71.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Amsterdam. The other printed books covered liturgy, devotions, and administration; the letters of Ignatius were the only patristic book in Mar Saba's library. Finally, the book of Ignatius' letters was in Latin, not Greek—indeed, it was the only Latin work in the Mar Saba library. On three separate fronts, then, the very presence of the book containing Clement's letter is suspicious.<sup>248</sup> After summarizing Carlson's argument, Craig Evans adds that the entire scenario, "finding a long-lost document in the Mar Saba Monastery that is potentially embarrassing to Christianity," was foreshadowed in a 1940 James Hunter novel.<sup>249</sup>

Carlson's arguments are persuasive,<sup>250</sup> although there are still some scholars who defend the authenticity of *Secret Mark*.<sup>251</sup> Crossan initially insisted that future study of *Secret Mark* was necessary to confirm its authenticity, lamenting (in 1988) that twenty-five years had passed since Smith's "discovery" of the Clementine letter without such independent scholarly examination.<sup>252</sup> Another nearly twenty-five years has elapsed without independent examination of the original document. Furthermore, arguments

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<sup>248</sup>Carlson concludes that "the book containing *Secret Mark* . . . sticks out like a sore thumb." Ibid., 38.

<sup>249</sup>Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 97. The novel in question is James Hunter, *The Mystery of Mar Saba* (New York: Evangelical Publishers, 1940). Evans chastises biblical scholars, including Crossan, who despite immediate warning signs that *Secret Mark* was a forgery or a hoax, "defended Smith and the authenticity of the Clementine letter." Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 95.

<sup>250</sup>"A number of New Testament scholars . . . have already expressed the opinion that Carlson has sounded the death-knell for claims of genuineness for *Secret Mark*. His arguments are both cumulative and compelling on a first reading." Paul Foster, "Secret Mark: Uncovering a Hoax," *Expository Times* 117 (2005): 68.

<sup>251</sup>Although his work predates Carlson's publication, John Dart argues that the majority of scholars accept the letter to Theodosius as genuinely Clementine. John Dart, *Decoding Mark*, 13-14, 137-40. Scott Brown launches an exhaustive defense of *Secret Mark*'s authenticity, but does not deal with the evidence raised by Carlson's work. Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 23-57. Debate continues to rage within biblical scholarship as to whether *Secret Mark* is an authentic document or not. The 2008 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature had a symposium dedicated to the topic, with Dart and Brown defending *Secret Mark*'s authenticity.

<sup>252</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 100.

have been brought forward suggesting that the entire document is inauthentic. Despite his initial insistence on further study of the document, and the presentation of persuasive new arguments against *Secret Mark*'s authenticity, Crossan stands by his material investment that *Secret Mark* is the original version of Mark's Gospel, and was later censored and dismembered in the writing of canonical Mark.<sup>253</sup>

Crossan's material investment in *Secret Mark* is seriously flawed on two counts. First, there is a strong possibility that Morton Smith forged the pseudo-Clementine letter, and that the *Secret Mark* quoted within the letter never existed.<sup>254</sup> Second, even if one grants the authenticity of *Secret Mark* (*data non concessio*), Crossan's thesis of canonical Mark dismembering the offending pericope and scattering the remains throughout the rest of his Gospel is unconvincing. Thus, there is good reason to reject Crossan's material investment in *Secret Mark*. Crossan himself acknowledges that his reconstruction of the historical Jesus depends in large measure upon the material investments he makes in sources like *Secret Mark*.<sup>255</sup> If we reject Crossan's material

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<sup>253</sup>Crossan no longer publicly acknowledges *Secret Mark* as one of his gospel-presuppositions (i.e. material investments). Neither, however, has Crossan disavowed *Secret Mark*'s authenticity. In any case, the arguments which he drew from *Secret Mark* still form a key pillar in his overall reconstruction of the historical Jesus. If Crossan were to revise or abandon his material investment that *Secret Mark* is genuine, it would require a similar reworking of the scholarly conclusions he drew based upon it.

<sup>254</sup>Even if one wants to maintain the hypothetical possibility that Smith's discovery was genuine, the letter was truly Clementine, and that the *Secret Mark* it refers to truly existed/exists, how academically responsible is it to use that source today as a presupposition in one's scholarly hypotheses, given that it has fallen under such a cloud of suspicion? Unless there is secondary confirmation of the existence of *Secret Mark*, for example in another ancient document referring to it or containing the same miracle story that Smith claimed to have found reported in *Secret Mark*, it is irresponsible to assume the authenticity of *Secret Mark*. One could say that, according to Crossan's own methodology, *Secret Mark* lacks multiple attestation of its very existence, and should thus be "bracketed as a singularity." See Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxiii.

<sup>255</sup>"Methods for historical Jesus research depend on gospel presuppositions . . . The validity of one's Jesus-conclusions stand or fall with that of one's gospel-presuppositions. If mine are wrong, then all is delusion." John Dominic Crossan, "What Victory? What God? A Review Debate with N. T. Wright on *Jesus and the Victory of God*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997): 351.

investments in the *Sayings Gospel Q*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and *Secret Mark*, what damage is done to Crossan's cumulative case?<sup>256</sup> Before addressing that crucial question, we must turn to two further material investments.

**The Cross(an) Gospel: Out of thin air.** Crossan posits the existence of a hypothetical document, the *Cross Gospel*, now embedded within the *Gospel of Peter*. We first hear of the existence of a Gospel associated with Peter's name from Serapion, bishop of Rhossus, shortly before 200 A.D.<sup>257</sup> Serapion is aware of the *Gospel of Peter's* existence, acknowledges it is read in some churches, but eventually disallows its use in his churches because of its "docetic tendencies."<sup>258</sup> In contrast with the intracanoncial Gospels, there is no mention of the *Gospel of Peter*, or the *Cross Gospel* which Crossan identifies within it, in the first hundred and fifty years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

There are two extant fragments of the *Gospel of Peter*. The larger, more intact manuscript (the source for English translations of *Peter*), contains sixty verses and probably dates from the eighth century.<sup>259</sup> It was discovered in the tomb of a monk in Akhmim along with *The Apocalypse of Peter*, and thus scholars generally assume that

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<sup>256</sup>Craig Keener summarizes the arguments against *Secret Mark's* authenticity, and concludes, "the *Secret Gospel of Mark* is a forgery, hence any reconstructions based on it must be re-constructed." Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 60.

<sup>257</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 10.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 11-12. Serapion, as quoted by Eusebius, writes, "For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles of Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject, as men of experience, knowing that such were not handed down to us." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3, in *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse, 202. In other words, Serapion claims that the ancient church distinguished between true gospels which hearkened back to the apostolic tradition, and later pseudonymous gospels.

<sup>259</sup>The Akhmim fragment contains only 60 verses and is clearly incomplete. It begins abruptly with the ordering of Jesus' crucifixion and ends in mid-sentence. See Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, xiii-xiv, 3-9. For the text of the *Gospel of Peter*, see Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 462-66; and Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 32-34. My verse numbering will follow Crossan's. Crossan's reconstruction of the *Cross Gospel* and the *Gospel of Peter* is reproduced in appendix 1 of this dissertation.

this must be the *Gospel of Peter* which Serapion wrote against.<sup>260</sup> The other, smaller fragment is from Oxyrhyncus in Egypt (the source of many early Christian papyrus fragments) and has been tentatively dated to “the late second or early third century.”<sup>261</sup> On the basis of these two fragments, Crossan confidently asserts that “the manuscript evidence for the *Gospel of Peter* is now as good as that, say, for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.”<sup>262</sup> One must assume that Crossan is speaking only of the *earliest extant* manuscript evidence, not the completeness, number, or geographical diversity of early manuscripts. Matthew and Luke both have far more than two extant manuscripts, including complete copies, from the first five centuries A.D. The *Gospel of Peter* has only these two; both are fragmentary, and neither is explicitly identified as the *Peter* that Serapion writes against at the end of the second century A.D.<sup>263</sup>

Scholarly opinion on the *Gospel of Peter*’s relationship to the canonical Gospels has been split since it first appeared in the late nineteenth century. Adolf Harnack argued for *Peter*’s independence, while J. Armitage Robinson argued just as strenuously for *Peter*’s dependence upon the canonical tradition.<sup>264</sup> Crossan, however, takes the debate surrounding the *Gospel of Peter* beyond the question of literary relationship. The *Gospel of Peter*, Crossan argues, contains within it a more primitive narrative, which he calls the *Cross Gospel*. Crossan asserts that this ancient source was

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<sup>260</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 6.

<sup>261</sup>Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 128.

<sup>262</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 9.

<sup>263</sup>On the textual evidence for canonical and extra-canonical Gospels, see J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 53-102; and F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 4-15.

<sup>264</sup>See Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 13.

written prior to 50 A.D., and represents “the single source of the intracanonical passion accounts.”<sup>265</sup> Crossan detects additional layers within *The Gospel of Peter*, which are either dependent upon the canonical Gospels or redactional additions intended to facilitate the introduction of canonical elements.<sup>266</sup>

I call the first and earliest stage the *Cross Gospel*, a document presently imbedded in the *Gospel of Peter*, just as Q is in Matthew and Luke. This narrative has Jesus crucified under Antipas, buried by his enemies in a guarded tomb, resurrected, and confessed by Pilate. The second stage is the use of the preceding document by all four of the intracanonical Gospels. I hold it to be the only passion and resurrection narrative used by Mark and, along with him, by Matthew and Luke, and, along with them, by John. I see no reason to postulate any independent passion and resurrection narrative outside that single stream of tradition stemming from the *Cross Gospel*. In other words, all of the intracanonical passion and resurrection narratives are dependent on the *Cross Gospel*.<sup>267</sup>

The postulation of the *Cross Gospel* is crucial to Crossan’s reconstruction of Jesus’ resurrection. First, it allows Crossan to deny multiple attestation of Jesus’ burial and the discovery of the empty tomb.<sup>268</sup> More importantly, it facilitates Crossan’s depiction of Mark’s editorial and creative freedom.<sup>269</sup> Crossan argues that Mark follows *The Cross Gospel* as his source for the trial and crucifixion of Jesus but is dissatisfied

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<sup>265</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 429.

<sup>266</sup>The canonical elements Crossan identifies are Jesus’ burial by Joseph of Arimathea in 6:23-24; the coming of the women to the tomb in 12:50-13:57; and the anticipation of apparitions to the disciples in 14:60. The redactional additions are the introduction of Joseph of Arimathea and the request to bury Jesus’ body in 2:3-5a; the youth or angel descending to Jesus’ tomb in 11:43-44; the confession of ‘Peter’ as to the disciples’ mourning, fasting, and weeping after Jesus’ crucifixion in 7:26-27; and the comment that Jesus’ disciples “went away” to their own homes in 14:58-59. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 462-66.

<sup>267</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>268</sup>William Lane Craig, “Resurrection and the Real Jesus,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 167-68. Also, given the clearly legendary and non-historical nature of the *Gospel of Peter*’s resurrection scene, it associates the *only* passion and resurrection source with a work (*Peter*) of clearly questionable historical value. Thus, it serves Crossan’s purposes on both fronts—it allows him to deny multiple attestation and furthermore allows him to discredit the historicity of the only passion-resurrection source used by the canonical evangelists.

<sup>269</sup>Crossan’s material investment regarding the date, purpose, and freedom of Mark the Evangelist will be discussed in the following section.



with leaving Jesus' burial in the hands of Jesus' enemies.<sup>270</sup> Thus, Mark creates Joseph so that Jesus is buried by a friend rather than an enemy.

When it comes to the scene of Jesus' resurrection, Crossan argues that Mark is again unwilling to follow the *Cross Gospel*, which says,

The stone cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered. . . .

They saw three men emerge from the tomb, two of them supporting the other, with a cross following behind them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, but the head of the one they were leading went up above the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies, 'Have you preached to those who are asleep?' And a reply came from the cross, 'Yes.'<sup>271</sup>

Mark did not follow *The Cross Gospel* at this point but, Crossan argues, could not simply leave the account out. Accordingly, Mark retrojects the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ into what then becomes in Mark's Gospel (9:2-13) Jesus' Transfiguration.<sup>272</sup> This is one of two empirical examples that Crossan identifies as empirical support for his material investment that Mark radically alters his source documents. In other words, Crossan argues that Mark felt the literary freedom to

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<sup>270</sup>Crossan has excised the *Gospel of Peter* 6:23-24 ["But the Jews were glad and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury him, since he had seen all the good things he did. He took the Lord, washed him, wrapped him in a linen cloth, and brought him into his own tomb, called the Garden of Joseph."] from the original *Cross Gospel*, arguing that it is a later addition which was inserted in deference to the canonical Gospels. According to Crossan, the only burial in *The Cross Gospel* is contained in 6:21, "Then they [the Jews] pulled the nails from the Lord's hands and placed him on the ground." Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 463. This assertion in itself is highly suspect, given that the *Gospel of Peter* 8:28-33, which Crossan places in the original *Cross Gospel* layer, implies the burial of Jesus in a tomb, whereas burial in a tomb is *not* implied in 6:21. Crossan insists that the redactional additions in the *Gospel of Peter* are obvious, as they interrupt the flow. His argument has some plausibility with regards to 2:3-5a; but with this key component in 6:23-24, which Crossan *has* to identify as a canonically-dependent insertion in order to deny the authenticity of the Joseph tradition, the *Gospel of Peter* as it stands has natural flow. There is nothing which indicates that it is a later addition.

<sup>271</sup>*Gospel of Peter* 9:36-10:42, in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 33.

<sup>272</sup>"I think that Mark knew the Passion-Resurrection Source; that he adopted and adapted the Passion section quite thoroughly; but that he deliberately and radically rephrased, relocated, and reinterpreted the Resurrection section. In other words, it was Mark himself who turned Resurrection into Transfiguration." Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 172.

recast the resurrection account from the *Cross Gospel/Gospel of Peter* based in part upon the fact that Mark does, in fact, recast the resurrection account.<sup>273</sup>

Crossan's argument that the *Gospel of Peter* contains a more primitive *Cross Gospel*, which is the sole passion-resurrection narrative which was utilized by all four canonical gospel writers, is imaginative and creative.<sup>274</sup> Nonetheless, this material investment is plagued with several problems which have prompted nearly all biblical scholars to reject his thesis.<sup>275</sup>

First, the *Gospel of Peter/Cross Gospel* specifically names the Roman centurion assigned to guard Jesus' tomb. If the canonical Gospel-writers followed the *Cross Gospel* as their passion-resurrection source, *each* of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, had to independently decide to omit the naming of the centurion. It is far more plausible that *Peter*, as a later Gospel using the canonical Gospels as sources, would have added the detail of Petronius' name.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup>Crossan uses this empirical evidence, not only to suggest that Mark retrojects *Peter's* resurrection narrative, but also to insist that Mark similarly retrojected other resurrection validation appearances elsewhere in his Gospel. For example, Crossan believes that the canonical Gospels' "nature miracles" (walking on water, feeding the multitudes) are such retrojections. But on what basis does Crossan identify those? Well, he has already identified the Transfiguration as one; and asks, "Were any other postresurrectional manifestations or apparitions given a like retrojection?" Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 396. In other words, Crossan felt compelled to search for other retrojections of postresurrection appearances *because* Mark retrojected the *Gospel of Peter's* resurrection into the Transfiguration. His hypothesis that Mark radically alters the *Cross Gospel's* resurrection becomes the basis for his conclusion that Mark did the same in the case of the nature miracles. *Ibid.*, 404ff.

<sup>274</sup>Indeed, it bears much resemblance to the creativity and imagination which Crossan ascribes to Mark. Wright asserts, "We may say of Crossan, as he says of Mark, that he is such a gifted script-writer that we are lured into imagining that his scheme is actually historical." N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 65.

<sup>275</sup>For fuller critiques of Crossan's postulate of the *Cross Gospel*, see Charles Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter: Does it Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?" in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 106-20; Raymond E. Brown, "The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority" *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321-43; and Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 44-46.

<sup>276</sup>Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," 328. Critical scholars, including Crossan, regularly accuse the canonical Gospel-writers of *adding* incidental details to make their

Raymond Brown develops a second, more substantial, critique of Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel*,

A major argument against Crossan's thesis reflects a classic argument used in Synoptic discussions. The existence of *Q* rests on the observation that Matt and Luke agree closely with each other in large bodies of sayings material absent in Mark. But in the passion narrative where Matt, Luke, or John have material not in Mark but found in some form in [the] G[ospel of] P[eter], they do *not* agree with each other. Over against Mark, *GP and Matt* agree on the washing of the hands, Pilate's declaring himself innocent of Jesus' blood, and the guard at the tomb. None of these incidents is in John or Luke. Over against Mark, *GP and Luke* agree on the role of Herod, on Jesus being handed over to the Jewish leaders, on the designation of the fellow-crucified as '*kakourgoi*' and one of them as being sympathetic to Jesus, and on the penitent lamentation of the people. None of these incidents is in Matt or John. Over against Mark, *GP and John* agree on the crucifixion date as before the feast, on not breaking the bones of one crucified figure, on a garden tomb, and on explicitly mentioning nails. None of these incidents is in Matt or Luke. It is most unlikely that such exclusive selectivity could have taken place if independently Matthew, Luke, and John used GP. This phenomenon is far easier to explain if the GP author combined details from the canonical Gospels, taking the washing of the hands from Matt, the penitent wrongdoer from Luke, etc.<sup>277</sup>

In response to Brown's critique, Crossan admits that "it is exceedingly strange that Matthew, Luke, and John each chose different units to copy from the Cross Gospel and none of them chose the same unit. That is a serious problem for my theory, and I have no explanation for it beyond that it just happened that way."<sup>278</sup> Crossan simply states that he can "conceive" of the canonical evangelists using the *Cross Gospel* so selectively and differently more easily than he can "conceive" of the *Gospel of Peter* using the canonical gospels so selectively.<sup>279</sup>

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*apologia* more powerful, or removing details that detract from their argument. It is difficult to see the purpose in all four canonical gospel-writers intentionally removing Petronius' name. So far as I am aware, Crossan never responds to this objection.

<sup>277</sup>Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," 333.

<sup>278</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 138.

<sup>279</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

A third difficulty with Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel* is the presence of several noticeable inconsistencies contained within even Crossan's earliest stage.

In 7.25 the Jewish elders lament over the evil they have done, while in the next verse in Crossan's sequence (8.28) the Jewish elders are angry because the people are lamenting by beating their breasts. In 4.14, the Jews command that the bones of the crucified should not be broken, presumably in order to prolong his death agony; but in the next verse (5.15) they are uneasy lest the sun has set with the crucified still alive.<sup>280</sup>

Fourth, Brown identifies several places where the persons involved in the passion-resurrection narrative are different in the *Gospel of Peter* than in the canonical Gospels.<sup>281</sup>

Fifth, the *Gospel of Peter* seems to reflect Matthew's vocabulary and style. Most tellingly, there are grammatical constructions that *Peter* and Matthew share which are common in Matthew, but are rare and apparently otherwise avoided, in *Peter*. As a result, *Peter* can reasonably be presumed to be dependent primarily upon Matthew.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup>Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," 334.

<sup>281</sup>E.g., "John 20.2 has the male disciple whom Jesus loved go to the empty tomb, but in *GP* 12.50 Mary Magdalene is called a disciple of the Lord who is loved by her." Ibid., 334. "Luke 23.6-12 has Pilate send Jesus to Herod so that Herod and Pilate became friends; but in *GP* 2.3-4, in a context where Pilate sends to Herod, Joseph (of Arimathea) is the friend of Pilate. While Mark, Matt, and John have Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus as king, putting on him a crown of thorns and a red/purple garment, *GP* 3.7-9 has the Jewish people do this." Ibid., 335.

Brown concludes, "One might explain some of these switched attributions as a redactional preference exercised by the *GP* author in using the written canonical Gospels, but neither deliberate redaction nor fluidity of written textual transmission in the early period plausibly explains so many transfers. Certainly, if we consider Matt's and Luke's dependence on Mark and Q in the 1<sup>st</sup> century or Tatian's dependence on the canonical Gospels in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, we find no such massive tendency to switch personal attribution." Ibid., 335.

<sup>282</sup>See Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter," in *The Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stewart, 110-11. Quarles focuses particularly on the phrase, "Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body" (μηποτε ελθοντες οι μαθηται κλεψωσιν αυτον), which occurs identically in Matt 27:64b and the *Gospel of Peter* 8:30. The individual terms (μηποτε, ελθοντες, μαθηται, and κλεψωσιν) occur frequently in Matt's Gospel, but not in Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel* (with the exception of one occurrence of the conjunction μηποτε in 5:15; μαθητης occurs once, in *Gospel of Peter* 14:59, but this falls outside of Crossan's original *Cross Gospel*). The linguistic evidence thus suggests that the terms are common to Matthew but not to the author of the *Gospel of Peter*. If there is literary dependence of one upon the other, then it is much more likely that the author of the *Gospel of Peter* had access to the Gospel of Matthew, and imported unique Matthaean constructions into his work.

Sixth, the *Gospel of Peter* demonstrates ignorance of the historical context of first-century Palestine:

GP has no problem attributing to Herod a kingly role in Jerusalem, so that Pilate has to make requests of him . . . Could a story like that have developed in Palestine while there were still Roman governors with political authority over Judea? . . . GP 8.31-34 seems to have no problem in placing elders and scribes and the crowd from Jerusalem at a sepulchre on the Sabbath [in violation of Jewish sabbath laws]. . . . Does the failure of GP to mention the high priest(s), so prominent in the canonical accounts of Jesus' trial, mean that the GP author no longer knew how that figure functioned before the destruction of the Temple? Does the reference to 'the twelve disciples of the Lord' after the resurrection (14.59) mean that the GP author did not know the Judas story?<sup>283</sup>

The historical anachronisms in the *Gospel of Peter* strongly suggest that its author was not writing from a first-century Jewish context. Crossan readily admits the "historical implausibilities" and "factual verisimilitude," but argues that they are present because "the depths of theology quite properly override the surface of history."<sup>284</sup>

Finally, the *Gospel of Peter* 9:35 refers to the day of Jesus' resurrection as "the Lord's day." The identification of the "Lord's day" reflects later Christian terminology: the canonical Gospels consistently refer to the "first day of the week."<sup>285</sup> The first-century church continued to identify with the Jewish week, emphasizing the Sabbath as

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<sup>283</sup>Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," 338.

<sup>284</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 97.

<sup>285</sup>Matt 28:1 reads, "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the *first day of the week*, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb." Mark 16:1-2 reads, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the *first day of the week*, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb." Luke 24:1 reads, "On the *first day of the week*, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb." John 20:1 and 19 read, "Early on the *first day of the week*, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. . . . On the evening of that *first day of the week*, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" If all four canonical Gospel authors had access to the *Gospel of Peter*, it is unlikely they would each have rejected *Peter's* identification of the "Lord's day" in favor of "the first day of the week."

the end of the week, and the resurrection occurring the first day of the following week.<sup>286</sup>

It is not until the end of the first century that Christians begin referring to the day of Jesus' resurrection as "the Lord's day" instead of "the first day of the week."<sup>287</sup> As the *Gospel of Peter* 9:35 occurs within Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel*, Crossan cannot coherently argue that it reflects a later gloss or interpolation. Rather, it is evidence that the *Gospel of Peter* is in its entirety a later Christian composition.

The combination of these arguments render Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel* highly implausible. Raymond Brown argues that rather than representing the original passion-resurrection narrative, the *Gospel of Peter* is instead the result of oral tradition and memory.

If I am right, it is another window into popular Christianity of the first half of the second century, where Jesus was honoured as Lord, where church life included the Lord's day and fasting, where there was a knowledge of canonical Gospels (esp. Matthew), even if that knowledge rested on having heard or once having read them, but where now they had been blended into a confused but vivacious story—one made all the more vivid by the inclusion of imaginative details and popular traditions.<sup>288</sup>

Crossan rejects Brown's conclusion, insisting, "I still prefer my explanation because, to put it bluntly, the memory of the Gospel of Peter's author as imagined by Brown seems to me unique in all the world. . . . I cannot . . . fathom Peter's memory as proposed by Brown."<sup>289</sup> One does not, however, need to accept Brown's hypothesis in

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<sup>286</sup>See also Acts 20:7, which reads, "On the *first day of the week* we came together to break bread"; and 1 Cor 16:2, which says, "On the *first day of every week*, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income."

<sup>287</sup>As evidenced in Rev 1:10, the *Didache* 14:1, and Ignatius' *Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1. See Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter," 113-14; and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 594.

<sup>288</sup>Brown, "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," 339.

<sup>289</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 139.

order to reject Crossan's own fatally flawed hypothesis.<sup>290</sup> One can and ought to note the devastating critique which has been leveled against the very existence of the *Cross Gospel*, and acknowledge the dependence of the canonical gospels upon material now embedded within the *Gospel of Peter*.

From the internal evidence, then, Crossan's postulated *Cross Gospel* as the sole passion-resurrection source is suspect. Nonetheless, Crossan argues strenuously for its existence, independence, and earliness: "The existence of the *Cross Gospel* is as good a hypothesis as is the existence of Q. There are good objections to both, *but they become convincing because the alternatives have much more serious objections against them.*"<sup>291</sup>

The final blow to Crossan's hypothesis is the lack of manuscript evidence for the existence of the *Cross Gospel* in the first place. The manuscript evidence for the *Gospel of Peter* itself is relatively weak, notwithstanding Crossan's protestations to the contrary.<sup>292</sup> It is highly imaginative but equally implausible to use two fragmentary texts which can only tentatively be identified as belonging to the same text to begin with to suggest not only that the *Gospel of Peter*'s manuscript evidence is as strong as that for the

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<sup>290</sup>Indeed, one could instead accept the reconstruction offered by Charles Quarles, that the *Gospel of Peter* reflects an elaboration and revision of the passion and resurrection of Christ, based primarily on the Gospel of Matthew. See Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter," 118-19.

<sup>291</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 404. Emphasis original.

<sup>292</sup>Craig Evans raises the interesting possibility that the manuscript evidence we possess is not even *The Gospel of Peter*. We know that *Peter* was in circulation because the gospel is mentioned by Bishop Serapion. The fragments are only identified as the *Gospel of Peter* because the eighth century fragment was found alongside a fragment of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Evans argues that the fragments may not be from the *Gospel of Peter* at all, but rather from some other, and even later, apocryphal Gospel. "The extant Akhmim fragment does not identify itself, nor do we have a patristic quotation of the *Gospel of Peter* to compare it to and possibly settle the questions. Nor is the Akhmim fragment docetic, as many asserted shortly after its publication. If the fragment is not docetic, then the proposed identification of the fragment with the *Gospel of Peter* is weakened still further. . . . the connection between the Akhmim Gospel fragment and the small papyrus fragments that may date as early as 200-250 is quite tenuous. Thus we have no solid evidence that allows us with any confidence to link the extant Akhmim Gospel fragment with a second-century text, whether the *Gospel of Peter* mentioned by Bishop Serapion or some other writing from the late second century." Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 85.

canonical Gospels,<sup>293</sup> but furthermore that *Peter* contains an even earlier source, the *Cross Gospel*, from which the *Gospel of Peter* and the canonical Gospels alike derived their passion-resurrection narratives. The conclusion of most biblical scholars—namely, that the *Gospel of Peter* is a derivative of the canonical Gospels, in particular Matthew, and that there is no such thing as *The Cross Gospel*—seems to be correct. O’Collins and Kendall conclude,

Apart from one or two sympathetic reactions, scholars generally have remained quite unconvinced by Crossan’s 1988 lengthy and tortuous attempt to rehabilitate the *Gospel of Peter* and claim that its core (his ‘Cross Gospel’) served as the sole source for Mark’s story of the passion and resurrection. . . . As regards the passion narrative, our earliest source remains Mark’s gospel.<sup>294</sup>

Similarly, N. T. Wright states,

[The *Cross Gospel*’s] very existence as a separate document has not been accepted yet by any other serious scholar, and its suggested date and provenance are purely imaginary. . . . Like so many of the judgments made in the inventory [appendix 1 of *The Historical Jesus*], this one depends wholly on Crossan’s prior convictions both about Jesus himself and about the nature of early Christianity.<sup>295</sup>

Some biblical scholars agree with Crossan that there may be a primitive passion-resurrection narrative from which the canonical Gospels draw, in much the same way that Matthew and Luke draw from *Q*.<sup>296</sup> Nonetheless, the suggestion that *Peter* contains the primitive core of such a passion-resurrection source has not garnered any

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<sup>293</sup>Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke*, 9.

<sup>294</sup>Gerald O’Collins and Daniel Kendall, “Did Joseph of Arimathea Exist?” *Biblica* 75 (1994): 237-38. O’Collins and Kendall cite reviews by C. C. Black II, *Journal of Religion* 69 (1989): 398-99; Reginald H. Fuller, *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 71-72; Joel B. Green, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 356-58; F. J. Matera, *Worship* 63 (1989): 269-70; John P. Meier, *Horizons* 16 (1989): 378-79; and Walter Wink, *Christian Century* 105 (1988): 1159-60; which “were little less than devastating in demolishing Crossan’s case for an early date for the core of *The Gospel of Peter* and a literary dependence from it on the part of Mark and other canonical gospels.” O’Collins and Kendall, “Did Joseph of Arimathea Exist,” 238. See also Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 339.

<sup>295</sup>Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 48-49.

<sup>296</sup>E.g., Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 326.



significant scholarly support. Despite Crossan's arguments, there is no good reason to accept the existence of his hypothesized *Cross Gospel*, nor to believe that the *Gospel of Peter* contains the earliest (and only) passion-resurrection narrative.

It is good to remember Crossan's acknowledgment that "conclusions and decisions about the historical Jesus are built, *by everyone*, atop their presuppositions about the gospels. Mistakes about foundations can bring superstructures tumbling down either partially or totally."<sup>297</sup> Crossan's reconstruction of the historical Jesus, particularly the crucifixion and resurrection, leans heavily on his hypothesized *Cross Gospel*. If this material investment is indeed fundamentally wrong, what are the implications for Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection?

**The Gospel of Mark: Date, purpose, and freedom.** Crossan's material investments in the Gospel of Mark are crucial to his reconstruction of the historical Jesus, especially his resurrection. Our previous examination of the *Cross Gospel* and *Secret Mark* has a bearing upon the discussion here, and should be kept in mind. In addition to those material investments, Crossan argues that the canonical Gospels, including Mark, were written not by eyewitnesses but rather "by anonymous authors, none of whom knew Jesus personally."<sup>298</sup> Mark was written around 70 A.D.,<sup>299</sup> but not as Peter's recollections. Rather, Mark the evangelist writes from a rural Galilean Christian

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<sup>297</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 96. Emphasis original.

<sup>298</sup>"The canonical stories are all by anonymous authors, *none of whom knew Jesus personally* but all of whom wrote before the end of the first century." Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 20-21. Emphasis added. For a strong statement of the contrary viewpoint, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006). Bauckham concludes, "The Gospels put us in close touch with the eyewitnesses of the history of Jesus. The Gospel writers, in their different ways, present their Gospels as based on and incorporating the testimony of the eyewitnesses." Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 472.

<sup>299</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 430

perspective *against* the theology and practice of the mother Church in Jerusalem led by the apostles, particularly Peter.<sup>300</sup>

I accept the general hypothesis that M[ar]k created the genre Gospel, and thereby created Gospel as we know it, as an intra-Christian polemic against theological opponents characterized by (1) interest in miracles and apparitions rather than in suffering and service; (2) very little sympathy with the Gentile mission especially insofar as this questioned the validity of the Law; (3) an appeal to the authority of the Jerusalem mother Church, based both on the family of Jesus and on the original disciples of Jesus: the twelve, the inner three, and Peter in particular.<sup>301</sup>

Furthermore, Crossan holds that Mark, like all Gospels, contains three textual layers, which represent a) original historical Jesus material; b) accumulation of early Christian tradition; and c) redactional and editorial additions of Mark the evangelist. For Crossan, the successive layers are not attempts to accurately convey and apply the teaching and deeds of the historical Jesus; rather, they are creative adaptations.<sup>302</sup> Essentially, Mark “believed in the historical Jesus so much that [he] kept creating more and more of him out of biblical type and prophetic text.”<sup>303</sup> Mark wrote with great narrative creativity,<sup>304</sup> freely adapting his oral and written sources including, in Crossan’s

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<sup>300</sup>“The villains of Markan theology are not just the disciples in general but the inner three, Peter, James and John in particular.” John Dominic Crossan, “The Relatives of Jesus in Mark,” in *The Composition of Mark’s Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum*, Brill’s Readers in Biblical Studies, vol. 3, ed. David E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 82. Crossan rejects the traditional understanding that Mark records Peter’s self-critical recollections. The usual theory holds that Peter was ashamed of his failures, and records them (through Mark) despite their embarrassing nature. Crossan never explains how Mark came to be understood as Peter’s remembrances if its original purpose was anti-Petrine. Nor does he explain why Luke and Matthew, who wrote with the approval of the Petrine Church, would have used such an antagonistic gospel as a source for their own writing.

<sup>301</sup>Crossan, “Empty Tomb and Absent Lord (Mark 16:1-8),” 146.

<sup>302</sup>“There is a degree of creativity in all of those layers . . . the tradition . . . took and creatively adapted the sayings and works of Jesus.” Crossan, “Opening Statement,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 34. See also Crossan, *Jesus*, xiii; Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 6-7.

<sup>303</sup>Crossan, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” 20.

<sup>304</sup>“The [historical-critical] methodology [which Crossan inherits and applies] . . . grant[s] the constant creative reinterpretation of the Jesus tradition which lies behind our gospels.” Crossan, “Parable as Religious and Poetic Experience,” 330.

estimation, the *Cross Gospel* and *Secret Mark*. Accordingly, Mark's portrait of Jesus of Nazareth is of questionable value historically; the biblical scholar has to peel away the layers of ecclesiastic accretions and Markan additions in order to secure the historical kernel of the person and work of Jesus.<sup>305</sup>

Mark's narrative creativity is particularly significant when it comes to the burial and resurrection of Jesus. Crossan holds that the Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea is a Markan invention, devised to avoid the embarrassment of having Jesus unceremoniously buried by his enemies or, even worse, not buried at all, but rather left for the scavengers to devour.<sup>306</sup>

He created and sent to Pilate, in 15:43, one 'Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God.' That is a perfect in-between figure, at once within the Jewish leadership elite as 'respected' and still connected to Jesus as 'looking'. Need I say that Mark's naming him renders him more not less suspect as an historical figure in my eyes?<sup>307</sup>

Initially, Crossan's suggestion that "Mark's naming [Joseph] renders him more not less suspect" is counter-intuitive. At this point, however, Crossan's earlier work in literary criticism comes into play. In his 1976 *Raid on the Articulate*, Crossan relates a dialogue between the novelist Jorge Luis Borges and a Spanish journalist regarding Borges' 1945 novel, *The Aleph*:

The journalist: 'Ah, . . . so the entire thing is your own invention. I thought it was true because you gave the name of the street.' And Borges: 'I did not dare tell him that the naming of streets is not much of a feat.' . . . The naming of streets, or towns,

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<sup>305</sup>Crossan inherits, apparently unquestioningly, the heritage of German biblical criticism, particularly since William Wrede. Wrede argued that "both Mark's framework and much of its detail derives not from reliable traditions about Jesus, but from fabrications fed by post-Easter theological reflection of the early church." Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

<sup>306</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 554; idem, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," 135-37.

<sup>307</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 393.

or cities, or battles, or kings, or whatever else history can verify, is not much of a feat.<sup>308</sup>

If it is relatively simple for a novelist to create names and other incidental details to flesh out their fictional narrative, Crossan argues that it was likewise easy for Mark the Evangelist to create the details necessary to flesh out his story—including, of course, the name and hometown of Jesus' fictional undertaker.

Crossan suggests that Mark's fictional narrative extends further. If there is no burial, then of course there is no discovery of an empty tomb, either—that too is a Markan invention. Here, the theological purpose of Mark comes into play. Crossan argues that Mark's purpose is to oppose the ministry and mandate of the Jerusalem church headed by Peter. Mark was aware of the reports circulating that the risen Jesus had appeared to Peter and the other apostles. Crossan argues, "it was precisely to avoid and to oppose any such apparitions to Peter or the Apostles that he created most deliberately a totally new tradition, that of E[mpty] T[omb]."<sup>309</sup>

In other words, the tradition of resurrection appearances predates Mark, but the tradition of the Empty Tomb does not. Mark creates the Easter Sunday narrative, but pointedly refuses to recount any resurrection appearances of Jesus to the apostles. Instead, the Gospel ends, deliberately, with the failure of the female disciples to communicate the message they receive concerning the risen Lord. According to Crossan, "the Jerusalem community led by the disciples and especially Peter, has never accepted the call of the exalted Lord communicated to it from the M[ar]kan community. The

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<sup>308</sup>Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate*, 45.

<sup>309</sup>Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," 146.

Gospel ends in a juxtaposition of M[ar]kan faith in 16:6-7 and of Jerusalem failure in 16:7-8.”<sup>310</sup>

Crossan’s material investments in the Gospel of Mark are numerous, complex, and interrelated.<sup>311</sup> The material investment that Mark is not an associate of Peter, but rather an opponent, becomes a key to the later argument that Mark freely invents people and events in order to oppose the theology of the Petrine-led church in Jerusalem. The question is whether Mark is better compared to an historian or a novelist. If Mark is an historian in any sense, then creating names of people and places is out of the question; if Mark is instead a novelist of sorts, then it is perfectly plausible that he would invent Joseph of Arimathea. But do we have good reason for believing that Mark is more novelist than historian? Crossan thinks so.

Crossan claims to have discovered two empirical cases which demonstrate how Mark radically alters his sources. The first is the retrojection of the *Cross Gospel*’s resurrection scene; the second is the dismemberment and scattering of *Secret Mark*. If authentic, those two empirical examples would indeed demonstrate significant editorial freedom on Mark’s part. As shown in this chapter, however, there are good reasons to conclude that neither the *Cross Gospel* nor *Secret Mark* is a real document—one is a

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<sup>310</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>311</sup>(1) Mark is written around 70 A.D. (2) Mark is not an eyewitness to the events he narrates. (3) Mark is not an associate of Peter, but rather a staunch theological and ecclesiological opponent. (4) Mark rejects the tradition of resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. (5) Mark creates gospel material freely and frequently in order to suit his theological and ecclesiological purposes. (6) Mark uses the *Cross Gospel* as his sole passion-resurrection source, but radically alters its resurrection scene. (7) Mark originally produces a longer version of his Gospel, *Secret Mark*. He later removes an offending passage, scattering the literary remains throughout the rest of his Gospel. (8) In conclusion, Mark plays fast and loose with his source material, changing it radically at will.

literary conjecture,<sup>312</sup> the other probably an academic forgery. Without these two empirical cases, Crossan's assertion that Mark played fast and loose with his sources is simply a naked assertion with no empirical basis. Crossan can still argue for Mark's editorial creativity, but his empirical foundation has been eradicated.<sup>313</sup>

Crossan's material investments regarding Mark the Evangelist can also be challenged on other grounds. Crossan holds that Mark was intentionally opposing the authority of the apostle Peter in his Gospel. Church tradition and history teaches instead that Mark was essentially Peter's scribe. Eusebius quotes the church father Papias, who wrote about 110 A.D.,<sup>314</sup> on the source of Mark's Gospel,

. . . Mark being the interpreter of Peter whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy but not however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses; . . . he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by any thing that he heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts.<sup>315</sup>

Papias provides the earliest testimony to the identity of Mark as the author of the Gospel, and his relationship with the chief apostle, Peter. Richard Bauckham argues further that Mark's Gospel demonstrates on internal grounds an intimate relationship with the apostle Peter, and tends to relate stories from Peter's perspective.<sup>316</sup> After Papias, Christian testimony is unanimous in ascribing authorship of our earliest canonical Gospel

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<sup>312</sup>Indeed, the *Cross Gospel* hypothesis supports Crossan's contention that it is relatively easy to create names for people, or documents, that do not exist, if one is interested in writing fiction.

<sup>313</sup>Rejecting Crossan's material investment concerning Mark's editorial creativity does not imply rejecting the prior material investment that there are three layers within Mark's Gospel—an original core representing the words and deeds of Jesus, additions representing the reflections or interpretations of early Christians, and further emphases or pericopes bringing Mark's distinct perspective to bear.

<sup>314</sup>See, e.g., Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 14. Papias' testimony could come as late as 130 A.D., but could be as early as the 90s.

<sup>315</sup>Papias, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15.

to Mark the interpreter or scribal associate of Peter.<sup>317</sup> Even Crossan's cherished *Secret Mark* associates Mark the Evangelist with the Apostle Peter.<sup>318</sup> Why does Crossan accept the authenticity of *Secret Mark* regarding the contents of an expanded spiritual version of Mark's Gospel, but reject its testimony concerning Petrine association?

There is simply no compelling reason to reject the traditional association of Mark's Gospel with the testimony of the Apostle Peter.<sup>319</sup> Furthermore, one must ask whether Crossan's vision of Mark the evangelist satisfactorily accounts for later developments in the early Church. Crossan never explains how the Gospel of Mark came to be understood as Peter's remembrances if its original purpose was anti-Petrine. If Mark writes *against* the mission and authority of the Peter-led Church in Jerusalem, how did the early Christian Church, within a generation of Mark's writing, come to accept his gospel as Peter's account of the life and ministry of Jesus? Crossan never offers an explanation. Why would Luke and Matthew, who write with the approval of the Petrine Church, have used such an antagonistic gospel as a source? Crossan never provides an

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<sup>316</sup>Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 155-82, 202-04.

<sup>317</sup>"The report that Mark took notes from Peter and composed the Gospel that bears his name is subsequently confirmed by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria. . . . What are we to make of these testimonies? In our opinion, they are quite significant. What is most impressive about them, we believe, is that we have no record of anyone disputing them. Christians in the second and third centuries questioned the authorship of *other* works, but never *these*." Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 94-95.

<sup>318</sup>Part of the 'Clementine' letter reads, "As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge." Quoted in Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 446.

<sup>319</sup>Note that Mark's association with Peter does not make Mark an eyewitness to the events he relates; nor does it commit one to accepting an early date (ca. 50s A.D.) for Mark's Gospel.

answer. The testimony and evidence we have from the early church is unanimous that Mark writes *with*, not *against*, Petrine authority.

Only if one embraces the material investment that Mark writes to oppose Petrine authority is there persuasive cause to reject Mark's association with Peter; the problem is that the latter material investment is necessary to facilitate the former.<sup>320</sup>

Crossan is stuck, once again, with the circular reinforcement of his material investments in the gospel materials.<sup>321</sup>

### **Crossan's Material Investments and the Myth of the Metaphorical Resurrection**

Crossan insists upon the centrality of material investments in the Gospels.

I have learned these presuppositions from scholarly tradition, have studied them internally, have tested them externally, and have found them consistently more persuasive than their alternatives. But if they are wrong, then everything based on them is questionable; and if they are *proved* wrong, then everything based on them will have to be redone.<sup>322</sup>

As shown above, some of Crossan's material investments in canonical and extracanonical Gospels are in fact wrong. Does that mean that his reconstruction of Jesus, including Jesus' resurrection, has "to be redone"? In his reflection upon Crossan's 1996 debate with William Lane Craig, Marcus Borg argues that Crossan can sacrifice

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<sup>320</sup>Crossan notes two possible interpretations of Mark's generally negative portrayal of the disciples. "One interpretation is that Mark has those closest to Jesus fail him dismally *back then* in order to reassure those who have themselves failed him under persecution *just now*. Another one, probably more likely, is that he is opposing certain viewpoints advocated in the name of Peter, the Three, and the Twelve within Christian communities he wishes to criticize or oppose." Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 18. Crossan does not indicate *why* he judges his interpretation more likely; in particular, he gives no reason to discount the unanimous testimony of church history regarding Mark's association with Peter.

<sup>321</sup>For more detailed argument concerning the association of Mark's Gospel with Peter, and the general reliability of Mark, consult Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (esp. 12-38, 114-239).

<sup>322</sup>Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 109. Emphasis original.



*Secret Mark* and even the *Cross Gospel* without affecting his metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection.

I wish to set aside what seems to be an irrelevancy. Namely, William Craig places considerable importance on two challenges to John Dominic Crossan's work: he challenges (1) Crossan's argument that the Gospel of Peter contains very early material and (2) Crossan's acceptance of an early *Secret Gospel of Mark*. . . . But these two challenges are irrelevant to the central issue of the debate. Crossan could be wrong about both, and it would make no important difference. Many scholars who are not persuaded by Crossan on either of these points nevertheless hold a position on the resurrection similar to Crossan's.<sup>323</sup>

In other words, even if *Secret Mark* is an academic forgery and the *Cross Gospel* does not exist, Crossan's reconstruction of the resurrection still stands intact. Which is correct: Crossan's argument that if his material investments are wrong, the scholarly reconstruction based upon them will have to be redone, or Borg's contention that one can reject some of Crossan's key material investments without rejecting his conclusions concerning the resurrection?

In a sense they are both correct. On the one hand, it is essential to note the centrality of Crossan's material investments to his scholarly reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth. For example, if one rejects his material investment in the reconstruction of *Q*'s text *and* the speculative recovery of its redactional layers, then it is almost necessary to reject his conclusion that *Q* presents a non-apocalyptic Jesus who never referred to himself as the coming Son of Man. If one holds instead that *Q* has only one layer, which represents an early core of Jesus tradition, it is natural to conclude that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who identified himself as the unique Son of Man.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup>Marcus Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb," in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 117-18. Borg himself is one such scholar.

<sup>324</sup>Such a view would not commit one to believing that Jesus was *correct* in his self-understanding. Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was thoroughly apocalyptic, and saw himself as the coming

Similarly, one's material investments in the dates and dependence of Jesus material exerts considerable influence upon one's scholarly reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth. If, like Crossan, one holds non-canonical Gospel material (*Thomas*, *Q*, *Cross Gospel*, *Egerton*) to be earlier than and independent of the canonical tradition, the resulting picture of Jesus will be strongly influenced by motifs not traditionally part of orthodox Christianity.<sup>325</sup> Alternatively, if one holds *Q* to be only hypothetical and not recoverable, *Thomas* to be late second-century, the *Cross Gospel* to be imaginary, *Secret Mark* to be either fraudulent or a later expansion, and fragments like *Egerton* to be canonically-dependent, the resulting reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth will predominantly be a reflection upon the canonical Gospels. Material investments in the Gospels exert powerful influence upon one's conclusions regarding the historical Jesus.

On the other hand, material investments in the Gospels are not the central investments that determine one's view of Jesus' resurrection. Borg argues,

Let me now turn to the central issues. Most central is the question, 'What is meant by the resurrection of Jesus?' Was it physical, whatever more it might also be? *Did something miraculous happen* to the corpse of Jesus? Does affirming the resurrection of Jesus intrinsically involve saying, 'The tomb was really empty'?<sup>326</sup>

Borg is probing closer to the center of the issue. The crux is not whether Crossan's material investments in the *Cross Gospel* and *Secret Mark* are correct (although there *are* consequences for Crossan's scholarly project if those material investments are in fact wrong). Rather, the crux is the theological worldview which undergirds material investments in the Jesus tradition. Crossan hints at this in reflecting

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Son of Man, but was tragically wrong in his expectations that he could somehow affect the grinding wheels of history.

<sup>325</sup>Likewise, themes and doctrines traditionally central to Christianity will be downplayed.

<sup>326</sup>Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb," 118. Emphasis added.

upon his debate with Craig: “I wanted to get down to the theological-historical interface where divergent presuppositions will necessarily involve surface disagreements.”<sup>327</sup>

Unfortunately, Crossan does not pursue the actual theological presuppositions which divide him and Craig; rather, he considers only their perspectives on what the canonical Gospels are and claim to be.<sup>328</sup>

William Lane Craig, in his own reflection upon their 1996 debate, penetrates to the heart of the matter:

As for Dr. Crossan’s presuppositions [i.e., material investments in the Gospels], again, remarkably, in tonight’s debate he hasn’t tried to defend any of them: (1) the priority of the Gospel of Peter, (2) the Secret Gospel of Mark, (3) the inventive community of early Christians. All he said is that he’s not a naturalist. Yet he does insist that the supernatural acts only through the natural. That would exclude a priori an event like the resurrection because there is no natural means by which an event like the resurrection could have been brought about. It was painfully obvious in the dialogue time that there is no evidence that could convince Dr. Crossan of the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, for he rules it out of court a priori.<sup>329</sup>

What truly separates Crossan and Craig in their assessment of Jesus’ resurrection? Crossan is right that it is not “surface disagreements.”<sup>330</sup> Rather, the chasm between them is the result of vastly different theological presuppositions. Recall, from chapter 3, three of Crossan’s core worldview presuppositions. First, major world religions are equally valid historically- and culturally-conditioned human responses to the sublime mystery of Ultimate Reality. Second, human life ceases absolutely at death—there is no possibility of life after death. Third, the supernatural (Ultimate Reality/God)

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<sup>327</sup>Crossan, “Reflections on a Debate,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 148.

<sup>328</sup>*Ibid.*, 148-49.

<sup>329</sup>William Lane Craig, “Closing Statement,” in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 69.

<sup>330</sup>Unfortunately, Crossan incorrectly considers the “surface disagreement” to concern simply the *mode* of Jesus’ resurrection—whether it is literal (Craig) or metaphorical (Crossan). The same misplaced emphasis arises in his 2005 dialogue with N. T. Wright.

does not interact directly or causally in the physical universe; rather, the world is a closed, though not fully-understood, system of natural cause-and-effect. Crossan thus considers a miraculous event like the literal physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ to be an historical impossibility. Craig, on the other hand, embraces a traditional theistic worldview wherein such a miracle is considered uncommon, but possible.

**Presuppositions and material investments.** How do divergent theological presuppositions affect material investments in the canonical and extra-canonical Gospels? On the one hand, there is no direct connection between Crossan's theological worldview and the material investments he makes. As Borg notes, one can hold the same fundamental worldview presuppositions yet reject Crossan's material investments in *Secret Mark* and the *Cross Gospel*.

Nonetheless, there is an *indirect* influence exerted by theological presuppositions upon material investments. Crossan's worldview rules out certain scholarly judgments about the canonical Gospels. Given his theological commitment to human extinction at death, Crossan is bound to reject the conclusion that Jesus' physical body was miraculously raised from the dead to a new glorified bodily existence.<sup>331</sup> Traditionally, the New Testament Gospels have been understood by Christians to be historically-reliable documents narrating the events of Jesus' life and death. When it comes to the resurrection, those Gospels have been perceived as presenting an account of a supernatural event whereby God raised Jesus back to life. The resurrected Jesus then appeared to his astonished disciples in Jerusalem and then in Galilee, demonstrating his

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<sup>331</sup>When Crossan insists that we need to treat pagan narratives (of miraculous divine conceptions and gods rising from the dead) with the same seriousness that we treat "our" Christian stories (the virgin birth and resurrection), he is not pleading that we take both sets literally.

corporeality<sup>332</sup> and authority. Such a reading is ruled out by Crossan's worldview presuppositions. Thus, he is driven inexorably to make alternative material investments in the canonical Gospels. There are numerous possible alternative material investments, as evidenced by critical scholarship over the past three centuries. In each case, however, the conclusion is inevitably that the canonical resurrection accounts are unhistorical.

Crossan could, with Reimarus, argue that the canonical Gospels are intentionally dishonest attempts by the apostles to subvert the naturalistic religion preached by Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>333</sup> The resurrection, accordingly, is a fraud perpetrated *by* the disciples *upon* unwittingly followers, and the canonical Gospels are the literary products of *deceivers*. The Gospels clearly present an unapologetically bodily resurrection, but it is a false story.

Crossan could instead, with Bahrtdt and Venturini, explain the resurrection naturalistically—Jesus was revived in the tomb and thereafter presented himself as the risen Lord to the deceived disciples.<sup>334</sup> The resurrection would still be seen as a fraud, but this time perpetrated *by* Jesus (and his secret handlers, according to Venturini) *upon* the disciples. In this case, the canonical Gospels are the works of the *deceived*. Again, the Gospels present a bodily resurrection, but it is a false narrative.

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<sup>332</sup>What N. T. Wright helpfully terms Jesus' post-resurrection "trans-physicality." Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 477-78, 606-07, 612, 678-79. "Transphysical is not meant to describe in detail what sort of a body it was that the early Christians supposed Jesus already had, and believed that they themselves would eventually have. Nor indeed does it claim to explain how such a thing can come to be. It merely, but I hope usefully, puts a label on the demonstrable fact that the early Christians envisaged a body which was still robustly physical but also significantly different from the present one." Ibid., 477-78.

<sup>333</sup>Henri Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 151

<sup>334</sup>Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought 1778-1860*, Studies in Historical Theology 1 (Durham: Labyrinth, 1985), 163; Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 44-57.

Instead, Crossan follows the trail blazed by David Strauss, arguing that the canonical Gospels bear the hallmarks of ancient myth, and the resurrection accounts should not be read literally in the first place.<sup>335</sup> The end result is the same—the canonical Gospels do not contain an historical narrative of a bodily resurrection. But the means of getting there, the material investments in canonical Gospels, is different.

Furthermore, Crossan's presupposition of religious pluralism leads him toward embracing the equal validity of intra- and extra-canonical sources for the Jesus tradition. It emphatically *does not* predetermine Crossan's material investments in various Jesus sources; however, it tends toward granting extra-canonical documents more credence than has historically been granted them.<sup>336</sup>

**Presuppositions and relative plausibility.** In the early and mid-1990s, John Dominic Crossan and Raymond Brown engaged in a spirited debate about the origins of the *Gospel of Peter*. Crossan proposes that the *Gospel of Peter* contains an older core, the *Cross Gospel*, which is the single source for the canonical passion-resurrection narrative. The canonical authors used the *Cross Gospel* (the latter three evangelists also used Mark's Gospel), using some elements but leaving others out. Brown responds that Crossan's reconstruction is highly implausible: "It is most unlikely that such exclusive

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<sup>335</sup>See, e.g., Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 78-120; also Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God*, 27-29.

<sup>336</sup>N. T. Wright notes that Crossan's hermeneutic of suspicion with regards to the canonical texts is "balanced by a hermeneutic of credulity" in other areas, including his approach to extracanonical sources and his reconstruction of the growth of the early Christian Church. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 20. In a review of Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity*, Wright asks, "Granted that Crossan has taught us to be sceptical of so many texts and their reconstructions, why, once he has swept away common-sense understandings, should we believe his alternative, highly complex story? Why should we suddenly abandon scepticism and embrace historical credulity?" N. T. Wright, "A New Birth? An Article Review of John Dominic Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000): 80.

selectivity could have taken place if independently Matthew, Luke and John used [the *Gospel of Peter*].” It is much more plausible, Brown argues, to hold that the author of *Peter* “combined details from the canonical Gospels, taking the washing of hands from Matt[hew], the penitent wrongdoer from Luke, etc.”<sup>337</sup> Crossan retorts that he cannot fathom the type of memory and imagination that Brown envisions in the *Gospel of Peter*’s author using random pieces of canonical passion-resurrection material in a pastiche.<sup>338</sup> Crossan concludes,

I insist, however, as noted earlier, that a theory need not be perfect but simply better than its alternatives. You will have to *judge for yourself* whether Peter is best explained as a medley of canonical and noncanonical gospels filtered through memory or as the original passion-resurrection narrative used by the New Testament gospels.<sup>339</sup>

Crossan and Brown disagree about relative plausibilities. Is it more plausible that the *Gospel of Peter* contains the original passion-resurrection narrative, which was then used by the canonical authors? Or is it more plausible that the *Gospel of Peter* represents a pastiche of orally-recalled and popularly-embellished elements from the canonical passion-resurrection narratives? The relative plausibility of the alternatives is adjudicated, in partial measure, based upon how each fits with one’s existing theological presuppositions and conclusions.

In the case of the *Gospel of Peter*, the alternatives have different standings within Crossan’s overall worldview. Granted his perspective on the dating and narrative creativity of Mark the evangelist, he is predisposed to the possibility that Mark had access to the *Cross Gospel* and radically recast central elements within it. Similarly, the

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<sup>337</sup>Brown, “The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

<sup>338</sup>See, e.g., Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, 484-86.

<sup>339</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 31. Emphasis added.

alternatives have different standings within my own overall worldview. Given my rejection of Crossan's material investments concerning the Gospel of Mark, and my informed decision that Mark intends to be faithful to the substance of inherited Jesus tradition, I am predisposed to view the *Gospel of Peter* as an imaginative pastiche of the author's recollection of oral canonical tradition.

Crossan frequently asks his readers to temporarily forget everything they have previously learned, thought, or known about the events of Easter, and approach his presentation of the data with an open mind and no preconceived notions.<sup>340</sup> In essence, Crossan is asking his readers to suspend their theological presuppositions, their previous conclusions regarding the resurrection, and instead approach the data of Easter as presented by Crossan with a fresh perspective. But Crossan himself has not done what he asks his readers to do. That is, Crossan has not approached the Jesus source materials willing to be convinced that Jesus was literally raised from the dead as an historical event. Crossan's inability to consider the historical evidence with a mind free from naturalistic presuppositions can be demonstrated through three examples.

First, Crossan's 1996 debate with William Lane Craig exposed his unwillingness to consider the traditional conception of Jesus' resurrection as a live option. Craig asks what type and amount of evidence it would take to convince Crossan that Jesus was raised bodily (literally) from the dead. Crossan responds, "It's a theological presupposition of mine that God does not operate that way. . . . What would it

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<sup>340</sup>"I maintain that Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. What we have now in those detailed passion accounts is not history remembered but prophecy historicized. . . . In testing this hypothesis, *forget all you 'know'* about Easter Sunday from accounts written in our Gospels between forty and sixty years after the event. Bracket even what you know from 1 Corinthians 15 written twenty years after the event." Crossan, "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity," 16. Emphasis added.



take to prove to me what you ask? I don't know, unless God changes the universe."<sup>341</sup>

Crossan is simply unable and/or unwilling to consider the evidence with a truly open mind. His worldview presuppositions have already rendered the orthodox understanding of Jesus' resurrection unacceptable.

Second, Crossan is asked whether his worldview presupposition of divine consistency is "a prejudice against miracles that invalidates your reading of gospel claims about Jesus?" Crossan simply acknowledges that "everyone draws a line of credibility somewhere."<sup>342</sup> The Gospel miracles, including the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, fall outside the bounds of plausibility; Crossan considers them simply in-credible. He never seeks to set aside that presupposition when considering the historical evidence; rather, he reads the historical evidence through the lens of his theological presuppositions.

Third, Raymond Brown insists that the biblical scholar needs to allow historicity to be "determined not by what we think possible or likely, but by the antiquity and reliability of the evidence."<sup>343</sup> Brown is appealing for fellow historical Jesus scholars to be open to acknowledging the historical veracity of miracles related in the canonical Gospels. Crossan, having embraced a Humean worldview which denies the possibility of supernatural intervention in the physical universe, rejects Brown's appeal: "In *public* discourse . . . possibility and likelihood are also factors. If not, how could we distinguish history from fiction in accounts of an execution in Jerusalem in the first century or an

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<sup>341</sup>Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 61-62.

<sup>342</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 76.

<sup>343</sup>Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. 2 of *A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1468.

assassination in Dallas in the twentieth.”<sup>344</sup> Within Crossan’s theological worldview, miraculous healings (of diseases, not just social symptoms) are ruled out *a priori*. Crossan does not set aside his own worldview presuppositions in his historical Jesus research in order to determine whether the historical evidence shows that Jesus truly healed people. He presupposes that Jesus could not have done so.

If Crossan does not (or cannot) set aside his own presuppositions in his consideration of the ancient textual evidence, why should his audience do so at Crossan’s request? In his doctoral dissertation and resulting book, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, Michael Licona outlines a rigorous six-fold methodology which seeks to set aside a scholar’s worldview presuppositions (which Licona terms part of his/her “horizon”) before considering the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>345</sup> Two of Licona’s guidelines in particular are helpful and applicable to discussion of Crossan’s scholarship. First, “The historians’ horizon and method should be public. . . . Methodological naturalists, who do not allow for the possibility of the supernatural in historical investigation, should . . . have their horizons open to

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<sup>344</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus*, 37. Emphasis original.

<sup>345</sup>Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010). “Horizons may be defined as one’s ‘preunderstanding.’ It is how historians view things as a result of their knowledge, experience, beliefs, education, cultural conditioning, preferences, presuppositions and worldview. Horizons are like sunglasses through which a historian looks. . . . For better and for worse, historians are influenced by their culture, race, nationality . . . their life experiences, the academic institutions they attended and the particular community of scholars from which they covet respect and acceptance. They cannot look at the data devoid of biases, hopes or inclinations. No historian is exempt. Horizons are of great interest to historians since they are responsible more than anything else for the embarrassing diversity among the conflicting portraits of the past. How can so many historians with access to the same data arrive at so many different conclusions? Horizons.” Ibid., 38-39. Licona then sets forth the argument that the impact of one’s horizon on historical research can be minimized, and gives examples of historians whose horizons were minimized and then transcended through their scholarship (ibid., 50-52). Licona proposes six tools (guidelines) that “when combined, can be effective guides that bring us closer to objectivity.” Ibid., 52.

challenge.”<sup>346</sup> Second, “Detachment from bias is nonnegotiable. . . . Historians must allow themselves to understand and empathize fully with the horizon of the author/agent and, furthermore, allow themselves to be challenged fully by that horizon to the point of conversion.”<sup>347</sup>

Crossan does an excellent job of opening his historical Jesus methodology to public scrutiny and challenge. Unfortunately, however, Crossan neither acknowledges his worldview presuppositions in public academic discourse, nor seeks to bracket them in his historical Jesus research. Indeed, he does not even acknowledge the need for or benefits of doing so. On what basis can Crossan require that readers set aside their preconceptions of Jesus’ resurrection, and approach Crossan’s metaphorical reconstruction with an open mind? Is it not fair to ask Crossan to do the same with regard to a literal understanding of the resurrection as well?<sup>348</sup>

### **Conclusion: Hermeneutics, Methodology, Presuppositions and the Resurrection**

John Dominic Crossan has been a prolific and persuasive proponent of a metaphorical understanding of Jesus’ resurrection for four decades. He suggests that the resurrection was a metaphor used by Jesus’ early learned disciples to describe their

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<sup>346</sup>Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 53.

<sup>347</sup>*Ibid.*, 58, 60.

<sup>348</sup>The foregoing does not exempt the critical scholar from doing what Crossan requests when approaching his scholarship. Licona is right to suggest that historians need to bracket their own presuppositions and enter into their subject’s worldview (in this case Crossan’s) as sympathetically as possible. An evangelical scholar approaching Crossan’s reconstruction of Jesus’ resurrection ought to set aside her own presuppositions and read Crossan on his own terms. The argument in this chapter has been that even aside from a theistic worldview, there are deep problems with Crossan’s material investments in Jesus sources. Those material investments, in turn, are crucial to facilitating Crossan’s metaphorical reinterpretation of the resurrection. The critique in the present context relates solely to Crossan’s failure to do what he requests his own readers to do: set aside presuppositions or preconceived notions in order to give the historical evidence an unbiased hearing.

experience of the ongoing presence and power of Jesus of Nazareth in their midst as they continued to live out his teaching of open commensality and unbrokered access to divine favor. In the course of this chapter, we have seen that Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection is driven by his underlying structuralist hermeneutics, worldview presuppositions, and questionable material investments.

First, Crossan understands reality to be structured by our use of language. Language is inherently metaphorical, with literal applications arising only after the initial paradox of metaphor has been subjugated in an attempt to impose order. The language of metaphor is able to better express the essential paradoxicality and polyvalence of reality. Crossan's commitment to a hermeneutic which emphasizes metaphorical parable leads him logically to embrace the resurrection as a parabolic metaphor rather than a literal historical event.

Second, Crossan's fundamental worldview presuppositions rule out the very possibility of a literal bodily resurrection. Crossan insists that human life ends absolutely at physical death. Furthermore, supernatural interventions such as a bodily resurrection simply do not occur. Crossan holds that the physical universe operates as a closed (but not fully-understood and therefore often mysterious or marvel-ous) system of natural cause and effect. Accordingly, Jesus could not have been supernaturally raised from the dead by God.

Third, Crossan's structuralist hermeneutics and naturalistic presuppositions lead him to make several questionable material investments in Jesus materials which strongly color his reconstruction of the historical Jesus, especially the resurrection. Crossan identifies a primitive stream of Christianity, the Life Tradition, which did not

profess the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus. To isolate the Life Tradition, however, Crossan has to utilize a number of questionable material investments: a speculative reconstruction of the contents of *Q*; an even more questionable recovery of redactional layers within *Q*; an even more doubtful postulate of a full-fledged Q Community; an early (50s A.D.) date for the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*; and the canonical independence of *Thomas*. Crossan accepts the authenticity of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (or *Longer Mark*) attested to only in a contested document found and photographed by Morton Smith, which subsequently disappeared without having been examined by independent scholars. Crossan further hypothesizes that *Secret Mark* predates canonical Mark, and that canonical Mark excised offensive passages from *Secret Mark* and scattered words and phrases from the censored passage throughout the rest of his work. Crossan finally insists that the *Gospel of Peter* contains the original passion-resurrection narrative in an earlier core, called the *Cross Gospel*, which was then used by all the canonical evangelists in their own narratives. Again, however, canonical Mark radically altered the source material he found in the *Cross Gospel*, for example turning the appearances of the risen Jesus into the transfiguration of Jesus.

Several of Crossan's material investments are highly doubtful; when you put them together, implausibility is compounded by dubitable assertion, only to be multiplied by speculative reconstruction. The result is an edifice borne out of governing worldview presuppositions, not by objective application of a rigorous methodology. As Crossan himself argues, reconstructions of the historical Jesus are built atop material investments made in the gospel materials. Numerous of Crossan's material investments are ultimately untenable. The resulting portrait of Jesus is thus rendered highly suspect.

I argue, further, that Crossan's material investments are indirectly influenced by his worldview presuppositions. Crossan follows the logical path blazed by Strauss and continued by Bultmann: the canonical Gospels cannot be taken as straightforward attempts to communicate what happened in literal history, since such things do not happen according to their methodological naturalistic worldview. Therefore, the Gospels must be *myths*; that is, expressions of profound religious truth in the only language available for such mysteries, the language of parable, paradox, and metaphor. Crossan's commitment to polyvalent reality (religious pluralism) induces him to insist that resurrection is *only one way* of expressing continued faith in, loyalty to, and experience of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, speculative reconstructions (e.g., a non-apocalyptic, non-resurrection *Sayings Gospel Q*; the early independence of the *Gospel of Thomas*) are seen not as tenuous hypotheses, but rather as confirmatory evidence.

Simply put, John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection of Jesus is itself a myth driven primarily by the logical force of his worldview presuppositions.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RESURRECTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

If Mark was intentionally writing fiction, one has to wonder why *no one in the history of the church has read it as such*—including, it seems, Matthew and Luke, who presumably used Mark’s words as the basis for their own Gospels.<sup>1</sup>

Crossan’s metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus’ resurrection suggests that the canonical evangelists were not intending to write narrative history. Rather, they were intentionally writing metaphorical parable (or parabolic metaphor)—expressing poetically deep theological truths as opposed to literal historical events. Critics like Boyd and Eddy thus question why Mark (and the other Gospel-writers) has been so misunderstood throughout Church history. Why has intentional metaphor been mistaken for historical intent for so many centuries?

Quite frequently, particularly in his more recent work, Crossan argues that ancient readers recognized the canonical Gospels as the metaphorical parables they were intended to be.<sup>2</sup> He suggests that it was not until the rise of the Enlightenment that both friends and foes of Christianity began treating them as literal historical accounts—friends

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *Lord or Legend? Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 85. Emphasis original.

<sup>2</sup>“We judge . . . that the ancients took their religious stories literally, but that we are now sophisticated enough to recognize their delusions. What, however, if those ancients intended and accepted their stories as metaphors or parables, and we are the mistaken ones? What if those pre-Enlightenment minds were quite capable of hearing a metaphor, grasping its meaning immediately and its contents correctly, and never worrying about the question: Is this literal or metaphorical? Or, better, what if they knew how to take their foundational metaphors and stories programmatically, functionally, and seriously without asking too closely about literal and metaphorical distinctions?” John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 33.

to defend their historicity, foes to besmirch them as fiction. Crossan calls this the Aesop Fallacy: “If you take him literally you misunderstand him badly.”<sup>3</sup> Much of the Gospels was written and intended to be understood parabolically and metaphorically rather than historically and literally, including, Crossan says, the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection.

The case is not that they told silly stories and that we got smart enough after the Enlightenment to understand them. The case is that they told profound parables and that we got dumb enough after the Enlightenment to misunderstand them.<sup>4</sup>

We used to think that the ancients believed dumb stuff, told silly stories, and that, at the Enlightenment, we got smart and ceased to believe them. I think it more accurate to say that the ancients told powerful parables and that, at the Enlightenment, we were dumb enough to take them all literally.<sup>5</sup>

Crossan claims that “ancients told powerful parables” that their contemporaries were not so stupid as to take them literally. In other words, the Gospel-writers were intentionally writing parabolic metaphor; their original audiences knew that they were writing parabolic metaphor; and during the Middle Ages Christians knew that the resurrection accounts of the Gospels were metaphorical, not literal. It was only in response to Enlightenment positivism that, unfortunately, we got dumb and took all these parables literally instead.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the early church professed belief in a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The early church fathers proclaimed a robust historical resurrection, not a metaphorical parable. If both the earliest church and the church

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<sup>3</sup>John Dominic Crossan and Richard Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 77.

<sup>4</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “Why Is Historical Jesus Research Necessary?” in *Jesus Two Thousand Years Later*. Faith and Scholarship Colloquies Series, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000), 19.

<sup>5</sup>John Dominic Crossan, “A Future for the Christian Faith,” in *The Once and Future Jesus*, ed. Robert W. Funk, Thomas Sheehan, Marcus J. Borg, John Shelby Spong, Karen L. King, John Dominic Crossan, Lloyd Geering, Gerd Ludemann, and Walter Wink (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2000), 113.



throughout history understood Jesus' resurrection as a literal historical event with significant metaphorical implications, then Crossan is calling a multitude of Christian theologians and philosophers throughout church history "dumb." This chapter will revisit the place of the resurrection in the early church, with particular attention to Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection. Three theses will be defended: (1) while there were multiple understandings of post-mortem existence (or lack thereof) in first century worldviews, resurrection terminology<sup>6</sup> always referred to an embodied life after death; (2) the earliest Christians professed, and the earliest recorded opponents of the Christian church attacked, belief in Jesus' literal bodily resurrection; and (3) in the second century, Gnostic Christians redefined the resurrection in a spiritual<sup>7</sup> manner in order to reconcile orthodox Christian creedal affirmations with their Gnostic worldview presuppositions. Crossan's metaphorical conception of Jesus' resurrection receives no support from (and has no historical precursors in) first century conceptions of resurrection, the early church and its opponents, or Gnostic Christianity.

### **Resurrection in the First Century: Jewish and Pagan Conceptions**

The metaphorical conception of Christ's resurrection does not fit the first-century context in which it was first preached. Greco-Roman paganism and second-temple Judaism contained diverse afterlife beliefs. Significantly, however, wherever

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<sup>6</sup>Resurrection is expressed by the Greek verbs *αναστεμι* (and its derivative noun *αναστασις*) and *εγειρω* (and its derivative noun *εγερσις*). Richard A. Muller, "Resurrection," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 147.

<sup>7</sup>A spiritual understanding of resurrection is not the same as a metaphorical understanding. A spiritual resurrection is a literal historical event on a *spiritual plane*, in which Jesus' soul was freed from his physical body. Metaphorical proponents remove Christ's resurrection from history altogether. Nothing happened to Jesus after his death; resurrection is simply a symbol for what the disciples experienced.

resurrection terminology (*ανίσταμι* and *ἐγείρω* and their cognates) was used, first-century thinkers were referring to bodily existence after physical death. In his significant historical work, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N. T. Wright traces the contours of resurrection belief in Jesus' religious-cultural milieu Greco-Roman thought, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the intertestamental period of Second-Temple Judaism.<sup>8</sup>

### **Greco-Roman Conceptions of the Afterlife**

One major stream of Greco-Roman afterlife thought was represented in Homeric literature.

The Homeric notion was that death only offered three options. One could be physically immortalized and transformed into a deity. One could end up spending eternity as a disembodied and unconscious soul either in Hades, some other place, or, if one was a bit more fortunate, as a hero. Or, one could end up without any existence whatsoever as one's body was improperly destroyed.<sup>9</sup>

Endsjø notes three possibilities for the Homeric afterlife. The first (and most attractive) option, however, was only available to the elite of Greek society—rulers, military heroes, physical champions, and the personal favorites of the Olympian gods and goddesses. For the vast majority of Greek society, disembodiment in Hades (the underworld or Netherworld; the realm of the dead) or utter extinction through improper (lack of) burial were the only realistic expectations.

Hades, then, was the best possible hope for most Greco-Romans. For Homer and those who read him devoutly, the dead in Hades are shadows of their earthly selves

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<sup>8</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 32-84 (Greco-Roman paganism); 85-128 (Old Testament); and 129-206 (Second-Temple Judaism).

<sup>9</sup>Dag Øistein Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 120.

(hence the term “shades”), and “are in no way fully human beings.”<sup>10</sup> Some type of conscious existence beyond death is universally presumed, but Hades “holds no comforts, no prospects, but only a profound sense of loss.”<sup>11</sup> The afterlife is a place of gloomy, incomplete existence.<sup>12</sup> Hence, as Achilles proclaims woefully to Odysseus, “Never try to reconcile me to death, glorious Odysseus. I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, some landless man with hardly enough to live on, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished.”<sup>13</sup>

Conscious existence beyond death is presumed also in Plato’s dualistic philosophy. Whereas Homerists lamented the finality and sadness of death, Platonists welcomed it as “the moment when, and the means by which, the immortal soul is set free from the prison-house of the physical body.”<sup>14</sup> The soul is the essential self; the body serves only as a shell, or even a prison. Thus, “the enlightened soul could look forward to a bodiless existence even *better* than that he or she had when alive in a body.”<sup>15</sup> Death

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<sup>10</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 43.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 44, 81-83.

<sup>12</sup>Helen North summarizes the Homeric afterlife in the underworld: “(1) Something of the human personality survives the death of the body. . . . (2) Whatever survives, whether the body has been cremated or buried, continues its existence in a location often thought of as within the tomb, or beneath the earth . . . (3) This existence for most shades is a dim, pallid reflection of their life on earth. The shades themselves are shadowy, without flesh, blood, or sinews, yet retaining a recognizable semblance of their earthly appearance. . . . (4) The realm of the dead is ruled by a brother of Zeus called Hades and his wife, Persephone. . . . (5) Funeral rites are necessary if the person is to enter the land of the dead, and these rites, even if only in brief, symbolic form, must be offered. Otherwise, the gods are offended and punish those responsible.” Helen F. North, “Death and Afterlife in Greek Tragedy and Plato,” in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, No. 33, ed. Hiroshi Obayashi (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 49-50.

<sup>13</sup>Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.488-91; cited in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 42.

<sup>14</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 48.

<sup>15</sup>Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity*, 108-09. Emphasis original.

brings release from the physical prison, and if one has lived well and rightly, eternal disembodied bliss in the heavenly realm of the forms.<sup>16</sup>

These two major perspectives on the afterlife dominated Greco-Roman thought, and significantly for our purposes, both of them denied the second-Temple Jewish concept of two-stage bodily resurrection.<sup>17</sup> The Homerist might want a body back, but they knew they would not get one; the Platonist did not want a physical resurrection, knowing that such was impossible anyway. Both alike denied the possibility of bodily resurrection. Later Jewish and Christian belief in bodily resurrection

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<sup>16</sup>Endsjø insists that Plato's dualism, and his doctrine of the immortality of the soul, "was contrary to everything traditional Greek religion had ever taught." Ibid., 109. Traditional Greek religion and philosophy emphasized the importance of the flesh, and "there is really no proof of any Greek abhorrence of the flesh. Quite the opposite. . . . I found a strong and enduring conviction that immortality always had to include both body and soul." Ibid., ix-x.

<sup>17</sup>Endsjø argues that argues that bodily resurrection represented a third significant strand of Greco-Roman afterlife expectation. First, he notes that "flesh equaled life" in Greco-Roman thought. Ibid., 21. Second, he suggests that the fear of Hades dominated Greek thought and spurred hopes for a better fate. Third, he points to the physical perfection and immortality of the Greek gods and heroes as the prototype for Greek resurrection belief. Ibid., 35-45. Fourth, he notes that Greco-Roman literature contains accounts of Asclepius and Heracles raising others from the dead. Ibid., 47-49. Fifth, he argues that Achilles and Memnon represent examples "who died, were resurrected with flesh and bones, and gained physical immortality." Ibid., 56.

Endsjø does not, however, demonstrate any connection between the accounts of Asclepius, Heracles, Achilles, and Memnon, and popular afterlife expectations. It seems that if the Greek heroes inspired any hopes for physical immortality, it was only within the elite segment of Greco-Roman society. Peter Bolt notes that hopes for immortality only applied to Roman emperors and, perhaps, men of "great virtue." See Peter G. Bolt, "Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Greco-Roman World," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 71-73.

Stanley Porter supports Endsjø's contention that Greek afterlife beliefs included expectation of a robust bodily resurrection. Stanley E. Porter, "Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament," in *Resurrection*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 186, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 52-81. "There is a shockingly strong tradition of contemplation of the soul's destiny in the afterlife, along with examples of bodily resurrection." Ibid., 68. Porter points to streams of Homeric tradition wherein shades were subjected to a semblance of judgment in Hades (Ibid., 69), and other Greek literature which embraced reincarnation or "metempsychosis." (Ibid., 70) Porter rightly acknowledges a development in Greek literature towards embracing the immortality of the soul along with "a sense of judgment for one's evil actions and even reward for righteous deeds. This implies continued existence for the soul after death." Ibid., 73. Indeed, but this is simply Platonic soul ascent, *not* resurrection, as Porter himself goes on to acknowledge ("there is not much said about the concept of resurrection." Ibid., 74). Thus, Porter is not really in agreement with Endsjø's argument; rather, he supports the thesis defended here, namely, that Greek afterlife beliefs tended towards Homeric pessimism in Hades and Platonic optimism for the soul's ascent.

“was strange and repellent, if not incomprehensible or abhorrent, to the contemporary pagan mind.”<sup>18</sup>

**Resurrection parallels in Greco-Roman mythology.** Contemporary scholars often point to the Greek ‘dying and rising gods’ as evidence that Christian resurrection belief was patterned after pagan legends.<sup>19</sup> The very category of dying and rising gods is controversial, with some scholars rejecting the classification altogether<sup>20</sup> and others refining and defending the concept.<sup>21</sup> Proponents and skeptics both delineate four essential characteristics of ‘dying and rising gods’: (a) undisputed divine status of the figure involved; (b) a real death and return to fully-embodied life; (c) relation of the dying-and-rising to seasonal cycles; and (d) ritual or cultic celebration or recitation of the

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<sup>18</sup>Russ Dudley, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better: A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus Based on Ancient Criticisms of the Resurrection Reports,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 (2000): 65. Wright notes that “the ancient world was thus divided into those who said that resurrection couldn’t happen, though they might have wanted it to [Homerists], and those who said they didn’t want it to happen, knowing that it couldn’t anyway [Platonists].” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 82. Echoes of the Greco-Roman ridicule of the Jewish perspective are evident in Acts 17:32, where Paul’s preaching meets with interest *until* he mentions the resurrection of Christ, and Acts 26:24, where the pagan Festus interrupts Paul to call his resurrection faith “insane.”

<sup>19</sup>This suggestion has a long and illustrious history, first being raised (in extant non-Christian literature) by the Roman anti-Christian Celsus, writing around 177 A.D. Graham Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden*, ed. Stephen Barton and Graham Stanton (London: SPCK, 1994), 81. Justin Martyr, in his attempt to ingratiate Christianity to Greco-Roman society, also explicitly draws attention to the parallels between Christ’s resurrection and the rising of Greek gods. For a contemporary example, see Robert M. Price, “Brand X Easters,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Sourcebook*, Jesus Seminar Guides, vol. 4, ed. Bernard Brandon Scott (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2008), 49-60. “I have assured readers more than once that the resurrection stories of the New Testament are cut from the same cloth as many others from the same environment.” *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>20</sup>E.g., Mark S. Smith’s seminal article, “The Death of ‘Dying and Rising Gods’ in the Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998): 257-313.

<sup>21</sup>E.g., Tryggve N. D. Mettinger’s excellent study, *The Riddle of Resurrection: “Dying and Rising Gods” in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

god's dying-and-rising.<sup>22</sup> Various Greek exemplars are suggested as parallels to Jesus' resurrection, including Tammuz/Ishtar, Adonis, Attis, Baal, Melqart/Heracles, Osiris, Dionysus/Bacchus, Demeter/Persephone, and Eshmun/Asclepius.<sup>23</sup>

Tryggve Mettinger argues persuasively that several of the proposed ancient dying-and-rising gods are legitimate. The Ugaritic storm/weather god Baal, for example, contains all four characteristics of a dying-and-rising god. Baal himself descends to Mot (the Ugaritic equivalent of Hades/Sheol), causing the chief gods to mourn his death and search for his body.<sup>24</sup> Baal is the god responsible for rain and agricultural fertility, and his descent to Mot and subsequent death results in devastating drought.<sup>25</sup> The Ugaritic goddess Anat finds Baal's body, confronts death (Mot), and eventually the chief god, El, has a "dream-vision, by which he is able to determine that Baal has returned to life."<sup>26</sup> The return of rain and the restoration of agricultural life demonstrate the true return of Baal to his divine throne.

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<sup>22</sup>Smith, "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World," 262; Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 42. Mettinger's explanation of the second feature is helpful: "he [must be] conceived of as dying (his death represented as a *descensus* to the Netherworld or in some other way) and reappearing as alive after the experience of death." Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Leon McKenzie, *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the Resurrection of Jesus: A Christian Perspective* (Charlottesville, VA: Bookwrights, 1997), 21ff. In *The Riddle of Resurrection*, Mettinger discusses six major parallels—Baal (55-81), Melqart/Heracles (83-111), Adonis (113-54), Eshmun/Asclepius (155-65), Osiris (167-83), and Dumuzi/Tammuz (185-215). In "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World," Smith focuses on Osiris, Dumuzi-Tammuz, Adonis, and Baal.

<sup>24</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 58.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 59. Thus, the argument that Baal himself does not die, but rather tricks Mot by sending a substitute, "does not make sense of the subsequent events." Ibid., 60. Furthermore, Mettinger points to the re-enacted ritual in which Baal is clearly believed to have died. Ibid., 61-62. Smith argues that Baal does not actually die, but rather disappears, and thus belongs to a category of ancient deities who disappear and return in sync with seasonal cycles. Smith, "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World," 290-91. Smith theorizes that the later development of cultic remembrances of Baal's death reflect royal funerary rituals which were superimposed upon the earlier myth of Baal's disappearance and return. Ibid., 307-08.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 58.

Along with Baal, Mettinger argues that the Tyrian god Melqart (imported into Greece as Heracles) is a clear example of a dying-and-rising god.<sup>27</sup> Mettinger identifies Eshmun-Asclepius and Dumuzi-Tammuz as ambiguous examples which *may* represent pre-Christian examples of dying-and-rising gods.<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, Mettinger's four strongest examples of dying-and-rising gods are not the two most frequently cited as possible parallels of or sources for early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection—that honor belongs to the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Adonis.<sup>29</sup> Both of these proposed parallels, according to both proponents and skeptics of the dying-and-rising gods in the ancient Near East, are tentative and weak.

Smith argues that Adonis is only remembered as a *dying* hero/god prior to the Christian era; it is only in the second century A.D. that texts begin celebrating Adonis' return to life as well.<sup>30</sup> Mettinger concurs, demonstrating that in the oldest texts describing Adonis rituals, "nothing is said . . . about a resurrection of Adonis. On the contrary, the Roman historian refers to the celebration of the Adonia as a bad omen, due to its funerary character."<sup>31</sup> Prior to the second century A.D., Adonis was celebrated purely as a dying hero; there is no pre-Christian evidence that he was considered a dying-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 83-111. After examining the textual evidence, Mettinger concludes: "Melqart is a god who dies. . . . Melqart returns to life. . . . Melqart's death and resurrection were the focus of cultic celebration. . . . Melqart must be described as a dying and rising god." Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>28</sup>Regarding the former, Mettinger concludes, "The question whether Eshmun was a dying and rising deity is difficult to answer. . . . It is possible, but not proved, that Eshmun was a dying and rising god already during the centuries before the Christian era." Ibid., 165. Regarding the latter, he concludes, "While the ritual material very much gives the picture of Dumuzi as the tragic hero, mourned and bewailed, there are also traces of a ritual celebration of his return. These, however, are sparse and difficult to interpret." Ibid., 213.

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Smith's discussion in "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World," 282.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 283-85.

<sup>31</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 117.

and-rising god.<sup>32</sup> It is, then, entirely likely that the dying-*and-rising* Adonis was patterned after the resurrected Jesus of the early church, rather than the other way around.

The Egyptian god Osiris is better described as a “dead god” rather than a ‘dying-and-rising god.’<sup>33</sup> Osiris is murdered by his brother Seth; his sister/wife Isis collects his body parts in order to return him to life. She inseminates herself with Osiris’ semen, and bears him a son, Horus. Horus avenges Osiris’ death, enabling Osiris’ revival in the underworld.<sup>34</sup> Smith emphasizes that Osiris does not return to a fully-embodied earthly life, but is rather restricted to the Egyptian underworld as king of the dead.<sup>35</sup> Mettinger stresses that “Osiris was a most active character in his Netherworld life. He was as little dead as the Mesopotamian Netherworld gods Nergal and Ereshkigal.”<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, he concedes that although Osiris “both died and rose . . . he rose to continued life in the Netherworld, and the general connotations are that he was a god of the dead.”<sup>37</sup> The “resurrection” of Osiris is merely his entrance to the underworld, a place of shadowy, incomplete existence.<sup>38</sup>

On balance, Mettinger concluded that “the world of ancient Near Eastern religions actually knew a number of deities that may be properly described as dying and rising gods.”<sup>39</sup> He overstates his case, given that he has only identified two clear

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 149-52.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 172.

<sup>34</sup>Smith, “The Death of ‘Dying and Rising Gods’ in the Biblical World,” 271.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 271-72.

<sup>36</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 174.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 175.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 217.



examples (Baal and Melqart/Hercles), two ambiguous examples (Dumuzi-Tammuz and Eshmun-Asclepius), and two probable counter-examples (Osiris and Adonis).

Regardless, the existence of legitimate dying-and-rising gods in the ancient Near East does not point to parallels between Near Eastern religions and the emergence of Christian resurrection faith. To the contrary, even Mettinger concludes that there are more dissimilarities than parallels.

First, proponents acknowledged their ancient dying-and-rising gods as ancient myths, whereas Christians proclaimed Jesus' literal historical resurrection from the dead.<sup>40</sup> Mettinger notes that while the rituals of Baal, Heracles, Osiris, and Adonis recounted events that happened in the realm of the gods, "for the disciples and for Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was a one-time, historical event that took place at one specific point in the earth's topography."<sup>41</sup> There is no pagan apologetic defending the historicity of Osiris' death and resurrection; the early Christians, on the other hand, pointed to the empty tomb as a historical datum establishing the truth of Christ's resurrection.

Second, the dying and rising gods of Greco-Roman paganism were intimately associated with agricultural cycles and fertility, whereas Jewish expectation (and Christian proclamation) of resurrection was associated with the righteousness and judgment of the God of Israel.<sup>42</sup> The resurrection of Baal, for example, is intimately

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<sup>40</sup>C. S. Lewis argues, "The differences between the Pagan Christs (Balder, Osiris, etc.) and the Christ Himself is much what we should expect to find. The Pagan stories are all about someone dying and rising, either every year, or else nobody knows where and nobody knows when. . . . It is the difference between a real event on the one hand and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other." C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 83-84.

<sup>41</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221.

<sup>42</sup>McKenzie, *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the Resurrection of Jesus*, 39. Mettinger concludes, "The dying and rising gods were closely related to the seasonal cycle. Their death and return

connected with the return of autumn rains and the resulting agricultural harvest.<sup>43</sup> There is no connection in Christian writing between Jesus' resurrection and natural cycles.<sup>44</sup>

Third, Mettinger notes that “the death of Jesus is presented in the sources as vicarious suffering, as an act of atonement for sins. . . . but there is no evidence for the death of the dying and rising gods as vicarious suffering for sins.”<sup>45</sup> The death of the dying-and-rising gods was often presumed to have *consequences* upon human beings and the natural world—particularly the death or withering of vegetation. There is, however, no inkling amongst the ancient Near Eastern dying-and-rising gods of the death of the god being *on behalf* of human beings and the natural world. The vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross is unique, and knows no ancient parallels.

A fourth distinction not noted by Mettinger is that no Greco-Roman worshiper expected what happened once upon a time to their dying-and-rising god to happen to them at some future time. Christian resurrection belief was significantly different in two ways. On one hand, Christians proclaimed that they would experience in the future the same type of bodily resurrection which had already happened to Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>46</sup>

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were seen as reflected in the changes of plant life. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a one-time event, not repeated, and unrelated to seasonal changes.” Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221.

<sup>43</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 81.

<sup>44</sup>John Oswalt notes the obsession in ancient Near Eastern religions with “sexuality and fertility,” and how that obsession is evidenced particularly in the “cult of the dying and rising god.” John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 56. Oswalt notes, “In the Sumerian religion as well as those that followed it . . . one of the cycles of myths tells how the vegetation or fertility god was killed by the god of death, with the corresponding death of all the plant and animal life. Through the ministrations of the dead god’s consort, who is variously his mother, his wife, his sister, or his mistress, and sometimes all of the above, the god is restored to life and nature is rejuvenated.” Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221.

<sup>46</sup>Rom 6:5—“If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” 2 Cor 4:17-18—“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is

Jesus' resurrection was a prototype (firstfruits) of the future resurrection of believers. On the other hand, Christian resurrection belief was available to all, not just the elite of society. Roman emperors could hope for apotheosis; the masses could only expect shadowy existence in Hades after death. But "the Christian proclamation of resurrection was filled with promise to all those in a broken world who could not raise themselves from the dust and whose virtue could not save them."<sup>47</sup> Belief in Christ's resurrection led to a robust hope for the resurrection of Christians; belief in the rising of ancient dying-and-rising gods led only to hope for agricultural fertility.

The lack of analogous parallels between the pagan dying-and-rising gods and the Judeo-Christian resurrection hope is striking.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Wright notes that "when Paul preached [the resurrection] in Athens, nobody said, 'Ah, yes, a new version of Osiris and such like.'"<sup>49</sup> Even Mettinger, a proponent of ancient dying-and-rising gods, concludes:

There is, as far as I am aware, no *prima facie* evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions. The riddle remains.<sup>50</sup>

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unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Phil 3:10-11—"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

<sup>47</sup>Bolt, "Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Greco-Roman World," 78.

<sup>48</sup>McKenzie concludes, "The use of the term 'resurrection' in reference to pagan deities . . . exemplifies equivocation at its worst. . . . Certainly the notions of resurrection or revival in the myths did not connote the same reality as the gospel meaning of the resurrection." McKenzie, *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the Resurrection of Jesus*, 39-40.

<sup>49</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 81.

<sup>50</sup>Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection*, 221. Mettinger's unexpected conclusion serves as the title for his monograph. Given the clear examples of ancient dying-and-rising gods, he anticipated clearer parallels with Jesus' resurrection. The dissimilarities are too striking, and lead him to conclude that belief in Jesus' resurrection was not patterned after the gods he surveys. Thus, Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection remains an unexplained riddle.

With myths involving dying and rising gods not forming part of the picture of Greco-Roman beliefs about the afterlife, the two-stream picture remains intact.

Homerists feared and lamented physical death as the end of meaningful life; Platonists welcomed physical death as the means of releasing the immortal soul to disembodied bliss: both rejected Jewish expectation of two-stage bodily resurrection.

### **The Afterlife in Second-Temple Judaism**

For people imbued with [the] long-established Jewish and Christian response to the question ‘Is there life after death?’ it can come as a surprise, or even a shock, to discover that the Hebrew Bible does not give the same answer, but in fact presents virtually the reverse scenario: Death is, to all intents and purposes, the end; if there is anything beyond it, that epilogue will be merely a shadow and inadequate aftertaste of what we experienced during life. There is a Hebrew name for that quasi-afterlife, or rather for the post-mortem resting-place that signifies or symbolizes the end of life. Its name is *Sheol*.<sup>51</sup>

The Hebrew Bible generally presents death as “sad, and tinged with evil.”<sup>52</sup>

The Old Testament lacks a consistent doctrine of rewards and punishments after death,<sup>53</sup> instead assuming that “upon death, one’s shade descends to *Sheol*, where one remains forever, cut off from God’s presence.”<sup>54</sup> The translation of Enoch and Elijah are unique examples of men who do not traverse physical death, but they represent “unexplained

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<sup>51</sup>John Jarick, “Questioning *Sheol*,” in *Resurrection*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 186, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>52</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 85-91. Wright notes numerous Old Testament passages which speak of the finality of death, and the lack of hope for anything positive beyond *Sheol* – Pss 6:5; 30:9; 88:3-12; 115:17; Gen 3:19; Isa 38:10f; 2 Sam 14:14; Eccl 3:19-21; 9:5f; Job 3:13-19; 14:1-14; 19:25-27. Crossan argues that the finality of death was the only truly Jewish conception; later developments of resurrection belief a loss, not gain, of faith in God. John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 147.

<sup>53</sup>Muller, “Resurrection,” 145.

<sup>54</sup>George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 685.

exceptions to the otherwise universal rule.”<sup>55</sup> After death, Hebrews could expect only shadowy existence in Sheol, the grave.<sup>56</sup>

Key Old Testament doctrines stood in tension with the generally gloomy Old Testament outlook on death: (1) God’s covenant relationship with Israel; (2) God’s justice and righteousness; and (3) God’s sovereignty. In the absence of a robust afterlife, God’s sovereign covenantal justice for Israel would have to “take place here and now”—hence Job’s demand (Job 14:1-14) that Yahweh judge Job righteously now, not after Job’s death.<sup>57</sup>

Tension between these theological themes eventually spurred the development of robust resurrection hopes within Israel. The emerging hope of Old Testament authors is focused upon both individual Israelites *and* the nation of Israel, particularly the Promised Land. Generally speaking, the national hope took precedence over visions of

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<sup>55</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 95.

<sup>56</sup>Muller makes the important point that this does not represent “extinction of the human being at death,” but rather passage to “a shadowy, underworld existence.” Muller, “Resurrection,” 145. Crossan’s contention that ancient Judaism disbelieved in life after death is therefore incorrect. Crossan’s own worldview presupposition, as outlined in chapter 3 of this dissertation, is that human life ceases absolutely at physical death. There is no afterlife of any sort. He argues that this was the ancient Jewish perspective, but it simply was not. While the Old Testament does not present belief in a robust, physical afterlife or post-mortem rewards and punishments, the presentation of Sheol is not “death, writ large,” but rather a shadowy and incomplete post-mortem existence.

Endsjø notes, “Originally the belief in the resurrection, any kind of resurrection, was not at all the most typical Jewish idea of what would happen after death. It seems rather to represent a more recent addition to previously held beliefs. What strikes the reader of the most ancient texts is the silence on the subject of the afterlife. . . . At an early point, the idea of the Sheol appeared, a shadowy afterworld similar to Hades, the depressing Greek abode of the dead. In Sheol, too, the dead souls remained forever in a dank existence that did not equal immortality.” Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity*, 122-23.

<sup>57</sup>Nickelsburg observes, “As creator, God is the Lord of life, who effects and nourishes a covenantal relationship with God’s people. As judge, God rewards the faithful and punishes those who rebel against the covenantal commandments. As the Almighty, God can effect what divine justice requires. *The tension arises when premature death frustrates this justice.*” Nickelsburg, “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” 685. Emphasis added.

individual vindication—hence the importance of family lines and genealogies.<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, during and after the Babylonian exile, expectations grew that at least some righteous Israelites would be raised to a new bodily life after death. Intimations of a glorious afterlife for God's faithful children are found in the Psalms<sup>59</sup> and the prophets.<sup>60</sup>

Hope for a bodily resurrection *is what sometimes happens when the hope of ancient Israel meets a new challenge* [such as threats of judgment or extended exile]. . . . This vision of the creator and covenant God underlies . . . the emerging belief that the relationship with YHWH would be unbreakable even by death, and the eventual belief that YHWH would raise the dead.<sup>61</sup>

Inter-testamental Jews held one of three broad beliefs about life after death.

First, some categorically denied life after death. The Sadducees are the best-known resurrection-deniers,<sup>62</sup> but *Sirach*<sup>63</sup> and parts of the Mishnah and Talmud also denied the resurrection of the dead.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 99-102. As resurrection belief developed, the themes of national restoration and personal resurrection were often difficult to distinguish. Jewish faith in the future 'resurrection' of Israel—a metaphorical resurrection embodied by a literal return from exile—was more frequently and powerfully expressed. Approaching the first century, however, the two themes became thoroughly intertwined and difficult to disentangle. Given my primary focus upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I will focus upon the expressions of resurrection hope in the personal eschatological sense.

<sup>59</sup>E.g., Ps 49:12-15—“Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. . . . Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”

<sup>60</sup>E.g., Isa. 26:19—“But your [God's] dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy.” See also Hos 6:1-2; 13:14; and Ezek 37.

<sup>61</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 122, 127. Emphasis original.

<sup>62</sup>Porter, “Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament,” 56-57; Richard Bauckham, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 82.

<sup>63</sup>E.g., *Sirach* 17:27—“Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades in place of the living who give thanks? From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased.” *Sirach* 38:21-23—“Do not forget, there is no coming back; . . . Remember his fate, for yours is like it; yesterday it was his, and today it is yours. When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance rest too, and be comforted for him when his spirit has departed.”

<sup>64</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 131-35. Wright makes the interesting comment that resurrection-deniers were the staunch conservatives of their day, an ironic twist given that today's

Second, some Jews adopted Platonic dualism and held to “a future blissful life for the righteous, in which souls, disencumbered of their attendant physical bodies, would enjoy a perfect life forever.”<sup>65</sup> Significantly, proponents of future disembodied bliss did not use resurrection language to describe their views.

Many other second-Temple Jews, however, rejected those positions and instead hoped for a bodily resurrection on the great ‘Day of the Lord’ when all peoples would be judged and the righteous of Israel would be vindicated and raised to new bodily life in a renewed heavens and earth.<sup>66</sup> Prophetic passages like Isaiah 2, Isaiah 13-14, Ezekiel 30, Joel 1-2, Amos 5, and Malachi 4 provided hope that God would intervene at the end of the age, vindicate his righteous remnant, and punish evildoers.<sup>67</sup> The clearest

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resurrection-deniers are religious liberals. He notes that resurrection “was from the beginning a revolutionary doctrine,” which arose in the context of “dogged resistance and martyrdom,” and encouraged persecuted Jews to persist in seeking the renewal of this world, rather than escape to some kind of heavenly afterlife. *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>65</sup>The inter-testamental work *Pseudo-Phocylides* insists, “For the souls remain unharmed among the deceased. For the spirit is a loan of God to mortals, and his image. For we have a body out of earth, and when afterward we are resolved again into earth we are but dust; and then the air has received our spirit.” Cited in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 141. Several passages in 4 Maccabees carry the same connotation of soul immortality. 4 Macc 13:13-17—“Let us with all our hearts consecrate ourselves to God, who gave us our lives, and let us use our bodies as a bulwark for the law. Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, for great is the struggle of the soul and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God. Therefore let us put on the full armour of self-control, which is divine reason. For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us.” Also, 4 Macc 18:23—“But the sons of Abraham with their victorious mother are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers, and have received pure and immortal souls from God, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” See further Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 140-46.

<sup>66</sup>Wright notes, “As we have seen, the Bible [OT] mostly denies or at least ignores the possibility of a future life, with only a few texts coming out strongly for a different view; but in the second-Temple period the position is more or less reversed. The evidence suggests that by the time of Jesus, . . . most Jews either believed in some form of resurrection or at least knew that it was standard teaching.” *Ibid.*, 129. Wright traces the emergence of resurrection belief through the intertestamental apocryphal literature (150-75), Josephus (176-81), the Essenes (182-89), and the Pharisaic tradition of the post-70 A.D. era (192-200).

<sup>67</sup>Isa 2:2-17—“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established . . . The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty . . . The arrogance of man will be brought low.” Isa 13:6, 9, 14:1—“Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty . . . a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger . . . The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land.” Ezek 30:3—“The day of the Lord is near – a day of

indication of such resurrection faith in the Old Testament is unquestionably Daniel 12:1-3, which combines the personal hope for bodily resurrection with the Day of the Lord.

At that time Michael, the great prince, who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

The development of resurrection faith was facilitated by the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the third century B.C. Passages like Daniel 12, which already spoke of resurrection, were emphasized; “there is no attempt to soften them.”<sup>68</sup> Passages which potentially hinted at resurrection had the intimation made explicit. Other passages yet were transformed from “a denial of future life into an affirmation of resurrection.”<sup>69</sup> The end result is that the Greek Old Testament presents resurrection belief more clearly than the original Hebrew might have warranted.<sup>70</sup>

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clouds, a time of gloom for the nations.” Joel 1:13-14, 2:13-14—“Declare a holy fast; . . . Alas for that Day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. . . . Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.” Amos 5:18—“Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.” Mal 4:1-2—“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire. . . . Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”

<sup>68</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 147.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 148. Wright cites Job 14:14, which in the Hebrew literally reads, “If a man die, shall he live again?” The expected answer to Job’s rhetorical question is “No.” The Septuagint, however, renders it, “If a man dies, he shall live.” Similarly, Job 19:26’s difficult “after my skin has been thus destroyed” is translated, “God will resurrect my skin.”

<sup>70</sup>Richard Bauckham describes the origins of Jewish resurrection belief: “The hope of resurrection . . . did not, as has sometimes been argued, originate only in connection with the martyrs. . . . Hope for a resurrection life beyond death is, in fact, a radical version of Old Testament faith, found especially in the Psalms, that God will deliver from premature death those who are faithful to him and trust in him. . . . The Old Testament God—the Creator, the Source of life, and the Lord of life—undoubtedly



Second-temple Jews, then, did not create resurrection belief out of whole cloth; rather, they found intimation, and promises contained within their Scriptures. Such Jews spoke of bodily resurrection using “what became the standard ‘resurrection’ language,” the verbs *αναστεμι* (and its derivative noun *αναστασις*) and *εγειρω* (and its derivative noun *εγερσις*).<sup>71</sup> The end result is that by the first century, *αναστεμι*, *εγειρω* and their cognates had a well-defined field of meaning. Some denied resurrection altogether, while others spoke of disembodied bliss and rejected resurrection; but when “resurrection is spoken of, it is the second stage in post-mortem life, not the instant destiny upon death,” which is in view. “Anyone who used the normal words for ‘resurrection’ within second-Temple Judaism would have been heard to be speaking within this strictly limited range of meaning.”<sup>72</sup> Most Jews hoped for the resurrection of the dead—a bodily resurrection which would occur on the Day of the Lord when all peoples would be judged and the righteous would be vindicated, raised to new bodily life in a renewed heavens and earth.

Those who believed in resurrection believed also that the dead, who would be raised in the future but had not been yet, were alive somewhere, somehow, in an interim state. . . . Resurrection . . . meant life *after* ‘life after death’: a two-stage future hope, as opposed to the single-stage expectation of those who believed in a non-bodily future life.<sup>73</sup>

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*could* raise the dead. That he *would* do so only became clear once death was perceived as contradicting God’s righteousness and God’s love. The Old Testament God could be trusted to vindicate the righteous and to be faithful in his love for his own. If these purposes could be fully attained only beyond death, then he could be trusted to raise the dead. In this way it was precisely faith in the Old Testament God that led to the hope of resurrection as a virtually necessary implication.” Bauckham, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism,” 85-86. Emphasis original. Thus, Crossan’s contention that Jewish belief in the resurrection was a rejection of their Yahwehism is mistaken—resurrection grew out of Old Testament faith.

<sup>71</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 147. Critics note that *αναστεμι* and *εγειρω* have broader usage; the former in particular does not always refer to resurrection. Nonetheless, when applied to the dead, these resurrection terms *always* refer to bodily resurrection. See also Muller, “Resurrection,” 147.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 204. Hence, Wright notes, “The NT references to Jesus’ resurrection cannot be ambiguous as to whether they mean bodily resurrection, because there was no other kind of resurrection.”

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 130. Emphasis original.

### **Summary: Resurrection Belief in the First Century**

The first century context contained a myriad of beliefs about what happened to human beings after physical death. Some Greeks believed that post-mortem existence in Hades would be shadowy, incomplete, and lamentable. Other Greeks and a few Jews longed for the soul's post-mortem liberation from the physical body. Some Jews denied any existence past death. In contrast, most Jews embraced belief in a two-stage resurrection—intermediate existence after death followed by eventual bodily resurrection at the judgment of the Lord on the last day. Whether affirming or denying the future resurrection, however, the Greek resurrection terms were always used “to refer to a hypothetical concrete event that might take place in the future, namely the coming-to-life in a full and bodily sense of those presently dead.”<sup>74</sup> The modern metaphorical reconstruction of the resurrection thus finds no contextual precedents within Greco-Roman thought, the Old Testament, or second-Temple Judaism.

They all understood the Greek word *anastasis* and its cognates . . . to mean . . . new life after a period of being dead. Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long-term future hope; . . . Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future.<sup>75</sup>

### **Resurrection in the Early Church**

Crossan argues that early Christians embraced diverse beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth. Some Christians simply continued to live out the mission and teaching of Jesus, embracing open commensality in community together. Others professed that Jesus

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., xix.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 31. “Belief in resurrection is characterized . . . by a two-age cosmic and personal eschatology ending with a new embodiment. . . . The word ‘resurrection’ and its cognates . . . is never used to denote something other than this position. The belief can occur without the word, but never the other way around.” Ibid., 181.

continued to be present with his disciples, empowering the community to experience the presence of divine reality. Jesus' resurrection was originally proclaimed in such communities as a metaphorical expression of their continued experience.

Easter means for me that the divine empowerment which was present in Jesus, but once upon a time limited to those people in Galilee and Judea who had contact with him, is now available to anyone, anywhere in the world, who finds God in Jesus. As far as I'm concerned, it has nothing to do, literally, with a body coming out of a tomb, or a tomb being found empty, or visions, or anything else. All those are dramatic ways of expressing the faith. The heart of resurrection for me is that the power of God is now available through Jesus, unconfined by time or space, to anyone who believes and experiences it.<sup>76</sup>

We have seen that resurrection terminology in the first century referred to a concrete expectation for a future two-stage bodily resurrection. Crossan's metaphorical resurrection thus does not fit the first-century usage and understanding of resurrection terminology. On those grounds alone, then, a metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection is questionable. Furthermore, the Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection was understood, by proponents and opponents alike, to refer to a literal historical event, not a metaphorical experience.

### **Resurrection Proclaimed: The New Testament and the Early Church Fathers**

The first chapter of this dissertation outlined the early Christian proclamation of Jesus' bodily resurrection in the New Testament and the early church fathers. The early church proclaimed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a concrete event wrought by the covenantal God of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>77</sup> Early Christian proclamation

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<sup>76</sup>Crossan and Watts, *Who Is Jesus*, 167.

<sup>77</sup>See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2004), 482-83. Proclamation of Jesus' resurrection as a concrete historical event does not deny that the concrete resurrection had immediate and primarily metaphorical application to the current lives of his followers. But

of the resurrection did, however, include a significant transformation of prior Jewish resurrection expectation. Heretofore, resurrection language was used to refer to what *would happen* to believers at the end of the age, when God judged all nations. “Nobody imagined that any individuals had already been raised, or would be raised in advance of the great last day.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, when the earliest Christians began proclaiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead, they were insisting that “something had happened to Jesus which had happened to nobody else.”<sup>79</sup> Greco-Roman pagans believed that resurrection could not and did not happen to anybody; most Jews affirmed that resurrection *would* happen in the future, but *had not yet* happened to anybody. Against all, Christians professed that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead.

### **Resurrection Opposed: Celsus and Porphyry**

Opponents of the early church recognized the centrality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and attacked it accordingly. Matthew 28:11-15 contains the earliest recorded objection to the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection—the accusation that Jesus’ disciples came and stole his body from the tomb at night.<sup>80</sup>

Around 175 A.D., the Roman philosopher Celsus launched several philosophical and historical arguments against the resurrection of Christ and the future

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the future hope of Christians’ bodily resurrection (as well as the current experience of spiritual rebirth) was based on the concrete past event of Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead.

<sup>78</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 205.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>80</sup>Matt 28:15 notes that “this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.” Critics contend that Matthew created this apologetic appeal in its entirety. Nonetheless, the same objection is found in the mouth of Justin’s Jewish opponent Trypho. Either way, it is the earliest objection.

resurrection of all Christians.<sup>81</sup> Despite Crossan's insistence that ancients correctly read the Christian resurrection stories as metaphorical religious myths,<sup>82</sup> Celsus launches a multi-pronged attack upon a concrete conception of Jesus' bodily resurrection as an historical event. First, Celsus denigrates the worth of the testimony of mere women at the empty tomb.<sup>83</sup> Second, he evokes parallels from Greek mythology, suggesting that Christians copied their resurrection faith from their neighbors' religions.<sup>84</sup>

Third, Celsus suggests that the Christian doctrine of resurrection is derived from the Greek notion of a blessed afterlife.<sup>85</sup> Fourth, he notes that *not all Christians* affirm the same doctrine of bodily resurrection.<sup>86</sup> Fifth, Celsus suggests that a risen Jesus

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<sup>81</sup>Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 106-15. Celsus' attack against Christian faith and doctrine is preserved by the theologian Origen, who reproduces about 70-75% of Celsus' words in his rebuttal, *Contra Celsum*.

<sup>82</sup>"We judge . . . that the ancients took their religious stories literally, but that we are now sophisticated enough to recognize their delusions. What, however, if those ancients intended and accepted their stories as metaphors or parables, and we are the mistaken ones? What if those pre-Enlightenment minds were quite capable of hearing a metaphor, grasping its meaning immediately and its contents correctly, and never worrying about the question: Is this literal or metaphorical? Or, better, what if they knew how to take their foundational metaphors and stories programmatically, functionally, and seriously without asking too closely about literal and metaphorical distinctions?" Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer*, 33. See also Crossan, "Why Is Historical Jesus Research Necessary," 19; and Crossan, "A Future for the Christian Faith," 113.

<sup>83</sup>Stanton, "Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus," 81; Dudrey, "What the Writers Should Have Done Better," 59.

<sup>84</sup>"Such ideas can also be found among the hero cults of Trophinus, Amphiarus and Mopsus, where it is claimed that gods may be seen in human form." Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 110. See also Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 111-12; Stanton, "Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus," 82.

<sup>85</sup>"The latter notion [resurrection to another earth] they derive from the ancients, who taught that there is a happy life for the blessed—variously called the Isles of the Blessed, the Elysian fields—where they are free from the evils of the world." Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 109.

<sup>86</sup>W. C. Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: II," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 15, no. 2 (1964): 157.

should have appeared to more than just a few friends after his resurrection.<sup>87</sup> Finally, his Platonic sensibilities lead Celsus to question why anyone, particularly a god, would “need or want a corruptible physical body.”<sup>88</sup>

About a century later, the Neoplatonist Porphyry added two objections against the Christian doctrine of resurrection. First, he asks whether the future resurrection of Christians will resemble that of Christ or of Lazarus, finding both answers philosophically lacking.<sup>89</sup> Second, he questions the logical possibility of anyone, even God, isolating and recombining the requisite physical elements in order to reconstitute a physical body.<sup>90</sup>

Two conclusions need to be drawn from this brief discussion of early anti-Christian, anti-resurrection polemics. First, modern objections to the resurrection are not new. As Stanton writes, “nearly all” of them are present already in the attacks of Celsus and Porphyry.<sup>91</sup>

Second, Christianity’s opponents focused upon the literal bodily resurrection. Alternative understandings of Jesus’ resurrection were *not* the subject of attack by non-

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<sup>87</sup>Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” 83; Dudrey, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better,” 60.

<sup>88</sup>Dudrey, “What the Writers Should Have Done Better,” 62. Celsus’ logic here is governed by his Platonic dualism—the body is a prison-house for the eternal soul. Once discarded, the body is bidden good riddance.

<sup>89</sup>Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 161.

<sup>90</sup>Porphyry, *Porphyry’s Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, ed. and trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1994), 90-91.

<sup>91</sup>Stanton, “Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,” 83-84. The exception Stanton cites (the disciples stealing the body of Jesus) *was* voiced by early Jewish opponents. This conclusion does *not* undermine my thesis that the metaphorical understanding of Christ’s resurrection is a purely modern, post-Enlightenment construct. Crossan utilizes the same *objections against* the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, but then arrives at a different *conclusion* based on those objections. Whereas Celsus and Porphyry conclude that the resurrection of Jesus is an infantile hoax, Crossan concludes that the resurrection is a metaphorical expression of early Christian faith in the continued power and presence of Jesus Christ.

Christians. Despite Crossan's insistence that early Christians embraced a metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection, even the church's enemies acknowledged that Christian resurrection faith was belief in Jesus' literal bodily resurrection. If post-Enlightenment human beings "got dumb enough"<sup>92</sup> to take Jesus' resurrection literally, then apparently pre-Enlightenment Christians and Romans were equally misguided. At any rate, it is patently not the case that the ancients (early Christians and their opponents) took the resurrection metaphorically and parabolically rather than literally and historically.

Rather, the New Testament authors, the early church fathers, and the earliest recorded anti-Christian polemicists Celsus and Porphyry all alike understood the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be intended as a literal, supernatural event in human history.

### **Resurrection Redefined: Gnostic Christianity**

The situation changes at some point in the second century. For the first time, we find a sizeable group *within* the Christian Church which professes and propagates something *other* than the bodily resurrection of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of believers. Gnostic Christians<sup>93</sup> begin to teach that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was

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<sup>92</sup>Crossan, "Why Is Historical Jesus Research Necessary," 19.

<sup>93</sup>Scholars vigorously contest the appropriateness of the term 'Gnostic Christians'. On the one hand, there is debate regarding the value of the label 'Gnostic' to begin with. Karen King notes that "there is no such thing as Gnosticism, if we mean by that some kind of ancient religious entity with a single origin and a distinct set of characteristics." Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-2. The problem, according to King, is that Gnosticism has been used as a *rhetorical* term rather than a *historical* badge (ibid., 1); thus, "modern historical constructions of Gnosticism reflect many of the characteristics and strategies used by early Christian polemicists . . . to construct heresy." Ibid., 3. Gnosticism is thereby defined in opposition to orthodox Christianity, rather than being understood on its own terms.

Some scholars respond by proposing that we abandon the term altogether, and replace it with a different, more descriptive (rather than dismissive) term. See, e.g., Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Williams suggests replacing Gnosticism with "biblical demiurgical," a label he finds more descriptive. Ibid., 265. King seeks to recast discussion of Gnosticism, focusing on its historical manifestations rather than orthodox Christian anti-Gnostic polemics. After her historical survey, she

spiritual, and can be shared by his followers—not at some eschatological fulfillment, but in the present life.

**The Gnostic worldview.** Gnosticism is a religious expression of neo-Platonic dualism.<sup>94</sup> Gnosticism is not a Christian heresy, as “there were Gnostic sects scattered over the Hellenistic world before Christianity as well as after.”<sup>95</sup> Gnosticism predates Christianity, and is founded upon a significantly different orienting worldview. Layton writes:

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concludes that “the term ‘Gnosticism’ will [in the near future] most likely be abandoned, at least in its present usage.” King, *What is Gnosticism*, 218. The term has simply embraced too wide and diverse a spectrum of beliefs and practices, primarily because it has been used rhetorically rather than historically.

Other scholars, meanwhile, argue that there is both a historical and doctrinal connection between various streams of Gnosticism. See, e.g., Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1987). Layton theorizes that ancient or “Classic Gnosticism” was filtered through the focal figure of Valentinus and into diverse later streams of Gnosticism. *Ibid.*, xvi. Layton identifies the core of “gnostic scripture” to be “its doctrines and its interpretation of Old and New Testament books—especially its open hostility to the god of Israel and its views on resurrection, the reality of Jesus’ incarnation and suffering, and the universality of Christian salvation.” Furthermore, “gnostic scripture is distinctive because the gnostic myth [of creation] competes strongly with the book of Genesis, thus rivaling the basic system used by other Christians to orient themselves to the world, the divine, and other people. On these points, the gap between gnostic religion and proto-orthodox Christianity was vast.” *Ibid.*, xxii.

While acknowledging the difficulties with Gnosticism as a term (raised by scholars like King and Williams), this dissertation follows scholars (e.g., Layton) who identify a core Gnostic worldview worthy of an identifying label. Thus, the “Gnostic” side of the term “Gnostic Christian” is embraced.

On the other hand, I am not convinced that true Gnostics could be truly Christian. As Layton intimates, the core worldview expressed in Gnostic scriptures is contra-biblical. The repudiation of the Old Testament, particularly its depiction of divine Creation, is the primary reason that Gnosticism has been primarily described as a heretical (rather than historical) entity. Thus, calling them ‘Gnostic Christians’ is questionable. Nonetheless, I think it’s the best shorthand description available. The underlying worldview of this group identifies them as clearly Gnostic; they self-identified as followers of Jesus and members of the universal Christian Church. Thus, I will hold my reservations and continue to apply the label.

<sup>94</sup>James M. Robinson, “Introduction,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2-4.

<sup>95</sup>Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion: Studies Based on a Course of Lectures Delivered in April 1912 at Columbia University*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The Thinker's Library 52 (London: Watts & Co., 1946), 162.



The Gnostic, or Gnosticizing, aspects of early Christianity [are] a ‘Platonism run wild’: one should not forget that close under the surface of much supposedly Gnostic language lies material familiar from the most-read passages of Plato.<sup>96</sup>

The core element of the Gnostic worldview is radical anthropological, cosmological, and theological dualism which emphasizes (along Platonic lines) the goodness of the spiritual and the badness of the physical.<sup>97</sup> The human being is essentially an embodied soul. The soul is eternal, and longs to be freed from the prison-house of the body.<sup>98</sup> The universe is a combination of spiritual beings and physical matter. The creator of the physical universe is not the supreme God, but rather a lesser deity who unintentionally created a corrupt physical realm.<sup>99</sup> A key component of Gnostic cosmology is the concept of *πληρωμα* (*pleroma*)—the cosmic *Fullness* which was the proper eternal state of spiritual beings prior to the creation of the physical universe and the resulting entrapment of souls in physical bodies.<sup>100</sup> Gnostic salvation thus consists of escape from the physical body and return to the *πληρωμα*.<sup>101</sup> The means of salvation is knowledge (Greek *γνῶσις*, the root word of Gnosticism), particularly self-understanding.

[Salvation] may be summarized as comprising the recognition of one’s self – one’s origin, who one is now, one’s destiny – and, by corollary, the recognition of one’s

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<sup>96</sup>Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection From Nag Hammadi*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, No. 12 (Missoula: Scholars, 1979), 3.

<sup>97</sup>Richard Smith, “The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 543-44.

<sup>98</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 65.

<sup>99</sup>See, e.g., Malcolm Peel, “The Treatise on the Resurrection,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 53. In some Gnostic or pseudo-Gnostic movements (e.g., Manichaeism), a strict theological dualism was maintained, with the existence of two super-potent deities—one good, one evil.

<sup>100</sup>Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection From Nag Hammadi*, 3.

<sup>101</sup>Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 15 (1964): 145; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 539.

relationship with heavenly characters like the Father and the Saviour. . . . If salvation is a process of self-recognition, and that insight is already present *in potentia* within the self, in one sense the Saviour is essentially superfluous . . . and we need to rethink what the term ‘saviour’ might mean for Gnostics apart from its more usual Christian definition of the one who redeems from sin.<sup>102</sup>

**Gnosticism and Christianity.** Given the Platonic foundations of Gnosticism, how did it take root within Christianity? Since Gnosticism was not founded upon a particular historical person or event, it was inherently adaptable, and capable of “drawing upon various religious heritages”<sup>103</sup> while still retaining its distinctive core. While the influential teachings of Marcion (c. 85-160 A.D.) likely had some impact, Valentinus (c. 100-160 A.D.) seems to have been the central figure in early Gnostic Christianity. At one point, according to Tertullian, Valentinus was sufficiently orthodox to be considered for the post of bishop of Rome.<sup>104</sup> The timing and process of Valentinus’ descent from trusted orthodox Christian to “despised heretic” is impossible to trace, but the Valentinian school of Gnostic Christianity left behind strong marks upon the ancient church.<sup>105</sup> The discovery of numerous Gnostic Christian treatises among the documents uncovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 exponentially increased our exposure to and understanding of Gnostic Christianity. Two documents from the Nag Hammadi Library are of particular

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<sup>102</sup>Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 99.

<sup>103</sup>Robinson, “Introduction,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 10.

<sup>104</sup>Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries: The Impact of the Nag Hammadi Library* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 119. Meyer continues to say: “Had he been appointed bishop of Rome, the subsequent history of the church might have been altogether different. Valentinus, *and perhaps all of us*, lost on that day.” Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup>Robert J. Douglass, “The Epistle to Rheginos: Christian-Gnostic Teaching on the Resurrection,” in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 116-17.

interest for our current study of the resurrection—the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (also known as the *Epistle to Rheginos*).

In ingratiating itself to the Christian tradition, Gnosticism willingly underwent some adjustments. Jesus' role as the author of salvation was embraced.<sup>106</sup> Gnostic Christians at least appeared to accept the authority of the apostolic New Testament scriptures—hence, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* quotes the Gospels and the letters of Paul to support his theological points.<sup>107</sup>

Despite some accommodations to Christian doctrine, however, Gnostic Christianity performed rather radical surgery upon orthodox doctrine in order to make it fit the underlying Gnostic worldview. First, the Christian conception of a Triune personal God is jettisoned. Second, the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation is rejected in favor of the view that “the world of space, time and matter is the evil creation of a lesser god.”<sup>108</sup> Third, the Hebrew Scriptures are studiously avoided or consciously rejected.<sup>109</sup> Fourth, the notion of sin is radically recast as the unfortunate, personally faultless separation of our eternal soul from the *πληρωμα*; as a consequence, the concept of divine

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<sup>106</sup>Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, 100. Embraced, but redefined.

<sup>107</sup>Bentley Layton, “Vision and Revision: a Gnostic View of Resurrection,” in *Colloque International sur Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981), 209; Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” 151. *Treatise on the Resurrection* 45 echoes Rom 6:3-9, “Then, indeed, as the Apostle [Paul] said: ‘We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.’” *Treatise* 48 invokes the Transfiguration of Jesus: “For if you remember reading in the Gospel that Elijah appeared and Moses with him, do not think the resurrection is an illusion. It is no illusion, but it is truth!”

<sup>108</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 537.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 550. Wright claims that “the Gnostic and similar writings avoid the Old Testament like the plague. . . . they certainly do not want to give the impression that the spirituality they are talking about, or the Jesus in whom they believe, or any events that may have happened to him, or the future hope they themselves embrace, have anything much to do with Israel, the Jews, the patriarchs and the scriptures.”

judgment is irrelevant.<sup>110</sup> Fifth, Gnostic Christology holds that Jesus is not really any different than other human beings—he merely understood and exercised the incipient spiritual powers which we all have.<sup>111</sup> Sixth, salvation is redefined. It is not the whole human being which is saved, but rather the soul alone.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the role of the savior in salvation is merely to point the way:

Salvation is the acquisition of self-knowledge, but the Gnostic does not have the power to come to that insight by him/herself. Someone is required to alert the Gnostic to the insight that awaits recognition, to wake him/her up. In this way, the Saviour needs to be primarily a revealer in the sense of one who awakens, rather than someone who gives extra knowledge that is not already possessed.<sup>113</sup>

**A Gnostic-sized (Gnosticized) resurrection.** With the aforementioned alterations to core Christian doctrines, it is clear that Gnostic Christianity is more “Gnostic” than “Christian.” The Gnostic treatment of the resurrection, displayed most clearly in the *Gospel of Philip* and *Treatise on the Resurrection*, continues to de-Christianize Gnostic Christianity.

The *Gospel of Philip*<sup>114</sup> insists that the resurrection of believers is to be found in the present, not in the future.<sup>115</sup> “Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will

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<sup>110</sup>Paul Foster, “The Gospel of Philip,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 82; Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” 151.

<sup>111</sup>Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, 72.

<sup>112</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 467.

<sup>113</sup>Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, 100. Thus, while Gnostic Christians embrace the role of Jesus as ‘Savior,’ the identity and role of the Savior has been radically redefined.

<sup>114</sup>A translation of excerpts from the *Gospel of Philip* appears in appendix 2.

<sup>115</sup>Foster, “The Gospel of Philip,” 80.

receive nothing.”<sup>116</sup> Jesus has already risen from the dead; so too the believer must rise *before* death.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, the resurrection is spiritual, not bodily.<sup>118</sup>

The *Treatise on the Resurrection*<sup>119</sup> also insists that the resurrection is a present reality, rather than a future hope.<sup>120</sup> Resurrection, like salvation, is self-achieved:

So too, the believer will raise *himself* through his newly acquired ‘acquaintance’ (γνωσις) with his true self, imparted by the Savior’s teaching. Paul by contrast has god raising Jesus; but the first principle of our author’s theology is too far removed from the mundane realm for such aggressive intervention.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, resurrection in the *Treatise* is a purely spiritual affair. The human being is essentially a spirit, trapped within a corrupt physical body. Resurrection “involves the complete laying aside of flesh, first by anticipation, then literally.”<sup>122</sup>

On the surface the Gnostic documents affirm the resurrection of Jesus and of all true Christians.<sup>123</sup> However, the spiritualization of the resurrection is in effect a rejection through redefinition. Resurrection language (*anastemi*, *egeiro* and their

<sup>116</sup>*The Gospel of Philip* 73:1-8; cited in Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 542.

<sup>117</sup>Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, 158.

<sup>118</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 542.

<sup>119</sup>A translation of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* (also known as the *Epistle to Rheginos*) appears in appendix 3.

<sup>120</sup>Douglass, “The Epistle to Rheginos,” 121; Malcolm Peel, “Resurrection, Treatise on the,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 691; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 540.

<sup>121</sup>Layton, *The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection From Nag Hammadi*, 58-59. Emphasis original.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>123</sup>Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*, 136; Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: I,” 150. Robinson notes that “Christian Gnosticism [was] a reaffirmation, though in somewhat different terms, of the original stance of transcendence central to the very beginnings of Christianity. Such Gnostic Christians surely considered themselves the faithful continuation, under changing circumstances, of that original stance which made Christians Christians.” Robinson, “Introduction,” 4. Robinson is surely right that the Gnostic Christians *considered* themselves to be faithful Christians; but the crucial question is whether they actually *were*.

cognates) had previously been used solely to refer to a two-stage bodily resurrection at a concrete point in history. The Platonic conception of soul liberation, ascent, or transmigration was common and widespread—but until its rather sudden appearance amongst Gnostic Christians, was *never* referred to using the language of resurrection. Texts like the *Treatise on the Resurrection* really represent Platonic philosophy dressed up in Pauline language.<sup>124</sup> N. T. Wright argues:

Resurrection, in the main sense that we have seen the word and its cognates used in the first two centuries of Christianity, is in these texts either *denied* or *radically reinterpreted*. If ‘resurrection’ is seen as in any sense a return, at some point after death, to a full bodily life, it is denied. If (as in the *Epistle to Rheginos*) the language of resurrection is retained, it is reinterpreted so that it no longer refers in any sense to the bodily events of either ultimate resurrection or moral obedience in this life, but rather to non-bodily religious experience during the present life and/or non-bodily post-mortem survival and exaltation.<sup>125</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is no longer the culmination of Jewish hope and the firstfruits of the bodily resurrection from the dead. Instead, it is the fulfillment of Platonic philosophical endeavor. The resurrection has been altered from an eschatological hope of vindication through the righteous judgment of Almighty God, into the achievement of Platonic soul-liberation through self-knowledge.<sup>126</sup> The resurrection of both Christ and Christians has been redefined out of existence.

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<sup>124</sup>Layton, “Vision and Revision: a Gnostic View of Resurrection,” 213. Earlier, Layton writes: “Not only does our author ignore the problem of sin. He ignores the question of Judaism and the Law, indeed he makes no reference whatsoever to the Old Testament. He does not speak of divine economy or providence, nor of God’s raising of Jesus. Indeed he does not speak of God. The crucifixion and cross are not mentioned. Jesus is not *ho khristos* (‘the anointed’) but *ho khrestos* (‘the excellent’). . . . Furthermore, there is no future resurrection. Resurrection for our author is preeminently a category of the here and now; thus there is no problem about delay in the general resurrection, and no concept of a coming *parousia* with judgment. And, as I have already emphasized, there is no concept of a resurrection ‘body’ in which the self will be re clothed when it reenters the *pleroma*. The author has therefore dressed a quite non-Pauline theology in a thin and tattered Pauline garb.” Ibid., 211.

<sup>125</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 547. Emphasis original.

<sup>126</sup>Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*, 136.

But why did Gnostics, with the language of Platonic philosophy readily at hand, choose instead to co-opt Judeo-Christian resurrection language? Van Unnik rightly argues that Gnostic Christians altered their proclamation of the resurrection “to fit the Gnostic conception of the *Pleroma* and the world.”<sup>127</sup> Gnostic Christians wanted to maintain both their Gnostic dualism and their Christian identity, so they simply applied Christian resurrection terminology to the Gnostic concept of soul liberation.<sup>128</sup>

### **Crossan and the Gnostics: Resurrection redefined.** John Dominic

Crossan’s metaphorical reconstruction of Jesus’ resurrection represents an ironic modern version of Gnostic Christianity. On the one hand, we must be absolutely clear: Crossan is no Gnostic. Crossan regularly distances himself from Gnostic theology in his academic work; he insists that Gnostic Christianity (which he claims grew out of the Life Tradition exemplified in the *Sayings Gospel Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*) has far too little interest in the bodily existence and earthly mission of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the Gnostics’ spiritual understanding of Jesus’ resurrection bears little resemblance to Crossan’s metaphorical conception. The former suggests that Jesus’ resurrection was an

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<sup>127</sup>Van Unnik, “The Newly Discovered Gnostic ‘Epistle to Rheginos’ on the Resurrection: II,” 165. The alteration could have taken place in two different ways. First, existing Gnostics attracted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ would transform Christian resurrection language to fit their worldview. But also, existing Christians could have been attracted to Gnosticism, and transformed their conception of Christ’s resurrection to fit the language of their new Gnostic worldview. Perhaps it is the latter transformation that happened with Valentinus.

<sup>128</sup>N. T. Wright emphasizes that “‘resurrection’ and its cognates never meant, in either pagan or Jewish usage, what these documents make it mean; the only explanation is that they are loath to give up the word, because they want to seem to be some type of Christian, but are using it in a way for which there is no early warrant.” Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 550.

<sup>129</sup>See, e.g., John Dominic Crossan, “Our Own Faces in Deep Wells: A Future for Historical Jesus Research,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 283, 299-301; idem, “Why Christians Must Search for the Historical Jesus,” *Bible Review* 12, no. 2 (1996): 35-36; idem, “The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity,” in *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 5-8.

event which happened in concrete history (albeit on a spiritual plane); the latter insists that resurrection is a symbolic expression of continued experience of transcendence through faith in the crucified Jesus. The former insists that Jesus' experience after death is the model for current Christian believers as well; the latter insists that nothing happened to Jesus' corpse, nor will anything happen to believers' bodies.<sup>130</sup>

On the other hand, Crossan inherits two significant emphases from ancient Gnostic Christianity. First, the Gnostics represent a strong and diverse strand of early Christianity, a definite boon to Crossan's own heterodoxy.<sup>131</sup> Second, Gnostic Christianity marks the first time that resurrection language is used to apply to something other than the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future two-stage bodily resurrection of believers. Modern proponents of the metaphorical resurrection seek to do precisely what the ancient Gnostic Christians did—use resurrection language to apply to something other than orthodox resurrection belief.

### **Conclusion: Worldview and Resurrection Redefinition**

Crossan insists that the resurrection of Jesus was understood metaphorically by his earliest followers. It is certainly true that the early church derived metaphorical applications *from* Jesus' bodily resurrection. We have seen, however, that when applied to an individual's post-mortem existence (or lack thereof), resurrection language in the first century always and only referred to a future two-stage bodily resurrection from the

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<sup>130</sup>In that sense, one could argue that Crossan and the Gnostics alike insist that Jesus' post-mortem fate is the model for the afterlife of contemporary Christians. Crossan asserts that Jesus' physical death marks his passing from existence, just as we too will cease to exist upon death. Gnostics argue that Jesus' physical death marked his spiritual ascent, just as we too will ascend to the *pleroma* upon our physical passing.

<sup>131</sup>Smith, "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism," 532-33.



dead, even among those who rejected the possibility. Furthermore, the New Testament, the early Church fathers, and early opponents of Christianity all understood the resurrection in literal, bodily terms.<sup>132</sup> When Gnostic Christians applied resurrection language in a radically new spiritualized sense, they did so in a way contrary to modern metaphorical reconstructions. Indeed, both the underlying worldview and the reconstructed resurrection of Jesus in Gnostic Christianity are opposed to Crossan's. The inescapable conclusion is that the metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a purely modern invention, with neither precursors in nor support from the history of the Church and her ancient opponents.

Gnostic Christians redefined the resurrection (of Christ and believers) in order to better fit their underlying theological worldview. Crossan's metaphorical reconstruction of Christ's resurrection represents the same process. Crossan holds a naturalistic worldview which denies both the possibility of life after death and the active involvement of God in the physical realm. Within such a worldview, the metaphorical resurrection is plausible; a bodily resurrection is not. The process of redefining resurrection belief in order to fit one's own worldview appears to be a widespread and natural phenomenon.<sup>133</sup>

Altering resurrection belief is considerably more likely when the predominant cultural worldview *does not accommodate orthodox resurrection belief*. The vast majority of the Greco-Roman world rejected the worldview that lay behind the Christian

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<sup>132</sup>Again, this does not downplay or deny that the resurrection was *applied* metaphorically to the present experience of believers. But this metaphorical application was only possible because of their belief in the concrete historical *fact* of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead.

<sup>133</sup>Van Unnik seems to agree; see Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: II," 163-64. See also Dudrey, "What the Writers Should Have Done Better," 55.

proclamation of Jesus' bodily resurrection and the future bodily resurrection of believers. The attacks launched by Celsus and Porphyry demonstrate "why Christians were tempted to abandon the doctrine of the incarnation and the resurrection," and why "Christian Gnosticism simply accepted the pagan antimaterialistic worldview": a spiritual understanding of resurrection "was far more marketable to the pagan worldview."<sup>134</sup> Since Hume, the respectable intellectual worldview has gradually become functionally naturalistic.<sup>135</sup> The metaphorical resurrection is "far more marketable" within this worldview than is the bodily resurrection proclaimed by historical Christianity. Thus, when Crossan proposes a metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection, he is following in the footsteps of the second-century Gnostic Christians—proposing a culturally-acceptable redefinition of the resurrection.

Crossan argues that bodily resurrection was "only one way" of professing continued belief in Jesus after his crucifixion. Even if he was correct in this assertion,<sup>136</sup> the conclusion of this chapter undermines the force of his argument. Crossan implies that two things follow from early Christian plurality: first, profession of belief in Jesus' resurrection was not a non-negotiable item of faith in the first century; and second, the earliest Christians' resurrection faith was metaphorical in nature. In this chapter, it has been argued that, on the contrary, Christians and their opponents alike understood that proclamation of Jesus' resurrection was proclamation of a literal bodily resurrection,

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<sup>134</sup>Dudrey, "What the Writers Should Have Done Better," 67.

<sup>135</sup>Westerners are not generally professing atheists (consistent naturalists). Functional naturalism suggests that while Westerners might consciously acknowledge the real or possible existence of a transcendent deity, they operate on a day-to-day basis as if that 'God' is uninvolved in world affairs. The dominant contemporary worldview discounts the possibility of God intervening in historical events.

<sup>136</sup>Chapters 2 and 4 refute Crossan's assertion of early plurality on the resurrection of Jesus.

wherein God supernaturally raised Jesus back to life on the third day. The metaphorical resurrection has neither precursors nor support from the early church or her opponents.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE RESURRECTION AND THE POOL OF LIVE OPTIONS

#### **The Myth of the Metaphorical Resurrection**

This dissertation has argued that John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' resurrection is the product of his worldview presuppositions, not his rigorous historical Jesus methodology.

#### **The Rise and Fall of Resurrection Belief**

Chapter 2 traced the rise and fall of resurrection belief in Western Christianity. It began with a brief examination of Jesus' bodily resurrection as proclaimed in the New Testament documents. It then considered the testimony of the early church fathers, particularly Clement, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr. Early Christian documents outside the New Testament were seen to profess the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, insisting upon its literal historical occurrence. The early Christian creeds likewise emphasize the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and its implications for individual Christian and the corporate Church.

Christian proclamation of and belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical event remained steadfast throughout the Middle Ages. With the fragmentation of the Christian Church in the Protestant Reformation, and the concurrent rise of Enlightenment rationalism, resurrection belief began to wane. The rise of deism resulted in widespread belief in a universe created by God but governed by an ordained

set of regular natural laws. The deistic worldview entailed a closed universe, and rejected miraculous divine interventions in the created order. Naturally, belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a supernaturally-caused historical event waned accordingly. David Hume's critique of miracles was adopted and later presumed by emerging biblical criticism. Henri Reimarus, Karl Bahrdt, David Strauss, William Wrede, Albert Schweitzer, and Rudolf Bultmann focused the lens of naturalistic skepticism upon the New Testament and its miraculous claims, particularly the resurrection of Jesus. Without exception, they presumed that the resurrection could not have occurred as depicted, as a literal physical historical event. Instead, they hypothesized that the New Testament's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection was the result of a fraud perpetrated by his disciples, a deception enacted by Jesus and his handlers, subjective hallucinations or delusions experienced by the disciples, or a mythical explanation for the continued power Jesus' followers experienced.

### **Crossan's Metaphorical Resurrection**

John Dominic Crossan inherits the naturalistic presuppositions and the *a priori* rejection of Jesus' literal bodily resurrection from eighteenth and nineteenth century German critical scholarship, which inherited those presuppositions from English deism. Chapter 3 demonstrated that Crossan's core theological worldview presuppositions reject the very possibility of Jesus' body being raised supernaturally back to life after his death; therefore, Crossan must find another way to account for the rise of resurrection belief in early Christianity.

Crossan thus takes up the mantle of Strauss, and proclaims that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is essentially a myth. Resurrection does not, and did not initially intend

to, refer to what actually happened to Jesus' body. Rather, resurrection is one way that the early Christian community described the continued manifestation of the divine power it had experienced during Jesus' lifetime. As the disciples continued to live the way Jesus lived, in open commensality offering the unmediated presence of God to all, they continued to experience the presence and power of God. Jesus lived on with his disciples, and his mission and teaching were thereby vindicated despite his life being snuffed out by the Roman authorities. Thus Jesus' first followers spoke of his resurrection in order to explain their continued experience.

### **Hermeneutics, Methodology, Material Investments, and Worldview Presuppositions**

Chapter 4 examined Crossan's hermeneutics and historical Jesus methodology. Crossan's early work in literary criticism embraces structuralism, the perspective that reality is constructed by the language of the experient. Crossan's structuralism emphasizes the unobtainability of an external reality-out-there waiting to be discovered, insisting instead that reality is formed by the language we use. Furthermore, Crossan sees language as inherently metaphorical, polyvalent, and paradoxical, with literal language arising in an attempt to create order and meaning out of chaos and paradox. Religious language in particular is unavoidably metaphorical, as the absolute transcendence of the Divine Reality is fundamentally unutterable and irreducible. Crossan has already rejected the possibility of Jesus' literal bodily resurrection, and his commitment to structuralism and the metaphoricity of language (particularly religious language) guides him to embrace a metaphorical picture of Jesus' resurrection.

Chapter 4 also surveyed Crossan's helpful and rigorous triple-triadic historical Jesus methodology, by which he seeks to recover the words and deeds of the historical Jesus. Crossan's first triad emphasizes the insights of anthropology and literary criticism along with knowledge of the historical context of first-century Palestine in the Greco-Roman world. His second triad aims at recovering an inventory of historical Jesus material by accumulating the major sources and texts, separating them into respective chronological strata of composition, and determining the number of independent attestation of each complex within that material. Crossan's third triad works with the Jesus complexes in their proper historical and anthropological context, dividing complexes according to their earliest stratum of attestation and their number of independent attestation, while bracketing (rejecting) all singularly-attested complexes.

Crossan's historical Jesus methodology is indeed helpful and thorough. Inevitably, however, his operative methodology is thoroughly influenced by his governing theological worldview, particularly his presupposition of methodological naturalism. Crossan acknowledges that scholarly judgments have to be made at every step of his rigorous methodology. When was a given text composed? What is its literary relationship to other texts? Within his methodology, Crossan designates each isolated Jesus complex as historical (+), non-historical (-), or metaphorical (+/-). Given his prevailing worldview presuppositions, events like the resurrection, the multiplication of loaves, the nature miracles, and the raising of Lazarus are necessarily non-historical or metaphorical in nature—they cannot be literal and historical.

Crossan also emphasizes the centrality of what he variably terms Gospel presuppositions, starting points, or informed decisions—what this dissertation has treated

as material investments for the sake of consistency. The material investments one makes in textual sources about Jesus, Crossan argues rightly, determine the resulting reconstruction of Jesus. Furthermore, if those material investments are doubtful or wrong, then the scholarly reconstruction is cast into doubt. Accordingly, four of Crossan's material investments were critically analyzed—those regarding his Life Tradition (exemplified in the *Sayings Gospel Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*), the *Cross Gospel* he identifies within the *Gospel of Peter*, Morton Smith's discovery of *Secret Mark*, and the purpose and narrative creativity of the author of the canonical Gospel of Mark. There are compelling reasons to reject each of Crossan's material investments, and thus, according to Crossan, compelling reason to doubt his resulting portrait of Jesus.

### **Worldview and Resurrection Belief in the Early Church and Her Opponents**

Chapter 5 focused upon the understanding of Jesus' resurrection in the early church, her pagan opponents, and second-century Gnostic revisionists. It argued that resurrection terminology in the first century was understood by pagans and Jews alike to refer to something concrete happening to a deceased physical body. The earliest extant refutations of Christian resurrection belief (from Celsus and Porphyry) opposed a literal bodily resurrection. On both fronts, Crossan's theory that early Christians understood Jesus' resurrection metaphorically rather than literally appears to be speculative hypothesis rather than historical conclusion.

Chapter 5 also examined the Gnostic Christian redefinition of Jesus' resurrection as a *spiritual*, rather than a *physical*, historical event. Gnostics redefined Jesus' resurrection in spiritual terms in order to make their creedal affirmation of the resurrection better fit the prevailing cultural worldview. Gnostic Christians bear



resemblance to the critical scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in their desire to accommodate their Christian faith with the surrounding worldview presuppositions. Gnostics questioned why anyone would want a body back after death; modern biblical critics question the very possibility of receiving physical life back after death. It seems to be appealing and common to redefine core Christian affirmations like the resurrection in order to make Christianity more “marketable” in the marketplace of contemporary worldview.

### **Worldview Presuppositions and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Worldview presuppositions act as a perceptual lens, controlling the way that we see the world around us.

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to biblical research and historical Jesus studies, a scholar’s worldview presuppositions inevitably influence his or her treatment of textual evidence and theological affirmations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 17.

<sup>2</sup>John Oswalt shares an example of the influence of worldview presuppositions upon study of the origin, development, and uniqueness of Old Testament Judaism in its ancient near-Eastern context. The basic item of contention Oswalt addresses is the relative similarities and distinctions of Hebrew religion with contemporary religions. In 1950, G. Ernest Wright, in *The Old Testament against Its Environment* (London: SCM, 1950), “argued that the differences between the Israelite way of thinking about reality and the way in which Israel’s neighbors approached that topic were so significant that no evolutionary explanations could account for them.” John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 11. Oswalt then notes how things have changed in sixty years: “But now, nearly sixty years later, it is widely affirmed that Israelite religion is simply one more of the complex of West Semitic religions, and that its characteristic features can be fully explained on the basis of evolutionary change.” Ibid. Oswalt notes Mark Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*

## Worldview and the Pool of Live Options

Worldview determines the antecedent possibility or plausibility of various explanations or theories. A scholar's worldview presuppositions decide whether the historic affirmation of Jesus' supernatural bodily resurrection from the dead is possible or not. To put it differently, worldview determines the pool of live options.

One might consider, for example, the need to explain the mysterious appearance of mail in his mailbox on a day that, to his knowledge, mail is not normally delivered. He returns home from attending weekly worship at his church and discovers a letter from Aunt Martha in the mailbox outside the front door of his townhouse. He is, needless to say, surprised—mail is not normally delivered on the Sabbath day. How then shall he explain this apparent mystery? His ten-year-old son offers a potential explanation: "The postal service must have started delivering on the Sabbath." His wife offers another explanation: "Yesterday's mail was probably delivered to Mr. and Mrs. Jones across the street (in 2843 Fallow Court as opposed to his 2834 Fallow Court) by mistake, and they brought it over for us today." His seven-year-old daughter offers a third possible explanation: "Aliens stole our mail yesterday, and brought it back today." His new friend Art offers a fourth explanation: "Did you not know, have you not heard,

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), as a pre-eminent example of the new hypothesis. Oswalt continues, "I do not wish to belittle either the ability or the motivation of current scholars. . . . Nonetheless, I am convinced that it is prior theological and philosophical convictions that account for the change and not any change in the data." Ibid., 12. The data has remained the same; but convictions about *what must be* has driven the change in theory. Worldview drives theory and conclusion. "Modern scholars who cannot admit the possibility of revelation now insist that the differences that were so unmistakable to scholars a generation ago are not really that important at all, but it is the similarities that are vital, showing that Israelite religion is not essentially different from the religions around it." Ibid., 13. Therefore, Oswalt appeals for "the Bible's claims to have been revealed [to] be given the attention that it deserves, and that arguments growing from a fundamental disbelief in that possibility not be given a privileged place in the discussion." Ibid., 18.

that here in the United States, mail is delivered every Saturday? It is only lazy Canadian postal workers who get the whole weekend off.”

Each of the four explanations is, theoretically speaking, possible. Nonetheless, the four alternatives are not going to be accorded the same weight of plausibility. Within his own worldview, option three will be immediately discarded from the realm of possibility. His skepticism concerning the existence of extra-terrestrial life forms (and my conviction that, even if they should happen to exist, the possibility of them traveling to earth is extremely remote) rules his daughter’s suggestion out. Simply put, the alien explanation is not in his pool of live options. Kelly James Clark argues, “explanatory power is not the only factor involved in the assessment of hypotheses; hypotheses must also be judged to have some initial likelihood of being true. And judgments of initial likelihood are *conditioned by our deepest commitments*.”<sup>3</sup> When faced with unusual phenomena or extraordinary claims, our worldview presuppositions govern their antecedent probability.

### **The Resurrection and the Pool of Live Options**

When it comes to the Christian proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection, worldview presuppositions determine whether or not the historically orthodox conception is within the pool of live options. John Dominic Crossan is committed to a naturalistic worldview which denies supernatural interaction with the closed physical universe. He is convinced that human life ceases at death. Those worldview presuppositions render the orthodox resurrection untenable and in-credible—a supernatural bodily resurrection is simply not

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<sup>3</sup>Kelly James Clark, “A Reformed Epistemologist’s Response to Evidential Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 143. Emphasis added.

within the pool of live options given Crossan's worldview. Neither his worldview presuppositions nor his rejection of the literal resurrection are unique or original to Crossan. Both are evident in the stream of scholarship surveyed and summarized in chapter 2 of this dissertation, from Hume to Reimarus to Strauss to Bultmann.

This dissertation has not set out to refute or counter the naturalistic worldview presuppositions that direct Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>4</sup> My own worldview is different than Crossan's. I entertain the *possibility* of divine interaction with the created universe, including such supernatural miracles as the divine conception of Octavius Caesar and the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. My worldview does not predetermine *acceptance* of all miracle-claims; but unlike Crossan's, my worldview does permit their historicity. Within a robust theistic worldview, miracles have to be individually considered and weighed; they can be neither accepted nor rejected *carte blanche* before the fact. I agree wholeheartedly with Crossan's insistence that Christian scholars need to take both Christian and pagan miracle-claims with equal seriousness; unlike Crossan, however, I am both unwilling and unable to discount both alike.<sup>5</sup> When

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<sup>4</sup>A defense of robust theism and a critique of deistic naturalism is in my opinion a worthwhile and necessary endeavor. For a defense of supernaturalistic theism, please see *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); *In Defense of Natural Theology*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005); and William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>Crossan insists that Christian and pagan miracle-claims need to be considered with equal seriousness, and there I agree with him. Crossan, however, goes further and insists that a responsible scholar *must* take both sets of miracle-claims either literally or metaphorically—that is, if a conservative Christian scholar is going to take the virgin birth of Jesus literally, she also needs to take the virgin birth of Octavius Caesar literally; if, on the other hand, the Christian scholar is going to treat Octavius' virgin birth as a mythical parable, he also needs to treat the virgin birth of Jesus as a myth. "Either all such divine conceptions, from Alexander to Augustus and from the Christ to the Buddha, should be accepted literally and miraculously or all of them should be accepted metaphorically and theologically. It is not morally acceptable to say directly and openly that our story is truth but yours is myth; ours is history but yours is lie." John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 28. "It is ... an ethical

it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it falls within the pool of live options given my worldview presuppositions.

### **Acknowledging Directing Worldview Presuppositions**

The point of this dissertation is not to show that Crossan's worldview presuppositions are incorrect and should be replaced by another. Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate the inexorable influence that unacknowledged worldview presuppositions exert upon Crossan's historical Jesus research, particularly his metaphorical conception of the resurrection. Crossan does not, per se, hide his presuppositions of religious pluralism, human extinction at death, and deistic naturalism. He does, in casual asides and responses to questions, acknowledge that his theological worldview involves those presumptions. At the same time, however, Crossan seems unaware of the powerful impact those presuppositions have on his reconstruction of Jesus and his resurrection.

My contention, therefore, is that biblical scholars in general and historical Jesus scholars in particular need to be much more conscious of the influence of worldview presuppositions. First, scholars need to identify openly and publicly

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imperative that we not claim our story is fact and true, theirs is myth and lie, if both are powerful and particular parables." Ibid., 148. "Either all such divine conceptions, from Alexander to Augustus and from the Christ to the Buddha, should be accepted literally and miraculously or all of them should be accepted metaphorically and theologically. It is not morally acceptable to say directly and openly that our story is truth but yours is myth, ours is history but yours is lie. It is even less morally acceptable to say that indirectly and covertly by manufacturing defensive or protective strategies that apply only to one's own story." Crossan, "Our Own Faces in Deep Wells: A Future for Historical Jesus Research," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 292. See also Crossan, "A Tale of Two Gods," *Christian Century* 110 (1993): 1270-78.

Unfortunately, Crossan does not pursue the need to evaluate Christian and pagan miracle-claims with equal seriousness. Instead, like Hume, he seems to presuppose that all miracle-claims *must* be either equally true or equally false. Since it is self-evident that the miracle-claims of various religious traditions cannot all be true, Crossan concludes (following Hume) that they must all be false, i.e., mythological rather than historical, metaphorical rather than literal. Unlike Crossan, I am open to considering the relative miracle-claims of different religious or philosophical traditions with equal seriousness; I am *not* content to conclude that they must be either equally historical or equally false.

worldview presuppositions which will direct and control their pool of live options.<sup>6</sup> In Crossan's case, this would involve acknowledging, perhaps in the introduction of significant studies like *The Historical Jesus*,<sup>7</sup> his three core worldview presuppositions examined in chapter 3 of this dissertation.<sup>8</sup> After articulating such theological presuppositions, historical Jesus scholars need to assess the areas of their scholarship which those presuppositions will inevitably influence. In Crossan's case, this would involve admitting that the orthodox understanding of Jesus' resurrection and the literal intent of the nature miracles in the canonical Gospels are ruled out of court by his worldview—supernatural miracles are not in Crossan's pool of live options.

### **Bracketing Worldview**

Second, biblical scholars need to go further, and seek to bracket, as far as possible, the influence that their worldview presuppositions exert upon their scholarship. Crossan rightly insists that biblical scholars should approach their subject material with open minds, not already knowing what they are going to discover.<sup>9</sup> By the same token, historical Jesus researchers should not know what they are *not* going to discover before

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<sup>6</sup>Licona notes, "Horizons [worldview presuppositions] can serve both as assets and liabilities. If we live in a deistic or atheistic reality, historians maintaining a bias against the supernatural will actually be assisted by their bias to arrive at an accurate historical conclusion. However, if we live in a theistic reality, a bias against the supernatural may actually prohibit certain historians from making a correct adjudication on miracle-claims in general and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus in particular." Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 49.

<sup>7</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>8</sup>Descriptive and prescriptive religious pluralism, human extinction at death, and deistic naturalism (which Crossan terms divine consistency).

<sup>9</sup>"It is one thing to be an investigative scholar, another to be a defensive scholar; one thing to find an answer as you proceed, another to know the answer before you begin; one thing to do research, another to do apologetics." John Dominic Crossan, *A Long Way from Tipperary: A Memoir* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 96.

they begin their study. In Crossan's case, his theological worldview presuppositions ruled the historic orthodox portrait of Jesus of Nazareth out of his pool of live options.<sup>10</sup> In order to conduct truly critical investigative scholarship, Crossan needed to bracket, or set aside, his theological presuppositions.

I do not believe that it is possible to obtain complete worldview neutrality in historical Jesus studies—that is, Crossan would not be able to entirely set aside his worldview presuppositions. Nonetheless, it behooves historical Jesus scholars to make a conscious effort to minimize the influence their worldview presuppositions exert upon their research. For example, when considering the Gospels' accounts of Jesus healing the sick and the blind, Crossan states, "I presume that Jesus, *who did not and could not cure that disease or any other one*, healed the poor man's illness by refusing to accept the disease's ritual uncleanness and social ostracization."<sup>11</sup> Crossan has made no apparent attempt to minimize the impact that his presupposition of divine consistency exerts upon his historical conclusions. Critical scholarship requires investigating possibilities and explanations that fall outside the purview of the scholar's own worldview and its concomitant presuppositions. The critical scholar may not (indeed probably will not) come to embrace those alternative positions; however, it is essential to enter into the material and read dissenting work sympathetically.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>After surveying various skeptical scholars' presumption of the impossibility of the miraculous, Licona notes, "Only the naïve would maintain that historians who are agnostics, atheists or non-Christian theists approach the question of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus without any biases." Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 46.

<sup>11</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 82. Emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup>E.g., it is encouraging to read an historian write, "I have attempted to divest myself of preconditioning and have worked toward experiencing empathy when reading the works of those with whom I do not agree." Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 131.

### **The Resurrection and Worldview Conversion**

John Dominic Crossan's metaphorical understanding of Jesus' resurrection has been shown to lack historical and textual evidence. The metaphorical resurrection is not an unbiased scholarly conclusion based on historical Jesus textual sources. Instead, it is the product of Crossan's theological worldview presuppositions. Second-century Gnostic Christians redefined Jesus' resurrection as a purely spiritual event in order to accommodate orthodox creedal confession within the prevailing Greco-Roman dualistic worldview. In a similar fashion, Crossan follows the lead of Reimarus, Strauss, and Bultmann, and redefines Jesus' resurrection as a metaphorical expression of religious experience in order to accommodate orthodox creedal confession within the prevailing Western naturalistic worldview.

The New Testament documents, the early church, and her opponents all understood the Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection to refer to a literal historical occurrence whereby God raised Jesus bodily and supernaturally from the dead. The historical evidence pointing to the historicity of Jesus' resurrection is multifaceted and, in my considered judgment, persuasive<sup>13</sup>—if, that is, one has not ruled such a supernatural event out due to worldview presuppositions. The traditional Christian evidential

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<sup>13</sup>A robust defense of the historicity of the resurrection is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the two fullest contemporary treatments, consult N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); and Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Other historical defenses of Jesus' bodily resurrection include William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 16 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989); idem, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1981); Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); and Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).



apologetic holds that Jesus was crucified and buried<sup>14</sup> the morning prior to the Sabbath; the morning after the Sabbath, women went to the tomb, only to find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. The risen Jesus then appeared in physical form to many of his followers, including a large group; he also appeared to his skeptical brother James and the opponent Saul of Tarsus. According to both early Christians and their opponents, such is the evidence demonstrating the historical veracity of Jesus' supernatural bodily resurrection.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Contra Crossan, it seems reasonable to accept the historicity of both Joseph of Arimathea and his burial of Jesus in a tomb outside Jerusalem. See, e.g., Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, "Did Joseph of Arimathea Exist?" *Biblica* 75 (1994): 235-41.

<sup>15</sup>N. T. Wright structures his *The Resurrection of the Son of God* around the dual historical facts of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Jesus to his followers. According to Wright, the supernatural bodily resurrection of Jesus is the best historical explanation of the data. Crossan disagrees. For the sake of argument, he says, "for here and now (*data non concessio*, to be sure) *I take the Gospel stories of the empty tomb's discovery and of all those risen apparitions as historically factual in their entirety.*" John Dominic Crossan, "Bodily-Resurrection Faith," in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 176. Emphasis original. Crossan then insists, "I cannot see how Tom's twin conditions, even granting them their fullest historicity, can explain anything beyond believers concluding to an *absolutely unique assumption* or *extraordinary heavenly exaltation* of Jesus as Christ, Lord, and Son of God." *Ibid.*, 177. Emphasis original.

It seems, however, that Crossan has *not* really accepted (provisionally, of course) the "fullest historicity" of the empty tomb and resurrection appearances. Crossan designates Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his followers (and not-yet-followers like James and Saul of Tarsus) "apparitions," not "appearances." Wright insists upon the "transphysical" nature of the resurrection appearances—there was something physical and tangible present to the disciples when the risen Jesus encountered them. While his intention is clear and honorable, Crossan is not able to consciously set aside his worldview presuppositions (which, we must recall, rule out the very possibility of Jesus' body being raised and thence appearing in *bodily physical form* to his disciples) and truly entertain (*data non concessio*, of course) Wright's hypothesis *as Wright himself puts it*. Instead, Crossan redefines Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, transforming them into non-physical *apparitions*. An apparition is a subjective experience, which may be accompanied with ocular data but is bereft of other tangible data. Wright's transphysical appearances, on the contrary, involve physical phenomena, like physically touching the risen Jesus, sharing breakfast with the risen Jesus, speaking to and hearing from the risen Jesus in audible verbal format. There is a vast experiential and ontological chasm between Wright's conception of risen appearances and Crossan's conceded understanding of resurrection apparitions.

I actually agree with Crossan—if all you have is an empty tomb and subjective non-tangible apparitions of the post-crucifixion Jesus, then all you can arrive at is exaltation or assumption. The same is true, however, of Crossan's *own* resurrection hypothesis: if all you have is Jesus' earthly ministry (the proclamation of the unbrokered unmediated kingdom of God available to everyone) and subjective experiences of divine presence in your continued Christ-following community, then all you can arrive at is exaltation, assumption or the Holy Spirit. In either case, concluding "bodily resurrection" is an unjustified leap. Given Wright's actual argument, however—empty tomb plus actual transphysical encounters with the resurrected Jesus—the historically orthodox conclusion of supernatural bodily resurrection becomes the best historical explanation of the data.

Worldview presuppositions are powerful; in Crossan's case, theological presuppositions prevent him from considering the historicity of Jesus' supernatural bodily resurrection. His presuppositions guide him to embrace an alternative naturalistic explanation of the historical data. Hence the bodily resurrection of Jesus becomes a metaphorical expression of the early church's religious experience. Worldview presuppositions are indeed powerful; however, they are not set in stone. The critical historian can open his or her worldview to transformation or conversion by allowing the historical evidence to inform and alter their perception of reality.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the earliest disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, leaders of the early church in Jerusalem, represent examples of men and women whose worldviews were radically transformed by their experiences.

N. T. Wright notes, "some events seem to have the power to challenge worldviews and generate either new mutations within them or complete transformations."<sup>17</sup> The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth around 30 A.D. is one such event. The Jewish disciples who encountered the risen Christ had their worldviews radically altered: they began to treat Jesus not only as Messiah, but also as Lord and God, and the proper object of devotion and worship; they gathered for separate corporate worship on the first day of the week (as well as continuing to observe the Jewish Sabbath on the seventh day of the week); and they altered their resurrection faith to include Jesus as the firstfruits and promise of their own future resurrection.

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<sup>16</sup>Licona provides several classic examples of worldview conversion: Bart Ehrman's conversion from evangelical Christian to agnostic skeptic; Alister McGrath's move from atheism to Christianity (mirroring compatriot C. S. Lewis' journey); Eta Linnemann's transformation from Bultmannian deism to biblical conservatism; and Antony Flew's conversion from atheism to deism. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 51.

<sup>17</sup>Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 27.

An historical investigation into the resurrection of Jesus Christ can arrive at the probable conclusion that Jesus was supernaturally raised from the dead in bodily form the third day after his crucifixion in Jerusalem. Historical investigation cannot result in a theological profession of faith in the risen Jesus. Acknowledging the probability of Jesus' (non-metaphorical) resurrection does not necessitate an adjustment or transformation of one's existing worldview. Acknowledging the *actuality* and *implications* of Jesus' supernatural resurrection, on the other hand, *does* entail a worldview conversion akin to that of the first-century disciples.

Whether in the first century or the twenty-first, the one who comes face-to-face with the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is faced with a decision: will I (like Gnostics in the second century and Crossanian deists today) alter, shape, reinterpret or redefine the resurrection so as to fit my pre-existing worldview? Or will I (like the apostles in the first century and countless Christians since) allow the resurrection of the Messiah to alter my worldview?

## APPENDIX 1

### TEXT AND LAYERS IN THE *GOSPEL OF PETER*

The *Gospel of Peter*, in its extant versions, is incomplete, and begins in mid-thought. In this appendix, John Dominic Crossan's translation and stratification of the *Gospel of Peter* is reproduced.<sup>1</sup> In order to differentiate the three layers identified by Crossan, the primitive core (i.e. the contents of the hypothesized *Cross Gospel*) will appear in "plain text"; the intercanonical dependent units (i.e. elements added by a later editor of the *Gospel of Peter*, reflecting dependence upon the canonical Gospels) will appear in "*italic text*"; and the redactional stratum (i.e. interpolations inserted by the redactor in order to prepare the reader for the later intercanonical units) will appear in "**bold text.**" Verse markings will set off units.

[1:1-2] But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod nor any one of his judges. And as they would not wash, Pilate arose. And then Herod the king commanded that the Lord should be marched off, saying to them, "What I have commanded you to do to him, do ye."

[2:3-5a] **Now there stood Joseph, the friend of Pilate and of the Lord, and knowing that they were about to crucify him he came to Pilate and begged the body of the Lord for burial. And Pilate sent to Herod and begged his body. And Herod said, "Brother Pilate, even if no one had begged him, we should bury him, since the**

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<sup>1</sup>Text and stratification is taken from John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), appendix 7, 462-66.

**Sabbath is drawing on. For it stands written in the law: the sun should not set on one that has been put to death.”<sup>2</sup>**

[2:5b-4:14] And he delivered him to the people on the day before the unleavened bread, their feast.<sup>3</sup> So they took the Lord and pushed him in great haste and said, “Let us hale the Son of God now that we have gotten power over him.” And they put on him a purple robe and set him on the judgment seat and said, “Judge righteously, O King of Israel!” And one of them brought a crown of thorns and put it on the Lord’s head. And others who stood by spat on his face, and others buffeted him on the cheeks, others nudged him with a reed, and some scourged him, saying, “With such honour let us honour the Son of God.” And they brought two malefactors and crucified the Lord in the midst between them. But he held his peace, as if he felt no pain.<sup>4</sup> And when they had set up the cross, they wrote upon it: this is the King of Israel. And they laid down his garments before him and divided them among themselves and cast the lot upon them.

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<sup>2</sup>In these first five verses, the author of *Peter* ascribes kingly authority to Herod, rather than Pilate. It is Herod, not Pilate, who ultimately orders the execution of Jesus. It is Herod, not Pilate, who grants the body of Jesus to Joseph. This is one of the historical anachronisms evident in *Peter* which indicate a lack of awareness of first-century Palestinian political reality. Such inaccuracies are evident not only in the redactional stratum (2:3-5), but even in what Crossan identifies as the primitive *Cross Gospel* core (1:1-2).

<sup>3</sup>Crossan argues that the *Gospel of Peter* does not have to be read as being more anti-Jewish than the canonical Gospels, particularly Matthew or John. However, *Peter* is undeniably more Jewish-ignorant than the canonical Gospels, an argument which Raymond Brown pushes relentlessly. Not only is *Peter* ignorant of some Jewish customs, but the author of *Peter* also consciously distances himself from “the Jews.” Here, the Passover is referred to as “the unleavened bread, *their* feast,” making it clear that the author does *not* share it with them. But if, as Crossan insists, the *Cross Gospel*, which is represented here in *Peter*, is the most primitive passion-resurrection narrative, how could the author possibly *not* have been a Jew? Particularly if, as Crossan argues consistently, the source of such passion narratives were the learned reflection of early Christians upon the Old Testament Scriptures, and then applying them retrospectively (as ‘historicized prophecy’) to the death of Jesus? Again, this seems to indicate that *Peter* is not the first-century, scribal-reflective composition that Crossan needs it to be.

<sup>4</sup>This is one of the semi-docetic elements within *Peter* which made it open to heretical interpretation. If what we now have in fragmentary form is in fact the same *Gospel of Peter* mentioned by Serapion, then passages like this one (and the misinterpretations that they gave rise to) would have been the reason that Serapion encouraged congregations *not* to read and use it.

But one of the malefactors rebuked them, saying, “We have landed in suffering for the deeds of wickedness which we have committed, but this man, who has become the saviour of men, what wrong has he done you?” And they were wroth with him and commanded that his legs should not be broken, so that he might die in torments.

[5:15-6:22] Now it was midday and a darkness covered all Judaea. And they became anxious and uneasy lest the sun had already set, since he was still alive. It stands written for them: the sun should not set on one that has been put to death.<sup>5</sup> And one of them said, “Give him to drink gall with vinegar.” And they mixed it and gave him to drink. And they fulfilled all things and completed the measure of their sins on their head.<sup>6</sup> And many went about with lamps, as they supposed it was night, they went to bed [or stumbled]. And the Lord called out and cried, “My power, O power, thou hast forsaken me!” And having said this he was taken up.<sup>7</sup> And at the same hour the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was rent in two. And then the Jews drew the nails from the hands of the Lord and laid him on the earth. And the whole earth shook and there came a great fear. Then the sun shone, and it was found to be the ninth hour.

[6:23-24] *And the Jews rejoiced and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he had seen all the good that he (Jesus) had done. And he took the Lord,*

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<sup>5</sup>Note the internal contradictions contained within Crossan’s purported *Cross Gospel*. In 4:14, the angry mob insists that the penitent “malefactor” be forced to die in torment; immediately thereafter, in 5:15-16, they are concerned that the crucified victims have not died, despite the oncoming darkness.

<sup>6</sup>Passages like this lead Brown and others to note the latent or explicit anti-Judaism in the *Gospel of Peter*—“they” seems to designate the crowd generally, and the author has “them” complete “the measure of their sins.” Raymond E. Brown, “The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321-43.

<sup>7</sup>Another verse which can potentially be read as embracing docetism, or perhaps even Gnosticism. After crying out, Jesus is “taken up,” implying a spiritual ascent which precedes his physical body being removed from the cross.

washed him, wrapped him in linen and brought him into his own sepulchre, called Joseph's Garden.<sup>8</sup>

[7:25] Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, perceiving what great evil they had done to themselves, began to lament and to say, "Woe on our sins, the judgment and the end of Jerusalem is drawn nigh."

[7:26-27] **But I mourned with my fellows, and being wounded in heart we hid ourselves, for we were sought after by them as evildoers and as persons who wanted to set fire to the temple. Because of all these things we were fasting and sat mourning and weeping night and day until the Sabbath.**

[8:28-9:34] But the scribes and Pharisees and elders, being assembled together and hearing that all the people were murmuring and beating their breasts, saying, "If at his death these exceeding great signs have come to pass, behold how righteous he was!" The elders were afraid and came to Pilate, entreating him and saying, "Give us soldiers that we may watch his sepulchre<sup>9</sup> for three days, lest his disciples come and steal him away and the people suppose that he is risen from the dead, and do us harm." And Pilate gave them Petronius the centurion with soldiers to watch the sepulchre. And with them there came elders and scribes to the sepulchre. And all who were there, together with the centurion and the soldiers, rolled thither a great stone and laid it against the entrance to

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<sup>8</sup>The *Gospel of Peter* flows very naturally at this point, whether one considers verses 23-24 to be an interpolation, or a part of the original composition. Removing them is not necessary for logical or stylistic coherence—only to designate Joseph and the burial of Jesus as a later addition. On this count, conclusions are driving presuppositions; that is, what Crossan wants to conclude regarding the fictitiousness of the burial by Joseph dictate that Crossan *must* designate *Peter* 6:23-24 as a later addition which depends upon the canonical Gospels.

<sup>9</sup>If 6:23-24 is a redactional insertion as Crossan asserts, one wonders from where the sepulchre came.

the sepulchre and put on it seven seals, pitched a tent and kept watch.<sup>10</sup> Early in the morning, when the Sabbath dawned, there came a crowd from Jerusalem and the country round about to see the sepulchre that had been sealed.<sup>11</sup>

[9:35-10:42] Now in the night in which the Lord's Day dawned,<sup>12</sup> when the soldiers, two by two in every watch, were keeping guard, there rang out a loud voice in heaven, and they saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and draw nigh to the sepulchre. That stone which had been laid against the entrance to the sepulchre started of itself to roll and give way to the side, and the sepulchre was opened,<sup>13</sup> and both the young men entered in. When now the soldiers saw this, they awakened the centurion and the elders—for they also were there to assist at the watch. And whilst they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come

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<sup>10</sup>The *Gospel of Peter* contains an accumulation of details, over and above what is contained in the canonical accounts of the burial. Pilate does not send just a few soldiers: it is an entire company, headed by a centurion. The centurion himself is no longer anonymous, but now receives a specific designation, Petronius. The guard is posted, not on Saturday, as in Matt, but rather on Friday, so that the tomb is never unguarded. It is no ordinary stone rolled against the tomb, but a massive one which requires everyone's labors to move. But the stone itself is not enough—the author of *Peter* also has the tomb sealed with 'seven seals', and the soldiers then pitch a tent to keep watch. This accumulation of apologetic details generally indicates later provenance, but again, in this case alone, Crossan insists that it is the original core. See Charles L. Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter: Does It Contain a Precanonical Resurrection Narrative?" in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 117-18; William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 169-70.

<sup>11</sup>Jews would not gather around a tomb on the Sabbath: it would make them ritually unclean.

<sup>12</sup>The use of 'the Lord's Day' is another indication of the lateness of the *Gospel of Peter*. See Quarles, "The Gospel of Peter," 113-14; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 594. The phrase is not used anywhere in the canonical Gospels, and is not mentioned until the latest set of New Testament documents. Instead, it was "the first day of the week" (i.e. the day after the Sabbath). The designation of resurrection day as "the Lord's day" is a clear indication that the *Gospel of Peter* reflects later Christian terminology. As this section occurs in Crossan's hypothesized *Cross Gospel* core within *Peter*, Crossan cannot coherently argue that it reflects a later gloss or interpolation either.

<sup>13</sup>This section contains another legendary addition to the canonical Gospels (occurring in what Crossan believes to be the *Cross Gospel* primitive core): the stone is not rolled away by the angels, but rather rolls away of its own accord.



out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, “Thou has preached to them that sleep,” and from the cross there was heard the answer, “Yea.”<sup>14</sup>

**[11:43-44] Those men therefore took counsel with one another to go and report this to Pilate. And whilst they were still deliberating, the heavens were again seen to open, and a man descended and entered the sepulchre.**

[11:45-47] When those who were of the centurion’s company saw this, they hastened by night to Pilate, abandoning the sepulchre which they were guarding, and reported everything they had seen, being full of disquietude and saying, “In truth he was the Son of God.” Pilate answered and said, “I am clean from the blood of the Son of God, upon such a thing have you decided.” Then all came to him, beseeching him and urgently calling upon him to command the centurion and the soldiers to tell no one what they had seen. “For it is better for us,” they said, “to make ourselves guilty of the greatest sin before God than to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and be stoned.” Pilate therefore commanded the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing.<sup>15</sup>

[12:50-13:57] *Early in the morning of the Lord’s day Mary Magdalene, a woman disciple of the Lord—for fear of the Jews, since they were inflamed with wrath, she had not done at the sepulchre what women are wont to do for those beloved of them who die—took with her her women friends and came to the sepulchre where he was laid.*

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<sup>14</sup>Here the legendary accretions are both multiple and reflective of second and third century Christian legends. “Other second-century texts also speak of independently moving crosses and ascribe a supernatural stature to the resurrected Christ.” Quarles, “The Gospel of Peter,” 116-17.

<sup>15</sup>This marks the ending of what Crossan considers to be the original *Cross Gospel*. His designation seems arbitrary, but it is necessitated by his conclusion that the women at the tomb are a Markan invention.

*And they feared lest the Jews should see them, and said, "Although we could not weep and lament on that day when he was crucified, yet let us now do so at his sepulchre. But who will roll away for us the stone also that is set on the entrance of the sepulchre, that we may go in and sit beside him and do what is due?—For the stone was great—and we fear lest any one see us. And if we cannot do so, let us at least put down at the entrance what we bring for a memorial to him and let us weep and lament until we have again gone home." So they went and found the sepulchre opened. And they came near, stooped down and saw there a young man sitting in the midst of the sepulchre, comely and clothed with a brightly shining robe, who said to them, "Wherefore are ye come? Whom seek ye? Not him that was crucified? He is risen and gone. But if ye believe not, stoop this way and see the place where he lay, for he is not here. For he is risen and is gone thither whence he was sent." Then the women fled affrighted.<sup>16</sup>*

**[14:58-59] Now it was the last day of unleavened bread and many went away and repaired to their homes, since the feast was at an end. But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and mourned, and each one, very grieved for what had come to pass, went to his home.**

*[14:60] But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew took our nets and went to the sea. And there was with us Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord . . .<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup>It is unclear why Crossan separates this section off from the so-called *Cross Gospel*, and argues that it was a later addition. It is simply asserted that it must be dependent upon the canonical Gospels. Again, however, Crossan requires this to be the case, as he has argued elsewhere that Mark invents the story of the women coming to find the tomb empty on Sunday morning (in order to hide one of the elements from the offensive story in *Secret Mark*). If Crossan allows this passage to be part of the original *Gospel of Peter* (which all indications show it to be), then his accusation against Mark's inventiveness falls apart.

<sup>17</sup>The *Gospel of Peter* ends here, mid-thought, mid-sentence.

## APPENDIX 2

### EXCERPTS FROM THE Gnostic *GOSPEL OF PHILIP*

The Greek text of the *Gospel of Philip* was discovered amongst the Nag Hammadi documents in 1945. Excerpts from the *Gospel of Philip* which relate to the resurrection of Jesus Christ are reproduced in this appendix.<sup>1</sup>

**53** Christ came to ransom some, to save others, to redeem others. . . . [5] he voluntarily laid down his life from the very day the world came into being. [10] Then he came first in order to take it, since it had been given as a pledge. It fell into the hands of robbers and was taken captive, but he saved it. He redeemed the good people in the world as well as the evil.

Light and darkness, [15] life and death, right and left, are brothers of one another. They are inseparable. Because of this neither are the good good, nor the evil evil, nor is life life, nor death death. [20] For this reason each one will dissolve into its earliest origin. But those who are exalted above the world are indissoluble, eternal. . . .

**56** . . . “Jesus” is a hidden name, “Christ” is a revealed name. [5] For this reason “Jesus” is not particular to any language; rather he is always called by the name “Jesus.” While as for “Christ,” in Syriac it is “Messiah,” in Greek it is “Christ.” Certainly [10] all the others have it according to their own language. “The Nazarene” is

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<sup>1</sup>The *Gospel of Philip* is contained in the Nag Hammadi Codex II, 51.29-86.19. The translation of the *Gospel of Philip* reproduced in this appendix is from Wesley W. Isenberg, “The Gospel of Philip,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 141-60.

he who reveals what is hidden. Christ has everything in himself, whether man or angel [15] or mystery, and the father.

Those who say that the lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died. If one does not first attain the resurrection he will not die . . . No one will hide a large valuable object in something large, but many a time one has tossed countless thousands into a thing worth a penny. Compare [25] the soul. It is a precious thing and it came to be in a contemptible body.

Some are afraid lest they rise naked. Because of this they wish to rise in the flesh, and [they] do not know that it is those who [30] wear the [flesh] who are naked. [It is] those who [. . .] to unclothe themselves who are not naked. “Flesh [and blood shall] not inherit the kingdom [of God].” (1 Co. 15:50). What is this which will **57** not inherit? This which is on us. But what is this, too, which will inherit? It is that which belongs to Jesus and his blood. Because of this he said, “He who shall not eat my flesh and [5] drink my blood has not life in him” (Jn. 6:53). What is it? His flesh is the word, and his blood is the holy spirit. He who has received these has food and he has drink and clothing. I find fault with the others who say [10] that it will not rise. Then both of them are at fault. You (sg.) say that the flesh will not rise. But tell me what will rise, that we may honor you (sg.). You (sg.) say the spirit in the flesh, [15] and it is also this light in the flesh. (But) this too is a matter which is in the flesh, for whatever you (sg.) shall, say, you (sg.) say nothing outside the flesh. It is necessary to rise in this flesh, since everything exists in it. In this world [20] those who put on garments are better than the garments. In the kingdom of heaven the garments are better than those who have put them on. . . .

**66** . . . Fear not the flesh nor [5] love it. If you (sg.) fear it, it will gain mastery over you. If you love it, it will swallow and paralyze you.

And so he dwells either in this world or in the resurrection or in the middle place. God forbid that I be found there! [10] In this world there is good and evil. Its good things are not good, and its evil things not evil. But there is evil after this world which is truly evil – [15] what is called “the middle.” It is death. While we are in this world it is fitting for us to acquire the resurrection, so that when we strip off the flesh we may be found in rest and not [20] walk in the middle. For many go astray on the way. For it is good to come forth from the world before one has sinned. . . .

**67** . . . Truth did not come [10] into the world naked, but it came in types and images. The world will not receive truth in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is certainly necessary to be born again through the image. Which [15] one? Resurrection. The image must rise again through the image. The bridal chamber and the image must enter through the image into the truth: this is the restoration.

[25] . . . The lord [did] everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption [30] and a bridal chamber. . . .

**68** [15] . . . Before Christ some came from a place they were no longer able to enter, and they went where they were no longer [20] able to come out. Then Christ came. Those who went in he brought out, and those who went out he brought in.

When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. [25] If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more.

**69** . . . There were three buildings specifically for [15] sacrifice in Jerusalem. The one facing west was called “the holy.” Another facing south was called “the holy of the holy.” The third facing [20] east was called “the holy of the holies,” the place where only the high priest enters. Baptism is “the holy” building. Redemption is “the holy of the holy.” “The holy of the holies” [25] is the bridal chamber. Baptism includes the resurrection [and the] redemption; the redemption (takes place) in the bridal chamber. . . .

**73** Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing. [5] So also when speaking about baptism they say, “Baptism is a great thing,” because if people receive it they will live.

Philip the apostle said, “Joseph the carpenter planted [10] a garden because he needed wood for his trade. It was he who made the cross from the trees which he planted. His own offspring hung on that which he planted. His offspring was [15] Jesus and the planting was the cross.” But the tree of life is in the middle of the garden. However, it is from the olive tree that we get the chrism, and from the chrism, the resurrection. . . .

**74** [10] . . . The chrism is superior to baptism, for it is from the word “chrism” that we have been called “Christians,” certainly not because [15] of the word “baptism.” And it because of the chrism that “the Christ” has his name. For the father anointed the son, and the son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. He who has been anointed possesses everything. He possesses [20] the resurrection, the light, the cross, the holy spirit. The father gave him this in the bridal chamber; he merely accepted (the

gift). The father was in the son and the son in the father. This is [the] kingdom of heaven. [25] . . .

**75** . . . The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create [5] it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire. For the world never was imperishable, nor, for that matter, was he who made the world. [10] For things are not imperishable, but sons are. Nothing will be able to receive imperishability if it does not first become a son. But he who has not the ability to receive, how much more will he be unable to give? . . .

**77** [5] . . . By perfecting the water of baptism, Jesus emptied it of death. Thus we do go [10] down into the water, but we do not go down into death in order that we may not be poured out into the spirit of the world. When that spirit blows, it brings the winter. When the holy spirit breathes, [15] the summer comes.

He who has knowledge of the truth is a free man, but the free man does not sin, for “he who sins is the slave of sin” (Jn. 8:34). Truth is the mother, knowledge [20] the father. Those who think that sinning does not apply to them are called “free” by the world. “Knowledge” of the truth merely “makes such people arrogant,” which is what the words “it makes them free” mean. [25] It even gives them a sense of superiority over the whole world.

## APPENDIX 3

### THE Gnostic *EPISTLE TO RHEGINOS*, OR *TREATISE ON THE RESURRECTION*

The *Epistle to Rheginos*, also known as the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, is one of the clearly Gnostic writings found amongst the Nag Hammadi documents in the middle of the twentieth century. The writer of the epistle instructs his spiritual son, Rheginos, in the doctrinal and practical elements of resurrection. This appendix reproduces the *Epistle to Rheginos* in its entirety.<sup>1</sup>

**43** Some there are, my son Rheginos, who want to learn many things. They have this goal when they are occupied with questions whose answer is lacking. [30] If they succeed with these, they usually think very highly of themselves. But I do not think that they have stood within the Word of Truth. They seek [35] rather their own rest, which we have received through our Savior, our Lord Christ. **44** We received it (i.e., Rest) when we came to know the truth and rested ourselves upon it. But since you ask us [5] pleasantly what is proper concerning the resurrection, I am writing you (to say) that it is necessary. To be sure, many are lacking faith in it, but there are a few [10] who find it. So then, let us discuss the matter.

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<sup>1</sup>The *Epistle to Rheginos*, also known as the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, is contained in the Nag Hammadi library, Codex I, 43:25-50:18. The text reproduced in this appendix is from Malcolm Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 54-57.



How did the Lord proclaim things while he existed [15] in flesh and after he had revealed himself as Son of God? He lived in this place where you remain, speaking [20] about the Law of Nature – but I call it “Death!” Now the Son of God, Rheginos, was Son of Man. He embraced them [25] both, possessing the humanity and the divinity, so that on the one hand he might vanquish death through his being Son of God, [30] and that on the other through the Son of Man the restoration to the Pleroma might occur; because he was originally from above, [35] a seed of the Truth, before this structure (of the cosmos) had come into being. In this (structure) many dominions and divinities came into existence.

I know that I am presenting **45** the solution in difficult terms, but there is nothing difficult in the Word of Truth. But since [5] the Solution appeared so as not to leave anything hidden, but to reveal all things openly concerning existence – the destruction [10] of evil on the one hand, the revelation of the elect on the other. This (Solution) is the emanation of Truth and Spirit, Grace is of the Truth.

The Savior swallowed up [15] death – (of this) you are not reckoned as being ignorant – for he put aside the world which is perishing. He transformed [himself] into an imperishable Aeon and raised himself up, having [20] swallowed the visible by the invisible, and he gave us the way of our immortality. Then, indeed, as the Apostle [25] said, “We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.” Now if we are manifest in [30] this world wearing him, we are that one’s beams, and we are embraced by him until our setting, that is [35] to say, our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is

[40] the spiritual resurrection **46** which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly.

But if there is one who does not believe, he does not have [5] the (capacity to be) persuaded. For it is the domain of faith, my son, and not that which belongs to persuasion: the dead shall arise! There is one who believes among the philosophers who are in this world. [10] At least he will arise. And let not the philosopher who is in this world have cause to believe that he is one who returns himself by himself – and (that) because of our faith! For we have known the Son of [15] Man, and we have believed that he rose from among the dead. This is he of whom we say, “He became the destruction of death, as he is a great one [20] in whom they believe.” {Great} are those who believe.

The thought of those who are saved shall not perish. The mind of those who have known him shall not perish. [25] Therefore, we are elected to salvation and redemption since we are predestined from the beginning not to fall into the foolishness of those who are without knowledge, [30] but we shall enter into the wisdom of those who have known the Truth. Indeed, the Truth which is kept cannot be abandoned, nor has it been. [35] “Strong is the system of the Pleroma; small is that which broke loose (and) became (the) world. But the All is what is encompassed. It has not **47** come into being; it was existing.” So, never doubt concerning the resurrection, my son Rheginos! For if you were not existing [5] in flesh, you received flesh when you entered this world. Why will you not receive flesh when you ascend into the Aeon? That which is better than the flesh is that which is [10] for it (the) cause of life. Does not that which is yours exist with you? Yet, while you are in this world, what is it that you [15] lack? This is what you have been making every effort to learn.

The afterbirth of the body is old age, and you exist in corruption. You have [20] absence as a gain. For you will not give up what is better if you depart. That which is worse has diminution, but there is grace for it.

Nothing, [25] then, redeems us from this world. But the All which we are, we are saved. We have received salvation from end to end. Let us think in this way! [30] Let us comprehend in this way!

But there are some (who) wish to understand, in the enquiry about those things they are looking into, whether he who is saved, if he leaves [35] his body behind, will be saved immediately. Let no one doubt concerning this. ... indeed, the visible members which are dead **48** shall not be saved, for (only) the living [members] which exist within them would arise.

What, then, is the resurrection? [5] it is always the disclosure of those who have risen. For if you remember reading in the Gospel that Elijah appeared and Moses [10] with him, do not think the resurrection is an illusion. It is no illusion, but it is truth! Indeed, it is more fitting to say that [15] the world is an illusion, rather than the resurrection which has come into being through our Lord the Savior, Jesus Christ. [20]

But what am I telling you now? Those who are living shall die. How do they live in an illusion? The rich have become poor, [25] and the kings have been overthrown. Everything is prone to change. The world is an illusion! – lest, indeed, I rail at [30] things to excess!

But the resurrection does not have this aforesaid character, for it is the truth which stands firm. It is the revelation of [35] what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness. For imperishability **49** [descends] upon the perishable; the

light flows down upon the darkness, swallowing it up; and the Pleroma [5] fills up the deficiency. These are the symbols and the images of the resurrection. He (Christ) it is who makes the good.

Therefore, do not [10] think in part, O Rheginos, nor live in conformity with this flesh for the sake of unanimity, but flee from the divisions and the [15] fetters, and already you have the resurrection. For if he who will die knows about himself that he will die – even if he spends many [20] years in this life, he is brought to this – why not consider yourself as risen and (already) brought to this? [25] If you have the resurrection but continue as if you are to die – and yet that one knows that he has died – why, then, do I ignore your [30] lack of exercise? It is fitting for each one to practice in a number of ways, and he shall be released from this Element that he may not fall into error but shall himself [35] receive again what at first was.

These things I have received from the generosity of my **50** Lord, Jesus Christ. [I have] taught you and your [brethren], my sons, concerning them, while I have not omitted any of the things suitable for strengthening you (pl.). [5] But if there is one thing written which is obscure in my exposition of the Word, I shall interpret it for you (pl.) when you (pl.) ask. But now, do not be jealous of anyone who is in your number [10] when he is able to help.

Many are looking into this which I have written to you. To these I say: peace (be) among them and grace. [15] I greet you and those who love you (pl.) in brotherly love.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MYTH OF THE METAPHORICAL RESURRECTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN'S METHODOLOGY, PRESUPPOSITIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

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This dissertation examines the impact of theological worldview upon John Dominic Crossan's scholarly reconstruction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 introduces the centrality of resurrection belief in historic Christianity, and outlines Crossan's redefinition of the resurrection as a metaphorical parable.

Chapter 2 examines the understanding of Jesus' resurrection throughout Christian history, focusing particularly on developments after the rise of deism. It concludes with an examination of Crossan's metaphorical conception of the resurrection.

Chapter 3 begins with a personal and academic biography of Crossan. The key section of the chapter deals with Crossan's theological worldview presuppositions, and offers a preliminary indication of how his worldview directs his conclusions concerning Jesus' resurrection.

Chapter 4 analyzes Crossan's hermeneutics and methodology. It begins with a survey of Crossan's early work in literary criticism before moving into his extra-canonical research. The chapter offers a substantial review and critical analysis of his triple-triadic historical Jesus methodology, arguing that its structure and operation are

both influenced by Crossan's underlying worldview presuppositions. Throughout, the chapter examines how Crossan's hermeneutics and methodology influence his understanding of the resurrection.

Chapter 5 considers the role of theological worldview and the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament, the early church, and her opponents, with particular focus upon second-century Gnostic Christianity. It argues that Gnostic Christians did what post-Enlightenment Christians, including Crossan, have also done—redefined and reconstructed Jesus' resurrection in order to fit it into their existing theological worldview.

Chapter 6 offers some closing thoughts about the relationship between theological worldview and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It insists that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as a literal historical fact lies at the center of historic Christianity. It suggests further that the resurrection-event transformed the theological worldview of Jesus' disciples and other early Christians, and continues to call for worldview transformation amongst those who would call themselves his followers today.

This dissertation concludes that the single most important factor in Crossan's scholarly conclusions regarding Jesus' resurrection is his underlying theological worldview.

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