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Few Protestant scholars today are at home both in the history of theology and the history of philosophy. Gordon H. Clark is among the few. His writings, for that reason, bridge the chasm in the intellectual outlook of the mid-century man. He is Chairman of the Department of Philosophy in Butler University. His latest book, *Thales to Dewey*, appeared in January.

The Resurrection

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The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, or, if you wish, the alleged resurrection, is the most stupendous miracle on record. A dead body's resumption of life, walking out of its tomb, eating and talking with its former friends for a period of forty days is a series of events that we do not experience very frequently. No wonder the foes of Christianity doubt it and pseudo-Christians spiritualize it.

POWER OF HUME'S ARGUMENT

No one since the time of Davie Hume has argued more powerfully against the resurrection than he. Therefore it is not amiss to begin with a reconsideration of Hume.

Suppose, he says, that all historians should agree that on January 1, 1600, Queen Elizabeth died, and that after being interred a month she again appeared resumed here throne and governed England another three years. Hume confesses that the agreement of all the witnesses on so many details would puzzle him. He would be compelled to believe that Elizabeth had died, he would have to accept the public circumstances that followed for three years, but far from having the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event, he would assert that the resurrection was merely pretended and could not possibly have been real. If, further, this alleged miracle were made a part of some religion, this very circumstance would be full proof of a cheat and would induce all men of good sense to reject it without examination.

The arguments against the possibility of miracles from the viewpoint of scientific mechanism are too intricate for the present discussion, and as a matter of fact Hume remains pretty well within the limits of ordinary observation. But if anyone think that broader questions of competitive world views are more difficult for a Christian to answer, and that therefore their omission here is a sign of weakness,

it can unembarrassingly be asserted that scientific mechanism does not enjoy the widespread acceptance it did fifty years ago. And when it comes to a particular miracles, such as the resurrection of Christ, the range of Hume's procedure is satisfactory.

Some of Hume's argumentation can be immediately dismissed because it begs the question. He assumes, for example, that any religious claim is automatically to be regarded as erroneous. Historians and travelers may mix truth and untruth, but religious stories are pure, unmixed falsehoods. When, further, he writes, "It is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age and country," and when he continues, "There must therefore be a uniform experience against every miraculous event," it is clear that he is using for proof the very conclusion he wishes to prove. Obviously, one who maintains that the resurrection of Christ cannot allow as a premise the assertion that in no age or country has a dead man ever come to life. To the extent that Hume's argument depends on such infelicitous assumptions, it is definitely weakened.

IMPROBABILITY AND PROBABILITY

Aside from such material Hume insists that miracles are improbable. This may well be granted in the sense that the number of miracles, or alleged miracles, is much less than the number of ordinary occurrences. Of course, miracles are admittedly rare. But this admission does not imply the improbability of miracles in another sense. For although the probability of a miraculous occurrence at a random time and place is very small, yet the universe may be so constituted that the probability of a miracle's occurrence at some time or other is very great. This possibility Hume neglected to discuss, except insofar as he works out elsewhere a nontheistic world view.

Hume continues by listing the suspicious circumstances of several miracles individually and then manages to produce the impression that the list as a totality applies to each. He remarks that all experience is fallible, and secondhand experience is more so; witness cannot be trusted and many alleged miracles are frauds. The more unusual the story, the less probably it is; it is the more believed because mankind enjoys tall tales. Then, further, he argues that since there is as much testimony for a miracle of one religion as for a miracle of another religion, and since all evidence in favor of one is evidence against the other, the witnesses for miracles cancel each other out, just as the witness in court who supports an alibi cancels out the witness who identifies the accused.

FLAW IN HUME'S LOGIC

Aside from the fact that the last consideration is not the precise truth, for courts constantly manage to decide between alibis and identifications, yet the cumulative force of such a listing of objections is considerable. However, examination will show that the force is more psychological than logical. To the extent that it drives a Christian to produce detailed evidence in support of the resurrection, it cannot be disallowed. But with whatever literary repetition Hume embellishes his account, he is only begging the question again when he concludes, “no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof.” In effect he says, no miracles has a sufficient number of competent and honest witnesses in its favor. Thus by a series of selected examples and by hasty generalization, he hopes to avoid the responsibility of a series historical examination of the resurrection of Christ. In spite of his reference to Queen Elizabeth—and note that he fails to explain the testimony of the historians—Hume has not studied the resurrection. His argument in reality is an argument against miracles as such, and it is only from the impossibility of any and all miracles that he deduces the falsity of the resurrection.

As was said above, Hume's argument that miracles are impossible begs the question. He assumes the point in dispute. And particularly in view of his philosophical empiricism, Hume should have first proved that the resurrection did not occur, then that another alleged event had not occurred, and so on, and then only at the end should have concluded that there is “a uniform experience against every miraculous event.” Is it not reasonable, therefore, and all the more evidently reasonable in view of the later Hegelians' attempt to rewrite history according to a preconceived pattern—is it not reasonable, therefore, to insist that the actual events be determined first and that the theory be made to conform to them?

The demand that the resurrection, or the alleged resurrection, itself be examined rather than ruled out beforehand has a facet that may go far to explain why its opponents rest their case on a general nontheistic argument against miracles as such. In the examination of any particular event the person who decides that the event did not occur is under obligation to give an alternate account of the history in question. Hume, as noted above, would have had to explain the alleged resurrection of Elizabeth and the remarkable agreement of the historians. Or, as a more modern example, and one who wished to deny that Hitler committed suicide in Berlin would have to produce evidence that he escaped to Bavaria, Argentina or some other definite place. So too those who refuse to believe that Christ rose from the dead are under logical compulsion to give an alternate account of what happened. This turns out to be so embarrassing that Hume's procedure is psychologically understandable.

UNDENIABLE HISTORICAL FACTS

What, then, happened? Well, it can hardly be denied, even by the most violent opponent of Christianity, that the Christian church happened. In the first century there were groups of people who believed, preached and were persecuted for the name of Jesus Christ. Second, it can hardly be denied that these people, who at first were mostly Jews, held their worship services on the first rather than on the seventh day of the week. These Christians claimed—their claim cannot be denied—that they did these things because Christ had conquered death, had risen from the tomb, and had been seen by five hundred of them. If now these claims are not true, in what manner may the undeniable history be accounted?

This is the question that is so embarrassing for the unbelievers, and it is embarrassing because their method precludes a consistent answer.

HISTORIANS AND THE RECORDS

For example, Ernest Renan, whose *Life of Jesus* went through more than 140 editions, claims to be a scientific historian: “J'avais fait mon livre avec la froideur absolue de l'historien. ... L'histoire est une science comme la chimie.” In this role he asserts that “the evangelists themselves, who have bequeathed to use the portrait of Jesus, are so far below the one of whom they speak, that they constantly disfigure him. ... Their writings are full of errors and misunderstandings. ... [they] do not understand, [they] substitute their own ideas for those they only partly grasp” (Chapter XXIII). But if the documents are so faulty, how can an objective and scientific historian conclude that the belief in the resurrection was the result of Mary Magdalene's hallucinations? The end of chapter XXVI in the original edition says, “the strong imagination of Mary Magdalene here enacted a principal part. Divine power of love! sacred moments in which the passion of an hallucinated woman gives to the world a resurrected God.” The later editions have deleted this chapter, but retain an anticipation of the idea in chapter VIII.)

In view of the utter unreliability of the Gospels, how could historian Renan objectively assert that Mary Magdalene is the source of the resurrection stories? Why could it not have been Peter?

As a matter of fact, this claim has been made. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, who has a much better claim to the title of historian than Renan ever had, vaguely traces the Church's belief in the resurrection to some unrecorded, unknown experience of Peter (*The Apostolic Age*, pp. 37-38 n. 3; pp. 48, 55-56); and to this McGiffert joins Paul's visions of a spirit—not a man of flesh and blood, but a heavenly apparition (*ibid.*, p. 126), thus emptying the word “resurrection” of its essential significance.

Now, obviously, these and all other other alternate theories conflict with the written reports. The

substitution of visions for a resurrection, whether they be Mary's visions or Peter's, conflicts with the evidence of the empty tomb. Is the account of the empty tomb therefore to be deleted as one of the numerous errors? But if the tomb, so carefully sealed and guarded at the insistence of the Pharisees, was not empty, would not those implacable enemies of Christ have exhibited the body and silenced the disciples? On the contrary, they bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen the body—at least so the record reports. Is this too an error, perhaps a fabrication of the authors? The story that the Pharisees are said to have invented cannot be true because it implies that the disciples suffered martyrdom for a gospel they knew to be false. Since the story cannot be true, we cannot, by reason of the same implication, suppose that the disciples invented the story and put it into the mouths of the Pharisees. Hence at least this part of the account must be true. But if this part is true, the tomb was empty and the Pharisees knew it.

How much then of the gospel account is true. It cannot be all false. Could Caesar's *Gallic Wars* contain many true statements and the Gospels none?

NO CONSISTENT ALTERNATIVE

One way to distinguish the true from the false would be to construct a satisfactory alternate theory. But this attempt has failed. Hume did not really try. Renan and McGiffert give impossible reconstructions. A still more radical writer, Corliss Lamont (*The Illusion of Immortality*, pp. 153 ff.) mentions several alternate theories and allows his readers to take their choice. This procedure follows a famous case at law. A man was sued for damaging a crock he had borrowed. The defendant offered three watertight defenses: first, when he returned the crock it was not cracked; second, the crock was already cracked when he borrowed it; third, he had never borrowed it.

The alternate theories—the vision theory, the swoon theory, the deliberate falsehood theory, of which one but not three may be chosen—fail to account for the later undeniable history. None of them can construct a consistent story.

The explanation of their failure lies in the fact that none of these theories results from an honest attempt to discover whether or not the resurrection actually occurred. They all proceed upon the hypothesis that miracles are impossible. Thus a nontheistic world view is made the criterion of history. Instead of examining the world to obtain a world view, the unbelievers use their world view to construct the history of the world. And the history they construct is self-contradictory.

But if the Gospel narratives are accepted as true, then (1) we have a self-consistent story, (2) the subsequent events are satisfactorily explained, and (3) redemption has been accomplished by Jesus

Christ the Lord. Otherwise our faith is vain and we are yet in our sin. END