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BOOK REVIEW

Gary R. Habermas. *Risen Indeed: A Historical Investigation into the Resurrection of Jesus*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021. xi + 299 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-68359-549-6. \$29.99.

The historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is one of those debates which permeates New Testament scholarship and results in a new publication almost by the year. Michael J. Alter's recent bibliography (*A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus's Resurrection* [Eugen, OR: Resource, 2019]) on the issue lists more than seven-thousand English language works on the topic alone, and this would have only exponentially grown in the years since its release. One of the more prolific authors on the resurrection has been Gary R. Habermas at Liberty University. He frequently releases new volumes concerning Jesus' resurrection, and *Risen Indeed* was published in 2021.

The book provides an introduction, which opens with the account of his own journey from doubting the historicity of the resurrection to becoming an avowed Christian and finding it entirely believable as history. Following this is a brief discussion of the "third quest for the historical Jesus" (6–12) and then a summary of his survey of resurrection research (12–21). Following this, he assembles his "minimal facts," which are what he deems to be agreed upon "facts" by a wide consensus (and with good historical documentation) surrounding the resurrection of Jesus, and which, when taken all together, indicate that Jesus was actually risen from the dead as their best explanation (21–26). Habermas also includes a brief section on the criteria of authenticity, which he utilizes throughout the book to his advantage (26–28).

The first chapter discusses the present state of the resurrection debate and tries to contend that this debate is of great interest to

historians, not just to theologians. It serves to grant this volume and discussion an aura of authority as a result. The second chapter discusses the possibility of miracles and the state of this question among scientists, contending at the end that science neither gives preference for or against the possibility miracles (63–64). Thus, the study has nothing to do with the scientific state of the question. The third chapter emphasizes this, and then goes on to discuss miracles in the context of history, arguing that if any text claims a miracle, it must be historically investigated as such. Habermas contends that miracles cannot be ruled out as historical *a priori* and must therefore be treated as any other historical claim and investigated as such. He then contends that since the resurrection is the “central claim of the New Testament” (71), it must be addressed and not simply left at “the original disciples believed that Jesus had risen” (71). Chapter four more or less attempts to establish religious faith as rational and reasonable. Part of this is to construe history, science, and faith as all functioning on the same basis of seeking the most “probable” answers, and so these chapters manufacture their definitions accordingly. The next few chapters (89–151) address arguments that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur. Another chapter is over the issue of the resurrection occurring, but we cannot demonstrate this (152–69, with “similar views” coming after 170–88). And then we have the chapters over the resurrection being historical and that this can be demonstrated as such (189–231). The last chapters then provide evaluations of these different theories and positions and then a conclusion that emphasizes that the resurrection of Jesus being historical and demonstrable is the best explanation of the evidence.

There is much to critique and analyze in this volume, regardless of one’s confessional status. One can firstly take note that the book itself and the scholarship it tends to cite are outdated (as this is a reprint of Habermas’s dissertation; though even his new introduction is sparse of new research). Habermas’s reliance on the criteria of authenticity, and his continuous attempts to justify bits and pieces of the Gospels/Acts as historical on the basis of “embarrassing” traits have been thoroughly critiqued and this book contains no new updates for this. In fact, the recently inau-

gured “Next Quest” (fourth) for the historical Jesus has officially done away with them (see James G. Crossley, “The Next Quest for the Historical Jesus.” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 19 [2021] 261–64 [261]), and this is not for no good reason. Embarrassment in particular is something that seems to be projected, and often stems from treating ancient Christians as a conglomerate. Habermas does this quite frequently throughout the volume. Though almost all scholars contend that the New Testament compiles various different views and theologies into one, he treats them as though they all have a unified vision of the resurrection of Jesus, calling it their “central claim” (71). Habermas’s work, thus, reveals itself as being built on the same errors and failings which defined much of the work of the third questers.

There is a polemical overtone to the volume, which tends to treat skepticism and skeptical positions as a negative. The book, in fact, frames skepticism as something to be overcome, with Habermas beginning the whole volume with his story of outgrowing it. This rhetorically sets up the volume as automatically favoring a conservative viewpoint. Skepticism of Jesus seems to be unacceptable for this volume. It is particularly notable throughout that whenever the author wishes to levy similar skepticism towards pagan religions and beliefs, however, that this is simply regarded as sound scholarship (even though almost all of his research relies on outdated citations). In fact, among his bibliography of approximately two-hundred seventy sources, only around sixteen sources that are not written by himself are cited which are dated after the year 2000. The majority of these sources are from prior to 1980, especially from the 1960–1970s. Thus, given that he seems almost entirely unfamiliar with recent research on the New Testament, the fact that Habermas has such an aversion to modern skepticism from authors like Bart Ehrman is notable. The sources that Habermas does cite that are more recent tend to be rather selective and in favor of his position already or are amenable to his views (e.g., his own research assistant’s dissertation).

On the topic of this skepticism and then lack of citing current research, Habermas quite frequently treats the New Testament as

a standardly reliable source. For instance, he argues that the empty tomb is historical, and one line of evidence is that Matthew reports a polemic that Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb being used by Jewish opponents, confirming that not even they doubted that the tomb was empty (226). This, of course, has numerous possible explanations. Firstly, if the empty tomb is a fiction (as I suspect), we could easily propose that Matthew (whom most scholars date in or after 80 CE) is simply placing Jewish opponents' polemic decades after the event in response to a fiction that they could not verify or refute any longer. Matthew even could have just invented this as a preemptive response to any potential objections. Another example is the "women as witness" apologetic which Habermas briefly mentions (27). This argument (which he has elsewhere endorsed) fails for similar reasons, not seeing that Mark—the inventor of this narrative—constructs many narratives centering on the disenfranchised and otherwise "embarrassing" people being the ones to understand and best treat Jesus. If we look at this from a literary-critical perspective, we can argue quite easily that Mark could have invented this narrative of the women as witnesses, specifically also because it parallels Mark 14:3–9, where Jesus is anointed by a woman in preparation for his eventual death. Women are the ones to set up and close the death arc, thus, it makes sense to use them. Habermas just does not engage with the texts as literature. Instead, he always treats them as a reliable source. He also has a habit of reading information into texts which is not present. For example, contending that Josephus and Tacitus attest to an empty tomb (which he places behind "directly or indirectly," 235) when in fact they do not, even in the reconstruction of the *Testimonium Flavianum* by Maier which he cites (225–26). This issue is parallel to that of his treatment of all New Testament texts as having the same theology.

These issues manifest in his treatment of 1 Cor 15 and the so-called "creedal" (141) tradition contained therein. Habermas contends that this supposed tradition predates Paul's letters, but this cannot be substantiated using his methods—for conjecturing that Paul heard it from the apostles in Jerusalem, see 140–41). Notably, the creedal tradition never speaks to Jesus being raised

from an empty tomb. Other leading scholars like Allison have contended that inferring an empty tomb is neither immediately viable (see, for example, Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2021], 145) nor does it speak of Jesus' resurrection being physical. Habermas may have recourse to Paul's other letters to argue this point, but if this creedal tradition *predates* Paul, then what Paul says on the matter is rather irrelevant. His words do not alter the possibility that the creedal tradition may attest to Jesus' reappearance only being in a vision or spiritual form. And even if Paul believes this to be a literal physical reappearance is doubtful as well, and so would Mark. Mark's Gospel in its current form has been interpolated to include Jesus' physical reappearance (16:9–20). The original Gospel ends with his body disappearing, and then it is said that he would reveal himself in Galilee. But it does not emphasize that this will be a physical reappearance.

There are also a few inherently strange and simply questionable implications of this volume. If miracle claims are to be taken seriously by historians, should Habermas now admit that Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and other non-Christian claims to miracles (which are often multiply attested, and feature much of the same, or better, evidence than Christian claims) are historical as well? Should we not apply the minimal facts to the miracles said of Vespasian, which are recorded by multiple Roman historians and thus conclude that, yes, Vespasian really did these things? I think H would either say that these methods do not apply (making it clear this is an apologetic for Jesus, not historical method at work), or he would produce such high levels of scrutiny to those sources so that this would not be the outcome, the same kind of scrutiny he would never levy at the New Testament, which he does in this very volume.

What emerges from reading this volume is that he is not interested in going through the processes of rigorous historical inquiry. The author does not engage current scholarship on the resurrection (save that which already defends its historicity), and further he clearly wishes to privilege the New Testament texts by excluding them from the same levels of scrutiny he applies to

skeptical and pagan positions. The New Testament texts are always believed as accurate data (even when most current scholars would not agree), and as a result, the answer was always assured to be what H wanted in the first place. The volume is not one of historical inquiry but just a confirmation of his own theological beliefs dressed as history. As Meggitt has noted, this would not be acceptable in any other respected field of historical research (see Justin J. Meggitt, “‘More Ingenious than Learned?’ Examining the Quest for the Non-Historical Jesus,” *NTS* 65 [2019] 443–60 [458]). As a result, the volume itself cannot be recommended. It does not add anything which Habermas has not written about elsewhere, and so does not contribute to the debate much. In fact, it contextualizes this debate as a largely apologetic one, which historians should be averse to engaging, regardless of their confessional status. This volume demonstrates its own antithesis, that this debate belongs to theologians, not historians.

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