

The resurrection is a myth theology religion essay



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(Do not put your name on this sheet or on any papers submitted as part of this assessment) Dyslexia Assessed Student Student ID Code: 3278 Unit Tutor: B Pugh Assessment Method: Essay Title: 'The resurrection is a myth.' Discuss. Word Count: 3064 Date Submitted: 22/01/2013 Extension authorised by: P Ensor Completion of this Header Sheet confirms that the student has abided by the Programme Regulations as set out in the Course Booklet 'The resurrection is a myth.' Discuss.

Introduction

The topic of the resurrection of Jesus is vital to the Christian faith.[1] The resurrection of Christ occupies a central place in the New Testament and is mentioned over one hundred times in the Bible.[2] The resurrection of Jesus first became a matter of importance during the first quest for the Historical Jesus.[3] The study of the life, ministry, and person of Jesus Christ has been at the centre of the Church's thinking since its inception, but the last two hundred years have seen a marked change in how those within the Church and those outside have examined Jesus and the Church's conceptions about Him.[4] A concern of regarding the mythologisation of Jesus' resurrection is that the salvation of humanity hangs on it. According to Christian belief, salvation is made possible by the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus. [5] The resurrection of Christ is also important because of its necessity to prove that Jesus was who He had claimed to be, to show that Jesus accomplished what He had promised, to fulfil Biblical prophecy and to determine that Jesus could not be restrained by death.[6] There are two definitions of the word 'myth', both of which could be considered to implicate the theories regarding the accuracy of Jesus resurrection and it's

role within the Christian faith. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the word myth as ' a widely held but false belief or idea' or more specifically ' a fictitious or imaginary person or thing' or even ' an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing.'[7]The popular definition of the word myth implies that the matter is untruthful spoken with strong doubt. In the context of Jesus' resurrection, Craig argues, the popular definition would mean that the concept of Jesus' physical resurrection was a lie put forward by His disciples as propaganda for Jesus' cause.[8]The New Dictionary of Christian Theology declares that ' theologians have widely agreed with the dictum of Reinhold that myth must always be taken 'seriously but not literally.'[9]The alternative, theological interpretation of the word myth suggests that something is allegorical in the sense of a symbolic story, with the weighting on the underlying meaning. This definition would, in the context of Jesus resurrection, allow for Jesus to have not physical manifestation resulting in an historical event. It is important to note however, the spiritual resurrection of Jesus is still considered to be, by those who hold this theological opinion, a central and important part of the faith.[10]In modern day Britain it can be considered more appropriate to focus on the historical accuracy of Jesus resurrection than the alternative, theological definition. The spiritual resurrection is of particular importance to those who hold an alternative view that the popular definition of the word myth whereas the historical account of the resurrection is more relatable between those with faith and those without. During the post-Christendom era the exploration of the historical accuracy of the accounts within the Gospels often focus on the many non-believers questions. It is important to guide non-believers, as Jesus says in Matthew 28: 19 to the apostles, that one should instruct those who follow

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Jesus to introduce and train people to follow Him. The following investigation of evidence will equip a contemporary theologian to respond apologetically to non-believers who may be unsure due to the supernatural sense of this aspect of faith. The Resurrection: Did it really happen? The Stone was Rolled Away' Who Moved the Stone?' is a question which has concerned theologians for the past two thousand years (Mark 16: 3). While no one witnessed the actual resurrection; many people swore they had seen the risen Christ after his death. There are a number of matters often provided as evidence for the bodily, historical resurrection of Jesus. Millard describes the tomb where Jesus laid as a traditional tomb[11]as donated by Joseph of Arimathia (Matt 15: 57-61, Mark 15: 42-47, Luke 23: 50-56, John 19: 38-42). Keener informs his readers that a disk-shaped stone would have been rolled in a groove across the entrance to a tomb, and several strong men would be needed to roll the stone, approximately weighing 2 tonne back uphill, along the groove; [12]Kelly and Thomas reveal that levers were used to move the stones down the sloped groove into place.[13]Therefore a historical explanation for the stone being able to be rolled away is in agreement with that which is recorded in Matthew 28: 2, claiming that during an earthquake an Angel moved the stone from Jesus tomb. The opposing argument represents a clear argument showing refutable details regarding the manor of which the rolled away stone took. The first witnesses to the open tomb were Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Salome (Mark 16: 1-2, Luke 24: 1, John 20: 1). Evans describes that the women had arrived to anoint Jesus body with spices and oil; however, Jesus' tomb was sealed with the Roman seal on his entry (Matt 27: 66).[14]Joseph of Arimathia wrapped Jesus body in linen sheets and St John suggests the presumption that this was part of the ritual

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of spicing and anointing the body as the linen cloths would have been used on top of these substances to preserve the body.[15]After three days, Houlder pointed out, the body would have decomposed and consequently would have been difficult to embalm[16]so it is not consistent for the women to arrive early in the morning to anoint Jesus' body. The first argument is used on the topic of the resurrection of the body to eliminate some other possibilities. This argument for the demythologisation of Jesus resurrection is in contrast in persuasive source to its opponents who argue against this, for the concept of the resurrection as a myth. These who agree with the resurrection as a mythological concept use understanding based on objective historical and scientific knowledge as support. Proponents of the bodily resurrection use their argument against the mythologists to suggest that the bodily resurrection of Christ was not a myth because of evidence which support the Biblical report; whereas opponents of this theory argue that the resurrection of Jesus is a myth because of logical discrepancies within the Gospels. The Broken Tomb-Seal McDowell informs that the Roman seal was affixed to the stone that secured the tomb.[17]He also shares that the seal stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire.

[18]McDowell explains that breaking the seal meant automatic execution by crucifixion upside down.[19]If a person was found to have moved the stone from the tomb's entrance or tamper with its contents the seal would have broken, thus incurred the wrath of Roman law.[20]Jesus' disciples displayed signs of cowardice when they hid themselves from the authorities (Luke 22: 34, John 13: 38). Peter, one of these disciples, denied Christ three times on the night that Jesus was arrested (Mark 14: 66-72). For this reason, it seems unlikely that any of the disciples would have taken the risk of breaking the

Roman seal which held the stone in place without the 40 days Jesus ministry and his commissioning afterwards which caused their later boldness of faith. Despite there being very little argument surrounding the concept of the Roman Seal being used on the tomb of Jesus,[21]the discrepancy lies within the control that the threat the seal ensues may bring to civilians. Seigal states that people all over the world commit crimes for a number of reasons, whilst being fully aware of the consequences, no matter how severe.[22]It could be argued that the disciples, despite showing early signs of dishonour, mostly ended being martyred in horrific ways anyway. The first of these two arguments is based on logic. It takes from Biblical evidence other information such as the personalities of the other disciples for example Peter's three-time denial of Christ on the night of his arrest, and uses that evidence to back up further conclusions. This is a persuasive method which McDowell is famous for, having written books for many apologist and evangelical publishing companies. This debate stands strong against the alternative which is of a Criminological perspective. Seigal as a criminologist explores the motivation behind such potential criminality which could be explored in more depth for a clearer understanding. These arguments provide opposing opinions of fairly equal weighting with supposition based on other details. This does not however bring the argument of whether the resurrection could be considered a myth. The Roman GuardsChristian tradition has generally claimed that Roman guards were used to seal the tomb (Matt 27: 65-66). Apologists such as McDowell consider it implausible that grave robbers would risk robbing a guarded tomb when surely many unguarded ones existed.[23]Furthermore, while traditionally depicted as only two guards, Matthew does not specify how many there were; he describes <https://assignbuster.com/the-resurrection-is-a-myth-theology-religion-essay/>

only 'some' guards report the tale to the chief priests. It is therefore plausible to assume that there may have been more than two, which would render a raid of the tomb even more of a risk of being caught. Apologists such as McDowell also doubt that the disciples could possibly have sneaked past a Roman guard at a sealed tomb, and that attacking the guards would be even more implausible due to their intensive training. The guards, who were appointed to guard the tomb, were accused of sleeping on the job or leaving their post without permission.[24] This would have been an unlikely event, as the death of Jesus was so important to Pontius Pilate, disproving that Jesus was God; he would have sent his most efficient guards to ensure the safe-keeping of Jesus body.[25] For this reason those who argue for demythologisation of Jesus resurrection suggest that a divine power must have put the guards to sleep during duty.[26] Foster informs that it is unclear whether Roman soldiers were used, or if the priests were to use their own temple guard.[27] In response, it could be hypothesized that the guard was not on duty at night, and thus the thieves would be able to have struck then, however there is no way to know for sure. A bribe to the soldiers is also possible, although Freedman and Myers explain that most of the disciples were of modest means.[28] Alternatively, the entire account of the guard and the chief priests can be discounted as likely to be an ahistorical addition written by Matthew to make the stolen body hypothesis appear implausible. Both of these arguments can be developed further and have many contributing factors to add to their validity. Whilst the argument for the demythologisation of Jesus' resurrection is relevant, it holds less weight than some other defining issues as it presumes the Christian doctrine of human imperfection in the Roman guards and as such neutralises the argument as

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each inadvertently point to the evidence of Jesus resurrection. The Empty TombThe empty tomb is most often referred to as the tomb of Jesus which was found to be empty by the women who were present at Jesus' crucifixion. Each of the Gospel's present a variation between accounts.[29]Christ's body is said to have been laid out in the tomb after crucifixion and death. Either a young man or angel within the tomb is said to tell the women that Christ has risen. All the Gospels describe the tomb as being found to be empty and Jesus' body gone. For many people of antiquity, empty tombs were seen as signs not of resurrection but of assumption, that is, the person being taken bodily into heaven. Smith informs that in Chariton's ancient Greek novel Callirhoe, Chaereas finds his wife's tomb empty and assumes that she has been assumed into heaven.[30]In Ancient Greek thinking, the connection between post-mortem disappearance and apotheosis was strong and there are numerous examples of individuals conspiring, before their deaths, to have their remains hidden in order to promote their post-mortem veneration.[31]Arrian wrote of Alexander the Great planning his own bodily disappearance so that he would be revered as a God.[32]Disappearances of individuals to be taken in the divine realm also occur in Jewish literature, [33]although they do not involve an empty tomb. Smith has recently proposed that the empty tomb stories in the gospels reflect traditions about Jesus' absence or assumption, in contrast to the resurrection appearance stories which were about Jesus' presence on earth. He concludes that the gospel writers took the two traditions and weaved them together.

[34]Collateral EvidenceJesus, in human form, was the greatest leader to have ever lived. No other leader has spread the word of their cause so widely. This was so effectively done that one out of three members of the world's

population now claim to believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. [35]This growth is unparalleled with any other leader, initiative or community. Hundreds of Christians have been willing to die for the cause of Jesus resurrection in martyrdom.[36]It's clear from the Gospel accounts that the story of Jesus reaches its culmination with the resurrection. If the disciples had made up the story, it seems out of character when comparing this event to other accounts of the disciples in other Biblical events.[37]The argument against demythologisation of the resurrection of Jesus is that whilst one third of the world's population claim to believe in the resurrected Christ, it is arguable that many of these have been coerced by state requirements of faith or social normalities of faithfulness. Beyond that, those Christians who were martyred for their belief that the resurrection took place were likely to have been killed anyway for their associations. Disciples would have died anyway and so supporting their cause was a more positive use of their time. The argument for collateral data to discover whether the resurrection of Jesus is a myth is important to uncover some of the minor details which could be considered important.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be considered rational to both accept and reject the resurrection as the evidence suggests that there is clearly a fair argument for both sides however the limited research presents an argument weighted towards the non-resuscitation of a bodily resurrection. The issues of the Romans guards, the empty tomb, the rolled away grave-stone and the broken Roman seal all hold crucial evidence for assessing whether or not the bodily resurrection of Jesus is a myth. Due to the strength of the evidence it

can be said that whether the resurrection of Jesus was a myth cannot be said. Christianity however, supports the view that faith is having belief in the unbelievable and to take faith and doubt, not as opposites, but as complimentary to one another. Jesus was the one and only totally innocent death in history and for that reason the sin of all civilisation is absorbed however without the demythologisation of Jesus there can be no life with Christ, modelling his new life after death.(Hebrews 11: 1-4). Word Count 3064