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The Resurrection Just Got Easier To Believe In

The bodily resurrection of Jesus used to be an embarrassing doctrine to me, though I could never fully articulate why. It just seemed unsophisticated for some reason. Well, I've done some thinking about it, and here's what I've come up with. The Greek mind (and its bastard stepchild, the Modern mind) has three hardcore prejudices that find Christ's bodily resurrection offensive:

The prejudice against MATTER. The Greeks believed in the "real" world of ideals and forms, of which the material world was only a dim (and often illusory) shadow. For them, matter was an icky thing. From that way of thinking, it would certainly not be a good thing for God to become flesh, and it would be even WORSE if he STAYED in flesh. Our bodies were something to be ESCAPED from, not eternally embraced. The Modern mind is similar, just flipped upside-down. For them, the objective material world is the real world, and the ideal or "spiritual" realm is the vague subjective stuff that isn't actually real. Observe how our culture believes in science and facts about matter, but when it comes to "spirituality and personal values," all beliefs are equally true, which is just a veiled way of saying they are all equally false. So in Modern culture, no one minds if you have a spiritual experience of the Risen Christ, as long as it has nothing to do with the real world of bodies in space.

The prejudice against TIME. The Greeks believed that time was part of the illusion of the material world, that the ideal (real) world was timeless and changeless. They believed we can learn a little about reality by observing the ways in which that timeless constancy expresses itself in those earthly phenomena which occur over and over again in an observable pattern. When Modern science developed, this turned into the belief that if a phenomenon is real, it happens over and over again. If you drop an apple 100 times, it goes down 100 times. Philosopher David Hume expressed this in his idea that it is "infinitely improbable" for something to happen only once. The Modern mind "knows" that Jesus' body didn't rise from the dead, based on the simple fact that it hadn't happened before and hasn't happened since.

The prejudice against COMMUNITY. This is really just an extension of the prejudice against time. If a phenomenon occurs in only one place at only one time, it is observable to only a small fraction of the human race who happen to be alive at that time and place. Therefore, if we are to have widespread knowledge of the phenomenon, it requires WITNESS. Think of how profoundly un-democratic this is. Due to no fault of my own, I cannot see the resurrection for myself. I must rely on the accounts of people who DID see it. For me to know what happened, I must enter into a "community of knowing," a set of relationships that require trust and faith. Anathema! To the Modern mind, the individual is THE important thing. If anything wants to be considered real, it must make itself fully accessible to every individual at every place and every time. The resurrection refuses to submit to these criteria, and is therefore not a respectable belief in the Modern world.

The good news, however, is that the Modern era is essentially dead, and the above prejudices have lost their own respectability.

The sciences since Einstein are discovering that the WHY questions are inseparable from the

WHAT questions. There is a growing awareness that when the scientist asks WHY things are the way they are, he/she is dealing with real objective realities that cannot be relegated to some “spiritual” realm that is less real. In other words, there can be no divorce between matter and spirit, WHAT and WHY.

Time also is more respectable than it used to be. Einstein proved that time is just as real as space. In addition, it’s been discovered that “singular events” happen all the time. Inside a black hole, space and time are so ravaged by gravity that our much-vaunted “laws of physics” cease to have any jurisdiction. Whatever happens inside any particular black hole, chances are it happens only once.

Likewise, psychologists and sociologists have entirely moved on from the Greek idea of a person as an “individual rational substance.” The fruitful realms of research are all about—yep, you guessed it—community. The only way for a person to be a person is to be situated in a community of trust with a particular tradition of knowing. For evidence of this, next time you visit a therapist, observe how much time you spend talking about relationships with parents, siblings, etc. We don’t need to be ashamed of belonging to a particular community of knowledge, because there is no such thing as a person who doesn’t.

I am not saying the bodily resurrection of Christ is a popular idea in the scientific culture of our day. Nor do I care. What I DO know is that the most intellectually honest thing I can do is to move on from these obsolete prejudices that make me shy about the resurrection—the well-documented fact of history that shapes how I understand the world.

~ John Stonecypher