

# THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

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Undated

## I. Dickie "The Organism of Christian Truth"

Extracts from pages 190 - 198.

Extracts from pages 325 - 327.

"a Miracle is a religiously significant event, an occurrence which speaks to us with a Divine impressiveness altogether special or extraordinary of the presence and power of the Living God in human life." p. 190

"Christian faith is essentially faith in a God who interposes by miracle. What gives the modern attack upon the idea of miracle its point and apparent cogency is the underlying assumption... that everything that happens in the world is the necessary and inevitable outcome of things as they already are. There are no new factors introduced or indeed introducible into the cosmos. There are no new beginnings - no creative activity of God still found in the world. But this is a hypothesis which is scientifically unprovable and from the religious point of view inconceivable. All religion holds, as we saw, that there is an increasing purpose running throughout the ages, and is compelled to interpret that increase as due to the living personal, creative activity of the Living Personal God. Every accession of Divine strength and guidance to every believer is a new factor in the world's history - a new creative energy of God, added to the cosmos of existing things. To deny that there are any new exercises of creative power is to deny freedom both to man and to God Himself. It is to hold that there can be no real personal communion between God and man, but that everything is absolutely determined by things previously existing." p. 192

"The late Professor Max Mueller found the kernel of the modern conception of the world in the idea that 'there is law and order in everything, and an unbroken chain of causes and effects holds the whole universe together.' This is not only a very fair summary of what the modern conception of the world really is. It is a wonderfully good illustration of the fallacy which underlies the whole naturalistic or monistic view of things. Philosophy told us long since that nature makes no leaps. Yet somehow there seems always to be a little something or other more in the effect than there was in the cause." p. 193

"How different the attitude of Lord Kelvin, who said, 'Every action of human free will is a miracle to physical and chemical and mathematical science, A miracle it certainly is in the sense that thereby there is introduced into the situation a new factor altogether inexplicable in terms of the categories with which these sciences operate.'" p. 194

"As a matter of fact, in the strict and proper use of the word, miracle is like sin, a distinctively religious conception, and so no miracle can be proved miraculous to the irreligious man, any more than sin can be proved sinful. Even if we convince a person destitute of religious faith that something extraordinary has occurred, we cannot convince him that we have in it a special act of

God's Providence, a clear and unmistakable proof of His love and care for His children. It belongs to the nature of religious faith not to be susceptible of rigid, logical or assent - compelling demonstration. At the same time faith has its own sufficient grounds of certainty. It depends for its life on the conviction that God does impart Himself to, and enter into personal relations with, the individual believer. It knows Him in Whom it trusts, with the immediacy of direct, personal knowledge; and it feels that there is nothing in human life at once so real and so valuable as the believer's experience of God's active personal interest in the well-being of His children, individually as well as collectively. Thus the proof which the believer has of the miraculous is in line with his proof of the existence of God Himself. It does not, and never can compel faith in the non-believer. It does abundantly sustain faith in those who are convinced of the reality of the Divine interposition in human affairs upon the basis of their own personal experience of redemptive grace. Our Lord Himself gives expression to this truth regarding miracle when He says, 'If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead' (Luke 16:31). In other words, no miracle, however extraordinary, can convince of religious truth, except upon the basis of moral and religious preparedness." p. 196 - 7

"Occurrences are not miraculous in the full sense which the word has always borne, unless God designs them to produce such definite effect upon the religious believers concerned. Here again by another road we reach the position that faith in miracle is conditioned by faith in a Living, Personal God, and also that miracles are not in a logical point of view provable." p. 198

### THE RESURRECTION

"The Church was founded upon faith in the Risen Lord; and by this faith it has always lived, To deny the Resurrection is to deny historical Christianity itself, For the Christian believer the Resurrection has always been God's own attestation of His Only Begotten Son; the crown and summit of our Lord's whole redemptive activity; the ground of our religious confidence that the divine purpose for the salvation of the world, however much it may be hindered by man's sin, must ultimately achieve its glorious fulfillment, We are in no way concerned to deny that some elements in our Lord's message may retain their validity, or even that they have retained it in individual instances, for those who regard His personal life as having finally closed on Calvary. But the result in life and religion is altogether different from the faith which says with St. Paul and all who throughout the Christian centuries have known and acknowledged Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord... p. 325 - 6.

"It would be utterly impossible as regards any acknowledged Christian believer of the earliest days to maintain with the slightest show of plausibility either that he had not heard of the Resurrection, or that he refused to accept it as a fact, or that he regarded it as a thing indifferent to the faith. At the same time it is true of the Resurrection ... that it becomes credible only in the context of our Lord's work and significance as apprehended by Christian faith, or believing experience. The "Evidence - writers" of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used to assert that the Resurrection is "the best attested fact," or more guardedly that it is "one of the best attested facts" in history. But no person of discrimination would take up that ground nowadays - at all events on the basis solely of the New Testament and other early Christian documents. If

such a contention were to be advanced at all, it would be grounded not simply on the historical testimonies, however excellent, but on their corroboration by the sum total of the effects which belief in the Resurrection has produced in history, and the improbability that the world should owe so much to a mere illusion. Precisely similar historical testimonies would not convince normal Christian believers of to-day that any one else had risen from the dead,” p. 326

“As regards the mode of the Resurrection I consider that the simplest and most natural view is that of the general Christian tradition as found, e.g., in our Confession of Faith (Chap. VIII, Sec. iv), viz, that “On the third day He arose from the dead with the same, body in which He suffered,” and I accept that view unhesitatingly as my own personal conviction. But at the same time I would maintain that what is essential to Christian faith in the Resurrection is not the empty tomb, but the Lord and saviour who once was dead but rose triumphant over death and, the grave and is now alive for evermore as the living, Personal Head of His Church.” P. 326 - 7.

Mackinnon “The Historic Jesus”

Extracts from pages 295, 296: 297, 298, 299, 300.

“It is, I think, reasonably certain, on this testimony, that the disciples had such experiences and they all are the more credible inasmuch as Paul does not ground them on legendary phenomena, but simply contents himself with attesting their reality. Equally certain that they gave rise to the unshakable conviction that their faith in the Jesus they had known on earth and in his God-sent mission was not a vain faith, however difficult it may be for us to decide what these experiences actually connote. Were they purely mental, or were they visual? The references to these manifestations, for which St. Paul vouches at a comparatively early period, and one of which he himself experienced, tend to the latter alternative. Thereby, at all events, the early disciples attained to a consciousness of his spiritual existence as real as had been that of his presence among them in the flesh. Such a consciousness is not an isolated thing; it is within, the compass of every human being in the more profound experiences of the inner life, even without the aid of any appearance of a visual kind. Moments may come when we are in real, conscious contact with the unseen spiritual realm and know for a certainty that we are so. It is a fact of this kind - the certainty that Jesus has not been held captive by the death on the Cross - on which the Christian community was founded, in which the expanding Church had its beginning. Whether spiritually or visually grasped, is really secondary, though in the case in question, it seems to have been the latter. That such a fact is possible, that it actually took place, no one has a right to deny offhand. The fact has, indeed, been questioned, and we know only too sadly from history that in religious phenomena, self-deception, hasty conclusions based on ill-regulated fancy and emotion, are common enough. There is also the phenomenon of spiritualism, old and new, necromancy, to be reckoned with, which seeks to establish by mechanical or magical means contact with the dead, and of which we are justly auspicious and distrustful in the present state of the evidence at least... But we have a right to question facts of the kind referred to above on what I may term dogmatic grounds— on the ground of the belief that such things are pure hallucinations, and that death is the end of both body and spirit? This is an assumption which amounts to begging the question, and results from the unwarrantable dogmatism that pronounces spiritual phenomena to be absolutely illusory. Such an altitude is very superficial, and scientists are happily to-day

emphasizing the spiritual reality underlying the material manifestation, of it. It ignores the spiritual realm and the spiritual side of human nature. We can from experience point to the certainty of spiritual communion. We know as a fact that through our moral and mental nature we are in contact with what is beyond the senses, and that a life beyond that of sense is a reality for those who exercise all the faculties of their being in the striving to realize it. "In Him we live and move and have our being" is as much a reality for those who give scope to the spiritual side of their being as seeing, hearing, sleeping. That the material is the only real and the spiritual necessarily illusory is a purely dogmatic conclusion, a one-sided and unreasonable interpretation of that double life of sense and spirit of which we are, or may be, conscious if we give a reasonable scope to the conditions of it."

"Moreover, to descend to a lower level, there are facts vouched by experience which tend to establish the reality of communion of spirit with spirit. Telepathy is an established experience, and of itself proves the direct intercourse of mind with mind without a sensible medium. Nor is this experience confined to the contact of spirit with spirit in the case of those living in the body. One has heard of experiences of this contact of the living with the departed, apart altogether from the intervention of professed mediums, which can only be explained by the capacity of the departing or departed spirit to make known through telepathy, say, the fact of the departure from this life, it may be thousands of miles at a distance from the object of this communication."

"It may be objected that these manifestations occur only to disciples, if we except the case of Paul, who, however, was evidently already less an enemy than an incipient friend. The question, as old as Celsus in the second century, is asked, Why not to enemies, and thus decisively settle the question? A weighty answer is that in the case of enemies the conditions are not there to make such conviction possible. Sympathy with, aspiration after, the object are indispensable, as our own experience teaches us. We cannot come by these experiences without the receptive mind, the spiritual atmosphere to which they belong. For there is really nothing supernatural in them. They are facts of the spiritual life, and without the conditions of them they cannot be, as it were, extemporized. When the Jews rejected Jesus and his spiritual teaching, they made it impossible for themselves to attain such apprehensions as can only come by spiritual means. Let them change their attitude and the experience, directly or indirectly, becomes possible, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles." p. 295-8.

"Psychologically these appearances presuppose at least a subconscious condition favorable to their recurrence in the impression which the wonderful life of the Master had left in their minds. The appearances only quickened into activity the latent thought that such a life could not be destroyed by death. Given the life, the conclusion had real, concrete grounds to rest on in the person and mission of Jesus as the highest embodiment of the divine in the human," p. 299.

"Jesus was great enough to induce the restitution and the transformation of their faith in spite of the Cross, to replace the living converse by a spiritual communion. Assuredly no illusory, incredible transition, in view of the historic reality underlying it. The resurrection faith is, in fact, the only rational faith for those who are conscious and capable of the divine life. "God isn't the God of the dead, but of the living," Jesus had told the Sadducees in defense of the belief in a

future life. In this capacity for the higher divine life, exemplified at its highest by him, lies the strength of the belief in a blessed immortality, ..." ' p. 299.

Baillie "And the Life Everlasting"

Extracts from pages 1614, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169; 170, 171; 181, 182, 183, 184, 185.

"What is quite certain is that all the disciples believed their Lord to have risen and that their belief was built into the very foundations of the Christian Church. Among the Jews the doctrine of resurrection had never, up to this date, met with universal acceptance. It was a moot question; and the Sadducees who denied it continued to flourish in Jerusalem until the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. But there was never any Sadduceeism within Christianity. In the hope of a blessed immortality Christianity had been born and in that hope it continued to live." p. 164 - 165.

"We must, however, enter the warning that this is not to be understood as if the faith that Jesus was alive was the sole original root of the Christians' hope that they too would live eternally. Most of them as followers of the Pharisaic tradition, and some of them, as followers of the Platonic tradition, had entertained that hope before they ever knew Jesus." p. 166.

"Moreover, Jesus had Himself, during His own lifetime, taught His disciples that they could assure themselves of immortality by looking — He could not then say to Himself, but — to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The faith that these are alive, He had argued, is ground for hope that we too may live. But the simple fact is that the argument never seemed to carry full conviction until for these names men could substitute the name of Jesus. The hope had long been entertained, but only now had it become a sure and firm persuasion, putting an end to all doubts" p. 166 - 7.

"The New Testament does not really teach that there is available for the truth of Christianity such empiric evidence as must confound all unbelief. Rather is faith "the evidence of things not seen." . . . "To say that the disciples' faith rested solely on the appearances is therefore to deny to them all faith properly so called and to charge them with the refusal to believe except on the evidence of the senses. If this be true of them, then they were not only less noble-minded than the disciples of Socrates whose faith in immortality rose triumphant from their master's death, but were less noble-minded also than their own Jewish fathers and mothers whose belief in resurrection had survived the disappearance of many a loved one beneath the sod. And that we cannot think to have been the case. That, then, is one reason why we must not say that the Church's faith in its ever-living Lord rests upon the fact that He was seen by His disciples after His death."

"But there is another reason. For the faith which manifested itself in the disciples' hearts was not really of such a kind as to be capable of any mere ocular demonstration. No conclusion of religious significance could be held to follow logically, and no spiritual conviction would be likely to follow psychologically, from the mere fact that a man who had died and been buried was seen walking the earth once again. If we are to believe St. Luke, this very point was made by Jesus Himself. In the story of Dives and Lazarus He makes Dives plead with Abraham that he

should send Lazarus back to earth to inform his five brothers of the reality of eternal life and the solemnity of the final judgment. "But Abraham saith, They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead," p. 16S - 9.

"Supposing a man devoid of religious faith were to read in his morning's paper that a remarkable thing had happened in a neighboring city - a citizen who had died and been buried had, after the lapse of some days, and in agreement with his alleged predictions, appeared to a number of his friends and been engaged by them in conversation: what would be his natural feeling about the report? To begin with, he would rightly be exceedingly skeptical about its accuracy and would feel that a phenomenon so contrary to all human experience should not be received as authentic without the most scrupulous enquiry and the most complete, indeed "watertight," attestation. But if he satisfied himself that such an enquiry had been made and that the evidence was indeed quite unimpeachable, then he would be forced to allow that a phenomenon of extraordinary scientific interest had occurred: a man who had been certified as dead by the doctors and had spent three days in a vault had (as foretold by himself) returned to earth alive and had again companied with his friends for a brief period before disappearing once again from their midst. But would he conclude, further, that the risen man must have been remarkable in any other respect, or that his ideas on things in general must have been profoundly wise and right, or that all men would rise as he did, or that even he would live on forever? Or again, would his mind be turned in any way towards belief in the reality of God or in the possibility of fellowship with Him whether in this life or in glory everlasting? Surely the answer to all these questions must be No." P. 170 - 1.

"It should be noted carefully that to make the vision of the risen Christ conditional upon faith in Him is by no means the same thing as making it the fruit of faith. To say that I cannot see a certain star without lenses does not mean that the lenses create the star. To say that only a trained eye can find beauty in a certain picture does not mean that the trained eye puts into the picture a beauty that is not really there. What faith did for the disciples was not to make them subject to delusions but - as we are fain to think - to open their eyes to a Reality that was actively seeking to invade their consciousness. Indeed it is as wrong to speak of the vision out of the faith as of the faith growing out of the vision." p.181 - 2.

..."Perhaps the visions are the form which faith assumes for exceptional natures or in exceptional circumstances." p. 182.

"The question I often raised whether the visions of the risen Christ were 'subjective'. The answer, for all who believe in the reality of the Unseen World at all, must surely be an emphatic negative. The visions granted to the disciples were revelations of a genuinely extant reality. Neither their faith itself, nor the visions that accompanied and defined it, are capable of a purely 'subjective' explanation. They were what they were only under the pressure of the reality, now believed in, now seen. Behind the fact of their upreaching faith lay the prior fact of God's downreaching grace. Behind the fact of their strained seeing lay the prior fact of the invading presence of Him whom they saw." p. 182 - 3.

“To make faith depend on the proved historicity of the appearances is to place a weight on the historical evidence which it cannot possibly bear and never was meant to bear; and it can lead only to perplexity. And this perplexity is increased when the Resurrection - appearances are separated from their natural context in the whole history of Biblical visionary disclosure. A story like that of Jacob wrestling with God at Peniel and seeing Him “face to face” is probably purely legendary. But what are we to say of Isaiah’s vision in the temple: or of the visions of Ezekial “in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month” as he was “among the captives by the river of Chebar”? And again, what are we to say of the Transfiguration, of the Ascension, of St. Stephen’s vision before he was stoned, of St. Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus and of many others recorded in the New Testament? These are clearly held by the Biblical writers to be ‘objective’ in just the same sense as were the Resurrection appearances. St. Paul regards his own vision of the risen Christ as being on the same plane as those vouchsafed to the original disciples: “and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also.” Yet are we to understand that what was seen in those cases was something that entered into the public and common order of events?” p. 183 - 4.

“Was the light from heaven” that shone round about St. Paul at his conversion, a light that mingled with the lights of earth, being of one substance with them? Surely we must answer No to all these questions. In that use none of the Biblical visions seem to have been ‘objective’. But is that a proper use of the word ‘objective’? I cannot believe that it is. I sometimes wonder, indeed, whether the word has any proper sense or use. The fashionable modern distinction, introduced by Kant, between the objective and the subjective is a highly confused one and needs to be broken up into at least two separate distinctions, that between significant and merely illusory experience, and that between public and private experience. There is no reason to suppose that all private experience must be illusory.” P. 185