

7 Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection

William P. Alston

The general topic of this paper is the historical (in)accuracy of the Gospel accounts of appearances of the risen Jesus. More specifically, I will be concerned with the bearing of contemporary Gospel criticism on that issue. A number of studies have reached largely negative conclusions as to what we can learn from these accounts about what happened in the alleged encounters of the disciples with their risen Lord. My central concern here will be to assess the arguments that are brought forward to support such conclusions. By way of preview, that assessment will itself be largely negative. In my view those arguments often fall far short of adequately supporting their conclusions.

Thus the discussion will be confined to the historical questions. What can we learn from the Gospels about what actually happened on and just after the first Easter? In enforcing this restriction I by no means suggest that there are not other, and at least equally important, issues concerning the resurrection. It is far from my intention to denigrate the role of faith or the relevance of the resurrection to Christian life; and I fully recognize that it is more important to enter into an appropriate *relationship* with the risen Christ than it is to figure out exactly what happened in Palestine at that time, or to enter into the minutiae of historical investigation.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, since it is crucial to the Christian faith and the Christian life to recognize that Jesus *was* restored to life after the crucifixion and has continued an (exalted and glorified) life ever since, whereby he is in effective touch with us, it is certainly not irrelevant to Christian concerns to do the best we can to determine what

²⁶¹ See G. O'Collins, *Jesus Risen* (New York: Paulist, 1987) for a salutary emphasis on these other matters.

we can reasonably believe about Jesus' return to life after his death and burial.

However, my approach to the historical questions is somewhat different from more usual ones. It is often supposed by biblical scholars that questions as to what happened at a certain time and place are to be answered, if at all, by the standard procedures of (secular) historical investigation. If these procedures fail to yield an answer or, worse, indicate that the balance of probability lies with the negation of certain historical reports in the Gospels, then we cannot be rationally justified in accepting those reports. Unless we embrace an irrational faith, we must reject them and, if we continue as Christians, find some other basis for Easter faith.

This approach obviously presupposes that we have no access to the facts of salvation history other than the standard procedures of historical investigation. If so, we must accept the results of such investigation or go without. But that is not the position of many committed Christians. They do not approach historical questions about the resurrection out of the blue, with nothing to go on at the outset. On the contrary, they think, believe, and *live* within a context that is partly defined by the acceptance, in a response of faith, of (more or less all of) what the Church delivers to them concerning what God is like and what He has done and plans to do, especially *vis-à-vis* us.²⁶² From that starting-point, what is, or should be, a Christian's concern with contemporary biblical historical scholarship? Something like this (and here is where the distinctive character of my approach comes out most clearly). Since she is already working within certain views on the matter, her mind is far from being completely open at the outset. She does not take historical research to be the sole determiner of what to believe about these matters. But if, as I suppose, she recognizes such research to be relevant to what she should believe, in what way is it relevant? By having a confirming or disconfirming bearing on the belief system she already has. Obviously, it could be confirmatory at some points and disconfirmatory at others.²⁶³ The historical results thus serve to

²⁶² The details depend, of course, on which branch of the Church and which segment of the branch is involved.

²⁶³ And while I am prescribing an attitude for the committed Christian, I will add that just as in science there are no conclusive experiments, as philosophers of science and scientists have been increasingly recognizing, so it is here. Just as a scientific theory can be adhered to in the face of any experimental results whatever by making appropriate adjustments to the theory, so no results of historical research can definitively and conclusively overthrow a religious doctrine. (That is not to say, of course, that it will always be reasonable to hang on to a system in the face of certain results of investigation.) But this additional complexity will play no role here.

shore up or weaken parts of the Christian belief system, without being allowed the presumption of completely determining even the historical parts thereof by themselves. And I hold, without being able to give an adequate defence of the position here, that this is a rational position for her to take.²⁶⁴

It is from this perspective that I consider negative conclusions of historical scholarship concerning Gospel accounts of appearances of the risen Jesus. I am interested in them as possibly having a dis-confirmatory force *vis-à-vis* certain items in a Christian belief system. I am concerned to assess the strength of the arguments for these conclusions so that I can assess the degree to which they pose a serious problem for that system. One important difference between this approach and the one with which I contrasted it has to do with what it is proper to expect, or need, in the way of historical ‘proof’ or evidence for historical components of Christian belief, such as the belief that Jesus is alive and appeared to his disciples after his death and burial. My idealized Christian believer neither expects nor feels any urgent need of such a proof. She accepts all this initially as part of ‘signing on’ with the Church, as part of her faith response to the Church’s proclamation.²⁶⁵ Thus she, and I, are undisturbed by the frequent statements of historical biblical scholars that historical investigation cannot establish this or that item of Christian belief—for example, that the post-resurrection events were as depicted in one or another Gospel, or that ‘he rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven’. But, being an intelligent, reflective, and rational person, she wants to know what has been discovered by historians that has any bearing on beliefs like those. When and if she becomes convinced that such results are forthcoming, she will

²⁶⁴ In this essay I cannot develop an epistemology of Christian belief. Hence I will have to leave it largely inexplicit what properly goes into the basis of Christian belief other than results of historical investigation. I have just spoken of a faith response to the proclamation of the gospel by the Church, but that is by no means the whole story. For more of the story see W. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), esp. ch. 8.

²⁶⁵ I concentrate here on the cognitive aspect of this faith response. But please do not take this to reflect a view as to what is most important in faith. I have no inclination to think that faith is mostly a matter of propositional belief, or that this is what is most important about it. I only think that it is *an* important component and is intimately related to the rest.

take account of them in her continuing reflection on, and possible modifications of, her belief system.²⁶⁶

So I will scrutinize claims by historical scholars to have established conclusions that have a negative bearing on Gospel accounts of resurrection appearances. But how will I select from the legion of such claims? First, I locate the discussion within the context of certain agreements. I will confine myself to scholars who accept some kind of continuance of life on the part of Jesus after death and burial (not necessarily life as an embodied human being) and who agree that in this post-resurrection period Jesus in some way ‘appeared’ or ‘manifested’ himself to his disciples. That restricts the territory to those who agree not only that after the crucifixion something momentous happened to the disciples but also that something momentous happened to Jesus. Moreover, it restricts the discussion to those who take resurrection ‘appearances’ to involve some kind of awareness of a real presence of a living Jesus, as contrasted with a view according to which the ‘appearances’ were merely ‘subjective visions’, states of consciousness that were wholly within the mind of the disciples and that involved no cognitive contact with Jesus as a distinct living person.²⁶⁷ Hence I will not spend time on such views as that the whole resurrection business was deliberately fabricated by the disciples or the early Church, or that the disciples were subject to some mass hallucination or delusion, or that Jesus rose from the dead only in the sense that the movement he initiated lived on after him or in the sense that the memory of his life, work, and personality was so strong that it was as if he was still actually present to his followers, or . . .²⁶⁸

Within the territory so delimited I will focus on recent studies that seriously address themselves to the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts, treatments that employ such techniques as form criticism,

²⁶⁶ Even though my approach to the problem is in terms of the assumptions just laid out, I do not think that my conclusions are relevant only against that background. If I am right in the criticisms I develop in this paper, it follows that certain negative conclusions of certain biblical scholars are inadequately supported. And that conclusion would stand whether or not I am right about what hangs on the results of historical research.

²⁶⁷ Note that a thinker could pass my first requirement for admission but not the second: i.e. he could believe that Jesus became alive again after death and burial but deny that the ‘appearances’ to the disciples involved any genuine interaction with Jesus. I don’t mean to suggest that this would be a reasonable combination.

²⁶⁸ Needless to say, all this would have to be considered in a comprehensive discussion of the topic.

redaction criticism, and attempts to reconstruct the history of the tradition behind a certain Gospel passage. Further, my targets will be taken from what I consider the best and strongest examples that meet these conditions.

There is still the question of how much of the Gospel accounts a writer must reject in order to be eligible for consideration here. It will not be enough to deny that the Gospel accounts are accurate in every detail; that is obvious from the important discrepancies between them. On the other hand, I do not want to restrict myself to those who reject the accounts completely. I could just say that I will consider accounts that deny *important* or *fundamental* features of the accounts, leaving it unspecified just what that amounts to. But I will give the essay a more specific focus by concentrating on the question of a *bodily* resurrection. The Gospels that contain appearance narratives, at least Luke and John,²⁶⁹ are insistent that Jesus appeared in a human body that was visible and tangible, even though not in all respects like a normal human body. Since this is such a prominent theme in those Gospels, and since there are excellent studies that deny the historicity of this feature, I will make this a unifying thread for the discussion. Do the considerations adduced by my authors suffice to show that Jesus did not appear to the disciples in bodily form, or at least that this is very unlikely, or that it is unreasonable to suppose this to have been the case?

In embarking on this task, I presuppose that the evangelists, in their narratives, intend to be providing factually accurate information, which is something that scholars often *seem* to deny. In some cases they actually do so. For example, it is alleged by some that the evangelists made no distinction between what was said or done by the historical Jesus and what was spoken or done in his name by inspired prophets in the early Church.²⁷⁰ Again, it is held that their narratives were simply *expressions* of their faith, or the faith of the Church, rather than factual claims.²⁷¹ But more often scholars make other points that are mistakenly taken by themselves or others to imply the denial of my presupposition. Thus it is often said (1) that the *ultimate* aim of the Gospels is to induce faith in Jesus as Christ

²⁶⁹ I will briefly consider below where Matthew stands on this.

²⁷⁰ See e.g. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 26–7.

²⁷¹ See e.g. W. Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) .

or Lord; (2) that the evangelists did not approach their task with the modern historian's critical attitude toward evidence; (3) that they were not bothered by minor discrepancies in details, either within a single Gospel or between their work and other Gospels, with which, presumably, they were acquainted; (4) that some of the differences between the Gospels indicate that each author was shaping the account in terms of his own theological perspective [and also with a view to the community for whom they were writing—eds.], and (5) that in reported speech there is no attempt to give the exact words but only the sense of what was said. But none of these implies that the evangelists were not concerned to provide accounts that, at least in the main, were factually accurate. As for (1), it is certainly a distinct possibility (I would say, an overwhelming probability) that they sought to induce faith by, *inter alia*, telling people about certain things that actually happened. As for (2), one obviously doesn't have to possess the sophisticated methodology of the modern historian to have as one's aim an accurate narration of events. As for (3), one can be more or less careless with details and still attempt to give an account that is correct in the main. As for (4), one can give a certain theological 'spin' to one's version without abandoning the aim at faithfulness to the facts as to what was done, undergone, or said. And as for (5), one can aim for accuracy as to *what was said*, rather than as to *the words in which it was said*.

The foregoing undoubtedly gives the impression that I will now proceed to discuss several studies that meet my conditions. And that is the aim of a larger work for which this is a pilot project. But, rather than either inflating this chapter intolerably or giving superficial treatment to several authors, I will, here and now, concentrate on one book, Reginald Fuller's *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, with some side comments on other works. I pick Fuller because his book is the richest in detail. He brings a greater variety of considerations to bear on the problems than any other important treatment with which I am familiar. Furthermore, he is an admirably clear writer. One can (usually) tell exactly what he is suggesting and just what his reasons are for the positions he takes.

It may be a useful propaedeutic to issue a few animadversions on some currently popular convictions and attitudes that are relevant to the issues I will be discussing.

First, the resurrection is not a 'historical' event because it is

‘eschatological’ and therefore comes at the ‘end of history’.²⁷² And because of the latter, it cannot strictly be dated, whether on the ‘third day’ or otherwise; it is not in time.²⁷³ I can recognize several senses in which the resurrection is eschatological: it involves transforming Jesus into a different sphere or mode of existence; it constitutes in some sense the realization of eschatological expectations; and so on. But in whatever sense it is eschatological, that sense had better be compatible with Jesus still existing and acting *in time*, doing things at particular times. Unless we are to dispense with appearances altogether, these took place at particular times on particular ‘datable’ days. Just to mention the most heavily documented one, Jesus appeared to Paul during a journey Paul was making on a particular day. Again, the resurrection itself—the transition of Jesus from death to new life—is not described in any of the canonical Gospels. But that is not because it is intrinsically undatable. If Jesus was dead on Good Friday afternoon and alive at some time later, there must have been some moment at which the transition took place.

Second, intimately related to this talk of the ‘transcendence of history’ is the view that there is no literal, straightforward way of describing the risen Lord and his appearances because he has transcended the categories of space and time. As a result, we are forced to use metaphorical, symbolic language, and we cannot form any clear notion of the subject-matter.²⁷⁴ But, in the first place, the claim of transcendence of space begs the question against the evangelists who report corporeal visible appearances. If one has succeeded in discrediting those reports, one may opt for a non-spatial mode of being for the Risen One, but it won't do to assume this *before* assessing the appearance accounts in Luke and John. And as for transcendence of time, the above remarks apply here as well.²⁷⁵

Third, historical research can take us only to the earliest records or earliest stage of tradition. It cannot tell us anything about what

²⁷² Reginald Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 22.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* 23.

²⁷⁴ See e.g. R. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), 73, 89, 92, 106, 125.

²⁷⁵ I, of course, do not deny that the resurrection and the risen Christ, like everything else, are often spoken of metaphorically. I only deny that they can only be spoken of metaphorically *because* of the lack of location in space or time. For that matter, if I were to go into this matter thoroughly, I would argue that we are not restricted to metaphor in speaking of what transcends space and time.

lies behind that, what ‘actually happened’, whether the earliest records were correct.²⁷⁶ The historian can discover only what certain persons believed about what happened to Jesus after his death, not what did happen to him.²⁷⁷ I can't see that there is much to be said for this. First, there is the question of whether the judgement is supposed to apply to history generally or only to those situations where there is a paucity of evidence.²⁷⁸ The former alternative, besides being absurd on the face of it, runs strongly counter to the practice of historians, who regularly purport to inform us as to what happened at particular times and places. Surely we know, by reasonable standards for knowledge, that Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, not just that many people at various times believed that he was. The weaker claim that where evidence is very scanty we can't check our sources well enough to draw solidly grounded conclusions as to what in fact happened is much more reasonable. But that leaves us with the question of whether we are in that situation with respect to this or that report in the Gospels. And that has to be determined by detailed investigation of the relevant details, not by sweeping statements as to what is in principle possible for historical research.

II

I now turn to the parts of Fuller's book that bear on my chosen theme. It will be useful to have before us at the outset a statement of his position. Fortunately Fuller provides a summary at the end of the book. It is too long to reproduce in full, but here is a summary of the summary:

At the earliest stage of the tradition the appearances were not *narrated*; rather, the resurrection was *proclaimed* in the language of Jewish apocalyptic. To this Paul added in 1 Corinthians 15: 3–8 a list of persons and groups to whom the risen Jesus had appeared, including, at the end of the list, himself. Since the appearance to Paul is the only one of which we have a first-hand report, since Paul considers it as the same general sort of thing

²⁷⁶ This view is so widespread as to need no specific documentation. For statements by two authors discussed in this paper see Fuller, *Formation of Resurrection Narratives*, 7, and Marxsen, *Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 115–17.

²⁷⁷ See e.g. Marxsen, *Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 119.

²⁷⁸ Marxsen, e.g. says things that make it sound like a generalized comment on the limits of history.

as the others, and since his was an experience of light and/or the hearing of a voice, rather than an encounter with a humanly embodied person, we can assume that the other appearances were of this same general sort. Paul says nothing of an empty tomb, but since he was thinking of the resurrection as a transformation of Jesus' body into a new mode of existence, this would be incompatible with that body decaying in the tomb. The empty tomb story goes back a long way in the tradition, and, though variously redacted in the Gospels, it presumably has a factually correct core.

The appearance narratives would seem to be a late development, expanding the Pauline list by attaching stories to them, and, in the process, 'materializing' the risen Jesus, endowing him with an abnormal but visible and tangible human body. There is no reason to accept these details as factually accurate, but we can see various significant features of the disciples' interactions with the risen One peeping through these narratives. Finally, there is no reason to suppose that the resurrection and the ascension were separated temporally, as Luke would have it. It fits the evidence better to suppose that the resurrection involved a direct translation of Jesus from the grave to an exalted and glorified existence, which he continues to enjoy to this day and for ever.²⁷⁹

Thus Fuller is a long way from those who would reject the objectivity and 'historicity' of the resurrection. He accepts and defends the conviction that Jesus was restored to life from the grave, that this is of fundamental importance to the Christian life and human destiny, and that Jesus thereby enjoyed the kind of exalted and transformed life that is expressed by saying 'He is sitting at the right hand of the Father'. On the other hand, he forthrightly rejects the picture presented by Luke and John of a visible, tangible, *humanly* (though atypically) *corporeal* risen Jesus. (And that rejection includes anything like literal speech of the Risen One to the disciples and apostles.) It is this rejection on which I wish to concentrate.²⁸⁰ I will look at what Fuller does to support the rejection of a corporeal resurrection and determine how strong that support is. Since his argument is long, complex, and multi-faceted, I will not be able to discuss everything, but will comment on what I take to be his most important points.

I will discuss three subdivisions of Fuller's overall argument: (1) the relation of the Pauline 'tradition' reported in 1 Corinthians 15 to the Gospel appearance narratives, (2) the idea that the post-resurrection

²⁷⁹ Summary of Fuller, *Formation of Resurrection Narratives*, 168–82.

²⁸⁰ A longer treatment would bring in the empty tomb stories as well, but I will have to forgo that here.

Jesus enjoyed an 'exalted' status from ground zero and hence was not even quasi-humanly embodied, and (3) the analysis of details of the Gospel narratives.

III

1 Corinthians 15: 3–8 may be taken as our earliest surviving testimony to the resurrection, assuming that it was written around 53–4.²⁸¹

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I in turn had received; that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with scriptures,⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.²⁸²

Fuller subjects this passage to minute analysis, entering into a variety of issues. Suffice it to say that he provides good reason for supposing that 3b–6a and 7 constitute very early tradition that Paul had received. What concern me are the implications Fuller draws from this passage, in the context of the rest of the Pauline material, for the assessment of the appearance narratives in the Gospels.

1. On Fuller's analysis of the Pauline texts concerning the resurrected state, particularly 1 Corinthians 15: 35–54, 2 Corinthians 5: 1–5, and Philippians 3: 21, Paul thought of the resurrection body as continuous with the body of this life, not a replacement, but also not just the same but rather the original body transformed into a new and more glorious mode of existence (pp. 17–22). Fuller, like many others, belabours the view that Jesus' resurrection was a mere 'resuscitation of a corpse', restoring it to the same kind of life it previously enjoyed, as in the raising of Lazarus.²⁸³ The bearing of

²⁸¹ In this essay I will accept the most commonly received dating of NT writings, which is assumed by Fuller, even though I do not consider the matter to be definitively settled with respect to the Gospels, and even though it is still a topic of lively controversy.

²⁸² Biblical quotations are from the RSV.

²⁸³ Davis, in his chapter in this volume, says that he has been unable to find any proponent of a pure resuscitation view. Since I have been similarly unsuccessful, I will join him in ignoring that issue.

this on the Gospel narratives depends on further details about this 'glorified, exalted body' and what implications this has for *corporeality*, *visibility*, and *tangibility*. I will go into that later.

2. Fuller wrests a great deal from the list of appearances. He takes the appearances to Cephas and the twelve as 'church founding appearances', the foundation of the 'eschatological community' (p. 35).²⁸⁴ The appearance to 500 brethren is construed as the 'first-fruits of the church-founding function of Peter and the twelve' (p. 36). Fuller then makes the not unreasonable assumption that the disciples fled back to Galilee after the crucifixion. He cites in this connection the message to the women at the empty tomb from the 'young man' in Mark 16: 7 (taken by Fuller to be the next oldest text after the Pauline epistles), 'But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.' On this basis Fuller takes these 'church founding' appearances to have occurred in Galilee, and the actual carrying out of the commission to begin after a return to Jerusalem. As for the appearances to James and all the 'apostles', Fuller picks up certain hints in Galatians and Acts concerning Paul's second visit to Jerusalem for the so-called apostolic conference, hints to the effect that James took the lead in launching wider missionary activities. Thus Fuller takes these appearances to be 'mission inaugurating' and to have occurred in Jerusalem.

Later we will see how Fuller uses these suppositions in his analysis of the Gospel accounts. My present point is that they rest on the slenderest of evidence. It is arbitrary in the extreme to derive conclusions as to the content and significance of these appearances from such indications as those just cited. If these hypotheses came into conflict with Gospel narratives, as they do with Luke and John placing the 'church founding' appearances in Jerusalem, that does not give us much reason to oppose the evangelists' testimony.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ One point he relies on here is the relation of 'twelve' (remember that according to the Gospels there were only eleven of the original twelve disciples available at this point) to the twelve tribes of Israel and words in Matt. 19: 28: 'You will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

²⁸⁵ Marxsen (*Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*) reads even more into the Pauline data. He advances the startling hypothesis that the resurrection faith (faith that Jesus is still alive and active) of all the disciples (and by extension of all Christians) stems from Peter's faith, which in turn, we are told, stemmed from an 'appearance' of the risen Jesus to Peter. (For Marxsen the faith of the early Church is the basic resurrection datum for the historian.) This leaves him free to take the following approach. Rather than try to find historically sound answers to questions about the other appearances Paul mentions (as Fuller and many other scholars do), he turns instead to the question of why all these people and groups were mentioned in this connection (p. 91). His answer is that the point of doing so is to drive home the point that the faith of all these persons and groups in the Church was based on the first appearance to Peter! (p. 92). He is careful to disavow any intention to deny that there were further appearances beyond that to Peter, though he takes it to be quite uncertain whether there were. But he holds that the intention of the formula we find in Paul 'is to trace back the later functions and the later faith of the church, as well as the later leadership of James to the one single root' (p. 95): viz. the appearance to Peter and his consequent faith. If we ask what evidence he has for this astounding thesis, it boils down to Luke's report that those returning from the Emmaus journey were told 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon' (24: 34). Marxsen takes this to indicate that the rest of the disciples believed that Jesus was alive just on the testimony of Peter without Jesus' having appeared to them. The only other reason he gives is that it is inconceivable that Peter did not tell the others of the initial appearance to him (p. 89), but then he has to appeal to Luke again for evidence that this was enough to lead them to faith. It seems extraordinary to me that Marxsen would base such a wild hypothesis on such slender evidence. He thinks that we can set aside the clear testimony of Paul (and his sources) that there were all these appearances, not to mention the Gospel accounts, on the basis of this tenuous argument. It is also paradoxical that the argument depends heavily on the account of Luke, although in other connections Marxsen gives scant credit to that account. (It is true that at one point in this very discussion he says: 'All we can say about Luke 24: 34 is that *according to Luke's Gospel itself* the disciples believed before Jesus had appeared to them. Whether this was actually the case we are not yet in a position to say.' But since he never gives any further reason for his hypothesis, without trusting Luke on this point, his argument that we can explain all the data on the basis of one appearance to Peter collapses.) Here is a historical scholar who is in the forefront of those who are leery in crediting the Gospel accounts with historical accuracy, uncritically taking one bit of testimony from such an account and using it to reject (or call into question) what is, by common consent, the most solid testimony we have of appearances of the risen Jesus. (I should add that this aspect of Marxsen's book is not typical of the whole, which contains much fascinating and much sound discussion.)

3. How did Paul understand 'appeared' in this passage? Was he thinking of it as an appearance in bodily form to the senses, as in Luke and John? And if not, then what? The Greek word here, *ophthe*, can have various meanings; but Fuller connects these occurrences with its use in the Septuagint to report divine revelatory manifestations, frequently involving verbal communication.

[T]he questions as to how they [the human recipients] see, whether with the physical eye or with the eye of the mind or the spirit, is left entirely undetermined and unemphasized. . . . What is seen and heard can only be described as 'revelation'. These are disclosures not of something which is visible or discernible within this world or age by ordinary sight or insight. . . . It is in such a context that we must place the *ophthe* of 1 Corinthians

15: 5–7 (cf. Luke 24: 34; Acts 13: 31, 9: 17; 26: 16). They designated not necessarily physical seeing . . . but a revelatory self-disclosure or disclosure by God of the eschatologically resurrected Christos. (pp. 30–1)

On this reading, as the last sentence indicates, *ophthe* does not rule out physical seeing, but it is not restricted to it. Fuller tries to be more definite by taking Paul's experience, as narrated by himself in Galatians and by Luke at three points in Acts, as a model for understanding the appearances generally. 'Here we have a first-hand statement by one who himself was a recipient of an appearance, deliberately placed by him in the series of appearances. What we know of Paul's appearances . . . can be applied . . . to the interpretation of the earlier appearances' (p. 43).²⁸⁶ This approach is rendered less straightforward than it would be otherwise by the differences in the accounts in Galatians and Acts. But Fuller, reasonably enough, suggests that 'All three accounts [in Acts], therefore agree that in the Damascus road encounter there was a visionary element and an auditory element, and that the inner meaning of the encounter was apprehended by Paul alone. It would be safe to infer that these three common elements are pre-Lukan, not redactional' (p. 46). He then proceeds to generalize to all the appearances:

Such appearances, we may conclude, involved visionary experiences of light, combined with a communication of meaning. They were not in their innermost essence incidents open to neutral observance or verification, but revelatory events in which the eschatological and christological significance of Jesus was disclosed, and in which the recipient was called to a particular function in salvation history. (p. 48)

If all the appearances were like Paul's Damascus Road experience in these respects, then the Gospel stories of encounters with a risen Jesus who possesses a visible and tangible quasi-human body are seriously misleading. But, in my judgement, Fuller's argument for this generalization of the Pauline pattern is extremely weak. Why suppose that Paul's putting his own experience in the same *list* as the others indicates that he took their experiences to be similar in

²⁸⁶ Peter Carnley (*The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 238–9) , along with various scholars, also asserts that Paul's placing the appearance to him in the same list with the others implies that the other appearances were very much like his. O'Collins (*Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1973)), on the other hand, dissents (p. 35), as does Davis in his chapter in this volume.

these respects to his?²⁸⁷ Why isn't it at least as reasonable to think that he was prepared to recognize that the appearances took a variety of forms?²⁸⁸ After all, his was much later. It would not be unreasonable for him to think it natural that corporeal appearances were limited to the immediate post-resurrection period, whereas at his late date the risen Christ would naturally appear in a different mode, since his situation was different. At least Fuller has given us no reason to prefer his supposition to that one.²⁸⁹

4. Finally, Fuller infers from the absence of any appearance narratives in Paul's report of the tradition, that there were no narratives current at that time. He makes a similar inference from the absence of such narratives in Mark (and in Matthew, assuming that Matthew pre-dates Luke and John). Speaking of the various attempts to account for the mysterious way in which Mark's Gospel breaks off (taking 16: 9–20 to be a later addition), Fuller writes:

All these hypotheses assume that Mark had appearance stories at his disposal. . . . It is this assumption that ought to be questioned . . . the earliest church did not narrate resurrection appearances, but proclaimed the resurrection. Paul adds to this proclamation a list of appearances. . . . But there is nothing to indicate at the time of the origin of these primitive formulae that appearances *stories* were actually in circulation. . . . (p. 66)

Since the earlier strata of the New Testament have no narratives of appearances, it does not seem necessary for Christian faith to believe in the literal veracity of any of these particular accounts [in Luke and John]. (p. 178)

This is a massive *argumentum ex silentio*. There are no resurrection narratives in Pauline letters. Therefore, there were no such narratives in circulation at that time. But why suppose that Paul includes everything that was currently in the Church tradition in his extant letters (or in all his letters for that matter)? The letters were written

²⁸⁷ There is also the question of whether Paul was correct in doing so. But since Paul was certainly in contact with some of the recipients of the appearances, and perhaps with most, he was in a position to know something about the matter.

²⁸⁸ Carnley, *Structure of Resurrection Belief*, 240–1, dismisses the idea that the appearances to the disciples and apostles might have taken quite different forms, but he gives no reason for this judgement.

²⁸⁹ Fuller might also say that Paul gives no indication that he takes the appearances to be of fundamentally different types. But he gives no indication of the contrary either. As I shall have repeated occasion to point out, the argument from silence is a very frail one, especially when applied to letters dealing with specific current problems. In that context Paul had no time to go into many questions that interest later historical scholars.

to address specific problems of the churches to which they were addressed. Admittedly this leads Paul into quite a bit of theological development, but it does not lead him into story-telling about *any* phase of Jesus' life, death, *or* post-resurrection doings. It is a familiar crux of New Testament study that Paul virtually never has anything to say about details of Jesus' life and ministry, the most notable exception being the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11: 23–5). Are we to infer from this that there were no stories of Jesus' life, ministry, and passion in circulation at the time? Why, then, single out appearance narratives for special treatment? The absence of such narrations in the Pauline letters is easily explained on other grounds. Paul was writing to people who presumably were well acquainted with such stories about Jesus as were in circulation. Why should he weigh down his letters by repeating all this, especially since his purpose was to respond to particular problems faced by his addressees. We can infer nothing about the presence or absence of appearance narratives in the earliest tradition from their absence in the Pauline corpus.²⁹⁰

Mark is a different matter. We can hardly claim that Mark was not in the business of narration! Therefore, it is not wholly unreasonable for Fuller to take the lack of appearance narratives there to indicate their unavailability. But still the matter is hardly clear. I find it extremely difficult to believe that the author intended to end his Gospel at 16: 8. In my view, this is no way to end a story. The young man in the empty tomb enjoins the women to tell his disciples that he is going before them to Galilee where they will see him. But they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. That's it! If we came across a secular story from, say, the Middle Ages, our oldest manuscripts of which ended like that, we would feel sure that the ending had been lost somehow or that the author had died before finishing it, like Puccini with *Turandot*, or for some reason had abandoned it or been prevented from finishing it. In addition,

²⁹⁰ It is interesting to elaborate imaginary analogues of this line of argument. Suppose that some future historian is interested in the doings of the Marquis de Sade. He has various accounts, the earliest of which date from forty years after Sade's death. He also has ten letters of a French nobleman from the early nineteenth century, letters that make no mention of Sade. Can he infer from this that no stories of Sade's notorious doings were current in the nineteenth century? That would be a most precarious inference unless we can assume that whenever anyone wrote a letter (or at least ten letters), it would be likely that he or she would mention Sade if Sade were known to him or her.

the last sentence ends with the conjunction *gar* ('for'), and as I understand from Fuller (p. 65), there is no other example of a book ending with 'gar'. There are various ingenious attempts to explain why Mark would deliberately end the book this way, such as Perrin's suggestion that Mark was simply continuing this theme of the utter failure of the disciples to keep the faith!²⁹¹ But it seems clear to me that the most reasonable hypothesis is that either Mark was prevented from finishing the book or that the end has been lost. In any event, the attractiveness of that explanation prevents us from taking the absence of appearance narratives to show that none were in the tradition at that time.

A similar point is to be made about Fuller's treatment of the final scene in Matthew, which he denies is an 'appearance narrative'.

Nothing is said of the form in which the Lord appeared, nothing is said of his disappearance in the end. There are no *theios aner* (divine man) traits. The scene is an artificial theologoumenon, constructed on the basis of the primitive statement that the disciples 'saw' the Lord. Matthew has no *narrative* of this appearance at his disposal, presumably because at this time no such narrative existed. (p. 91)

True it's not much of a narrative. It's not a strong candidate for a Pulitzer prize. But it certainly goes significantly beyond just saying 'he appeared to them'. They worshiped him, but some doubted. We are told what the physical setting was (a mountain in Galilee) and what Jesus said to them. But even if it isn't a full-fledged narrative, once again we cannot infer from this that no such narratives were available. Why suppose that each evangelist made use of everything available to him? If, as is usually supposed, Matthew and Luke made use of Mark, they didn't use everything that was available to them from that source. Why suppose they made use of everything available to them from other sources?

IV

A second component of Fuller's argument involves the claim that there is an incompatibility between the resurrected Jesus' 'exalted',

²⁹¹ N. Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 30–1.

‘glorified’, ‘transcendent’, ‘eschatological’, or ‘heavenly’ status, and his appearances in bodily form. Here is a summary statement:

Actual narratives of the appearances are found only in the later Gospel strata. They are just beginning in Matthew and one is found in a still somewhat early form in John 20: 15 ff. The appearances on the mountain in Galilee in Matthew 28 and by the lakeside in John 21 still depict a revelation of One risen and exalted into a transcendental mode for existence. . . . In the latest strata, Luke 24 and John 20, the narratives had developed from revelatory encounters with the transcendent Risen One into appearances of the Risen One in the early form of a divine man. At this stage, traits of the more supernaturalized presentations of the earthly Jesus in the later Hellenized Gospel tradition are transferred to the resurrection narratives. . . . But something of the earlier sense that the Risen One appears as a transcendent being still remains.

In the light of this history of the tradition, what is essential for Christian faith in the resurrection to believe today? . . . The Christian cannot be required to believe that the Risen One literally walked on earth in an earthly form as in the Emmaus story, or that he physically ate fish as in the Lukan appearance to the disciples at Jerusalem, or that he invited physical touch as in the Thomas story. There are two reasons why this should be so. First, not only do the earlier accounts know nothing of these features, but the resurrection faith of the earliest community, conceived in apocalyptic terms as a transformation into an entirely new (eschatological) mode of existence, directly contradicts it. Second, the Evangelists are here taking up popular stories, forged in the milieu of the ‘divine man’ concept, and using them for purposes of their own. What the believer must listen to is therefore the purpose and intention of the Evangelists in using these stories. They used them not simply to relate past events (though they doubtless assumed that the reports were historically correct), but in order to assert, e.g. the identity-in-transformation between the earthly and the Risen Jesus. (pp. 171–3)

Leaving aside questions as to what Christians are required to believe, the argument here goes as follows:

- (1) The earliest community construed the resurrection in terms of a transformation into a transcendent, eschatological mode of existence.
- (2) The appearance narratives in Luke and John, in terms of a risen Jesus in human form, contradict this.
- (3) We can explain these later versions in ways that give these features of them no historical value.

I will deal with the third point in the next section when I look at aspects of Fuller's detailed treatment of these narratives. I have no

wish to dispute the first. So my criticism will be directed to the second.²⁹²

In order to discuss the question of incompatibility, we must be more specific both as to what an 'exalted' or 'heavenly' mode of existence involves, and as to how to understand the Lucan and Johannine 'bodily' representations of the risen Jesus.

As for the former, the first thing to note is that these concepts of exaltation and glorification will differ depending on the Christology (and theology) of the user. They will mean something different to John with his pre-existent Logos Christology than to those with a more adoptionist outlook. But that is a large subject, and I will try to say something useful without getting into it. New Testament writers would seem to take at least the following as marks of exaltation: (a) Divine authority (whether derived or inherent). Thus Fuller writes that since Jesus says in the final scene of Matthew that all authority has been given to him, he is speaking as the Exalted One. The same point is involved in John's report that he endowed the disciples with the Holy Spirit by breathing on them (20: 22) and that he authorized them to forgive sins (20: 23). And the evangelical commission reported by Luke (24: 47) could be construed as presupposing such an authority. (b) A presence that seems transcendent, numinous, or full of mystery. This is evidenced by the

²⁹² Fuller's assumption of this incompatibility comes out clearly in his treatment of the final scene in Matthew. He says that Jesus' speech in the final scene 'is here placed in the mouth of the Exalted One, not of the earthly Jesus' (p. 90). It is certainly reasonable to say that Jesus appears as the 'Exalted One', since he says 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'. But what about the contrast with 'the earthly Jesus'? The saying is not represented as coming from the pre-crucifixion Jesus, if that is what is meant by the 'earthly Jesus'. But, clearly, what Fuller intends by that phrase is a 'corporeal' Jesus. And it is not clear that Matthew didn't intend this. We are properly cautioned not to read Matthew here in the light of the appearance narratives of Luke and John, where the Risen One is clearly represented as embodied in a human way. But, sticking to the Matthean text, why suppose that Matthew means to represent Jesus as incorporeal? I would say that the passage is non-committal on this, and can be interpreted either way. I can only conclude that Fuller reads the appearance as incorporeal because of his assumption that a corporeal appearance would be incompatible with exaltation. For other allegations of such an incompatibility see PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 20–1 and elsewhere; CARNLEY, *Structure of Resurrection Belief*, 72–81; O'COLLINS, *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 83–4. Brown, on the other hand, points out that one could hold that there was 'a corporeal resurrection in which the risen body is transformed to the eschatological sphere' (*Virginal Conception*, 85). See also Stephen Davis's chapter in this volume, pp. 132–4, 139–40, 141–4.

reactions of awe, fear, and trembling that his presence evokes (Luke 24: 37; Matt. 28: 10, John 21: 12). This feature is particularly evident in the appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road.

Before continuing with the discussion of the incompatibility thesis, point 2 above, let me say a bit about my indisposition to quarrel with point 1. The marks of exalted status I have just sketched are clearly present in the Gospel pictures of the immediate post-resurrection Jesus. I don't see that anything in Fuller's book shows that the very earliest tradition thinks of the resurrection in this way; but there are indications of this that other writers mention. There are various passages, some of them with a presumably early provenance, that speak of an exaltation or glorification of Jesus. Here is one from Paul's letter to the Philippians, a passage usually supposed to be from an early Christian hymn.

[H]e humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (2: 8–11)

Another supposed hymn fragment comes from 1 Timothy 3: 16:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.²⁹³

This is, indeed, evidence for an early construal of resurrection in terms of heavenly exaltation. But these passages have also been used to support Fuller's claim that a conception of bodily resurrection was absent in the earliest tradition. And here the argument creaks. Let us suppose that the quoted bits from Philippians and 1 Timothy are indeed fragments of early Christian hymns. Then the argument is that the fact that these passages make no mention of a bodily appearance of the risen Jesus indicates that the earliest tradition contained no such belief. But this is another extremely shaky

²⁹³ Marxsen mentions these passages (*Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 144–7), though for a different purpose—to show that in the NT 'being risen' is not the only way to 'express' the faith that Jesus is still alive and active.

argumentum ex silentio. For one thing, we should not forget that we have, at most, only a bit of each hymn. But even if we had the whole of both of them, why should we suppose that the author(s) included in their hymns everything that was currently believed about Jesus' post-resurrection career? It is hardly common practice for hymn writers to 'tell all'. The Christmas hymn, 'Of the Father's Love Begotten' says nothing of Bethlehem, or the manger, or the shepherds. Can we infer from this that the author, Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, had never heard of these things, that he had never read the Gospel of Luke? And so it is with hymns generally.

To return to the main line of the argument, how should we understand the appearances' 'incorporated form' in the Gospels of Luke and John. In both Gospels Jesus makes a point of insisting that he is not a 'spirit', that he 'has hands and feet', 'flesh and bones' (Luke 24: 39–40). He eats fish before them (Luke 24: 42).²⁹⁴ John 20 has him show the disciples his hands and his side and, in the second appearance, he invites Thomas to put his hand in his (Jesus') side. Clearly the corporeality is not represented as an optical (and tangible) illusion, an hallucination that Jesus produces to reassure the disciples. The body is represented as *his* body. Luke has him say 'See my hands and my feet, that *it is I myself*' (24: 39; my emphasis). So as Luke and John represent the matter, Jesus *at that stage* exists in a humanly embodied form. To be sure, this is no ordinary human body. He mysteriously disappears from sight after the meal with the travellers to Emmaus (Luke 24: 31). He appears out of thin air (Luke 24: 36) as well as disappearing into it (Luke 24: 31). He suddenly appears among them in a locked room (John 20: 19). Even at this stage, on these accounts, his body has at least been transformed in certain respects.

With this background I am ready to tackle Fuller's claim of incompatibility. Why should we suppose that an exalted, heavenly Jesus would not (could not?) appear to his disciples in corporeal form? Luke and John obviously don't think so, since, as I have already pointed out, they both, and especially John, combine an emphasis on corporeality with an emphasis on divine authority and numinosity. Indeed, these features of exaltation are also present in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry when he is obviously

²⁹⁴ Although in John 21 he is not explicitly reported as eating, the impression is that he ate breakfast with the disciples.

embodied.²⁹⁵ For example, Jesus is not infrequently depicted as presuming to forgive sins; the reaction to this clearly shows that it is taken by some of his auditors to involve a claim to exalted status. The Gospel of John is loaded with claims to speak the words of the Father, to be in or with the Father, to have come from the Father, and so on.²⁹⁶ But, leaving aside the way the evangelists think about the matter, let us consider the question on its own merits and decide what we should think about the relationship. Is an exalted status compatible with being (at least temporarily²⁹⁷) embodied in the ways Luke and John depict. Well, why not? What is there about exaltation that rules this out? No doubt, it seems more congenial to think of divine authority and transcendence as attaching to a being that is not even *pro tem* in such a lowly form as a quasi-human body. To think otherwise would seem to accord too much dignity to ourselves. At least, that is the way it seems if we do not take the doctrine of the incarnation seriously. But if we do take it seriously, that entails a radical revision of our thought on these matters. It is a major theme of the incarnation that, strange as it may seem, it is *not* incompatible with the highest possible divine status to take on embodied human form. Indeed, it is a familiar theme of Christian theology (more familiar in the East than in the West) that God greatly raised humanity in status (exalted it? glorified it?) by deigning to become a human being in all respects except sin. 'For he was made man that we might be made God' (Athanasius).²⁹⁸ Statements like this presuppose a continuing influence of God on us that we might realize this possibility. That influence is provided by the Holy Spirit. Aquinas speaks of the 'light of grace' as 'a participation in the divine nature'.²⁹⁹ Or, as 2 Peter has it, 'His divine power has

²⁹⁵ Fuller would reject this consideration since, as we have already seen, he takes features of the Gospel accounts of the pre-crucifixion ministry that are similar to the post-resurrection appearances in Luke and John to themselves stem from the 'later Hellenized Gospel tradition', and hence to have no historical value as accounts of the pre-crucifixion period.

²⁹⁶ To be sure, as far as John is concerned, the scholarly consensus is that much of this is read into the record by the evangelist, rather than being a historically faithful portrait of the earthly ministry of Jesus. But my present point is only that Luke and John do not take a heavenly authority and status to be incompatible with human embodiment.

²⁹⁷ If Jesus was quasi-humanly embodied immediately after the resurrection, must we suppose that he continues in this state through all succeeding time (or in eternity)? I will have a bit to say about that question in a moment.

²⁹⁸ *De Incarnatione*, 54, NPNF, 2nd ser., 4, 65.

²⁹⁹ *ST* 1a. 2ae. 110. 3.

granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his previous and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature' (1: 3–4). Another expression of this is the notion of being 'born again', which is often understood not merely as adoption by God, but as an actual sharing in the divine nature. As Aquinas wrote, 'Adoptive sonship is really a shared likeness of the eternal sonship of the Word.'³⁰⁰ Though this quasi-divinization of human nature through the incarnation is a not unfamiliar theme in Christian theology, New Testament scholars seem to forget it when they assume that it would be unworthy, unfitting, or otherwise inappropriate for an exalted Jesus to appear to his disciples in human form.

Here is another perspective on this matter from Christian theology. The corporeality of the risen Christ is not confined to the immediate post-resurrection encounters with the disciples. From St Paul on, the Church, the community of believers, has been construed as the 'body of Christ'. And, at least according to Catholic Christianity, Christ has been thought of as corporeally present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist. If it is not incompatible with divine dignity and status to encounter us in these corporeal forms, how could that charge be levelled against an exalted Jesus encountering his disciples in something like the form in which he existed during his earthly ministry? Thus it would seem that those who consider the exalted and glorified status of the risen Lord to rule out encountering the disciples in a partially human bodily form are seriously off base, for theological reasons.

To be sure, there are theological problems with a quasi-human embodiment of the risen Jesus. In particular, what happens to this body in the ensuing heavenly rule of Jesus at the right hand of God? Both evangelists leave this 'up in the air', John figuratively and Luke literally—well, perhaps not quite literally, but Luke does represent Jesus as being lifted up into a cloud (Acts 1: 9). I think we have to say that there is no satisfactory answer to this question in the New Testament.³⁰¹ But this is only one of the numerous loose

³⁰⁰ *ST* 3a. 3. 8.

³⁰¹ To be sure, this problem disappears if we take the embodiment to be an illusion perpetrated by Jesus for the sake of a more personal encounter with the disciples. He really existed in some way, but he made it appear, for the moment, that he was in a quasi-humanly embodied form. But, in addition to flirting with Docetism, this suggestion would involve rejecting the Lucan and Johannine accounts as drastically as Fuller does. For these evangelists represent Jesus as bending over backwards to insist that his corporeality is genuine.

ends left by biblical accounts. We cannot toss out everything that doesn't answer all the questions we would like answered.

V

The third prong of Fuller's argument involves an attempt to discredit Luke's and John's accounts more directly by an analysis of them. The analysis is quite detailed, proceeding line by line for the most part. I cannot discuss all of this here. I will concentrate on those portions that are especially important for the question of the corporeality of the risen Jesus, devoting most attention to Luke. But first let me stress that I do not by any means reject all of Fuller's treatment. At many points he is, in my judgement, clearly in the right. Here are some examples.

Fuller, like many other scholars, points out differences between the Gospel accounts that make a coherent harmonization impossible. Sticking to the appearances, and in addition to points of fine detail, there are the following important discrepancies.

1. *Location*. Matthew, after a brief encounter of Jesus with the women, sets the major appearance and commission to mission on a mountain in Galilee. Luke, on the other hand, locates all the appearances in and around Jerusalem. John includes both Jerusalem and Galilean appearances. The difficulty is not that it would be impossible, or even unlikely, that Jesus should appear to disciples in both regions.³⁰² The serious problem is dual. (a) What looks to all the world like different versions of the same appearance is located in different places. Thus, whereas Matthew has Jesus giving his evangelistic commission to the disciples in Galilee, both John and Luke locate it in Jerusalem. (b) Though Luke does not say explicitly, 'There were no appearances outside the Jerusalem area', he narrates several there, all on Easter day and evening, and then, at least in his Gospel, has Jesus departing from the disciples that evening.

³⁰² In Fuller's filling out of Paul's list of appearances he locates some in Galilee and some in Jerusalem.

2. *Time*. As just indicated, Luke compresses the appearances into one 24-hour day.³⁰³ While neither Matthew nor John give such precise timing, the impression is that the appearances are spread out over more than a day. In both cases the disciples would have had to make their way from Jerusalem to Galilee between appearances.

3. *The Holy Spirit*. John has Jesus bestow the Spirit on the disciples on Easter evening, whereas Luke has Jesus tell them, just before the ascension, to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the promised Holy Spirit—looking forward to Pentecost. I agree that we cannot suppose all these accounts to be completely accurate as they stand.

While in this irenic mood, I should also mention that Fuller is far from rejecting the Gospel appearance narratives *in toto*. On the contrary, he takes them to be *versions* of genuine appearances the memory of which was preserved in the tradition, but shaped and modified in various ways by the evangelists and/or their sources, ways that prevent them from being literally accurate in all their details. Thus the final scene of Matthew, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit and the commission to the disciples on Easter evening in John, and the similar Easter evening scene in Luke (without the bestowal of the Holy Spirit) he takes to be different versions of the appearance to ‘the twelve’ recorded by Paul. And the appearance in the last chapter of John he takes to be a (much altered and elaborated) version of the initial appearance to Peter. More specifically:

The Johannine resurrection appearance to the disciples at Jerusalem is unique in associating the Christophany with the gift of the Spirit. It may well be that John has here preserved an authentic insight from earlier tradition. (p. 174)
Turning now to the appearance narratives of the intermediate stratum we find several themes in the verbalizations of Matthew 28: 18–20. First, there is an emphasis on the authority of the Risen One (v. 8). This theme has been prominent in the Easter faith almost from the beginning. (p. 77).

We come now to the *Pasce oves* scene (John 21: 15–19). This appears to be an attempt to express in narrative form the theological significance of the appearance to Peter as it occurs in the primitive lists. (p. 177)

And so on.

Enough of this reconciliation. I now turn to features of Fuller's analysis of the narratives that he takes to discredit their depiction

³⁰³ Though at the beginning of Acts he says that they continued for forty days!

of the risen Jesus as embodied in (more or less) human form. First, Fuller argues that all narratives of appearances are late.

The Christophany of Matthew 28: 11–17 is the first instance we have of a materialization of the appearances. This materialization seems to originate here, not from any anti-Docetic motive such as we find in the later tradition (see especially Luke 24: 13), but from the exigencies of narrations. So long as the appearances were merely listed (1 Cor. 15: 5 f.; Mark 16: 7), their spiritual character could be preserved intact. But they could be narrated as external events only by modelling them on the stories of encounters with Jesus during his earthly ministry. It is particularly significant that it is precisely those later traits in the narrative tradition of the earthly Jesus' ministry which represent him as a 'divine man' (*theios aner*) that are taken into the resurrection narratives. Thus the women 'touch' his feet (cf. Mark 5: 22) and they 'worship' him (cf. Mark 5: 6). This is the strongest argument against the primitive character of the appearance *narratives*. (p. 79)

What Fuller is presumably referring to as 'the strongest argument' is the similarity of the appearance narratives to certain stories in the Gospels which he and other scholars assign to the Hellenistic phase of the development of the tradition. As such, neither the pre-crucifixion stories in question nor their post-crucifixion analogues can lay claim to a historical basis, at least in their 'divine man' features. But I find this argument extremely weak; if it really is Fuller's ace card, he is in big trouble. I am unable here to go into the question of whether the alleged pre-crucifixion models really did originate in the Hellenistic phase of the tradition and hence cannot represent memories of specific incidents in the ministry of Jesus;³⁰⁴ but even if Fuller is right about that, the mere fact of similarity is not much of a reason for thinking that the appearance stories were deliberately composed on the model of such Hellenistic material. Why shouldn't the risen Jesus act and speak in ways that bear some similarity to Hellenistic portrayals of him in his earthly ministry? Or, to put this in terms of the tradition, why shouldn't there have been very early,

³⁰⁴ See also Fuller, *Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 106: 'There are grounds for thinking that Luke drew his special material from Syrian tradition. . . . It was here, in circles which loved to tell stories and operated with a *theios aner* (divine man) interpretation of the earthly Jesus, that the late resurrection narratives may well have originated. In them the Risen One is portrayed on the one hand precisely [sic] as if he were still the earthly Jesus: he walks with his disciples, he accepts an invitation to supper in their home, and he breaks the bread before them as he had done during his earthly ministry. All these data are reproduced from the tradition of the earthly Jesus in the Gospels.'

fact-based traditions of such encounters with the Risen One that exhibit these similarities. It is only if we have some other reason for denying that early provenance that we are forced to look around for some other source for the stories, in which case Fuller's hypothesis would gain some credibility. And, as we have seen, Fuller is thinking in terms of such reasons. This passage makes it explicit that he supposes the early tradition contained only *lists* of appearances and construed them in 'spiritual' terms. But we have also seen the weakness of his arguments for this, arguments which suppose that the absence of narratives and references to corporeality in the Pauline letters and Mark are a strong indication that there was no such material early on. I have already said what I have to say about that reasoning.

The same point is to be made of his claim that the Emmaus story (and presumably he would say the same of the other narratives in Luke and John) 'looks like the product of story-telling proclivities of the community' (p. 106). It is only if we can dismiss an early, fact-based provenance on other grounds that we are warranted in appealing to a hypothetical 'story-telling proclivity'.

Another general feature of Fuller's treatment of these narratives is that he more than once charges them with conflating or mixing up the different appearances listed by Paul. This stems from what I noted earlier to be a speculative hypothesis that the appearances to Peter and 'the twelve' were 'church founding' in nature and located in Galilee, whereas the appearances to James and 'all the apostles' were 'mission inaugurating' and located in Jerusalem. With this background, Fuller takes both Luke and John, in their accounts of the missionary charges to the disciples, to have misaddressed them to the disciples rather than to 'all the apostles' (pp. 117, 139). But given the tenuous character of Fuller's argument for his interpretation of Paul's list of appearances, I am inclined to repose at least as much trust in the evangelists to get these matters straight. After all, for all Fuller has to tell us, it may be that they were working with traditions that stemmed from the original disciples.

I now turn to other points Fuller makes about the narratives in Luke. The Emmaus story, because of its careful 'literary' form, is a favourite hunting-ground for discerners of different strata of tradition, redactional contributions, interpolations, and tensions between different components. I find even the best historical critics to have much too low a threshold for conflict in Gospel accounts,

and too great a readiness to attribute 'contradiction'. These tendencies are not lacking in Fuller's discussion of the Emmaus story. Thus he says that the flashback to the primary appearance to Simon after the main characters have returned to the eleven in Jerusalem 'stands in contradiction to the Emmaus story, which seems to regard the appearance to Cleopas and his companion as the first of the appearances, for the earlier flashback [the two travellers relating to Jesus the discovery of the empty tomb] contains no reference to appearances' (p. 105). But that earlier flashback contained no reference to appearances because, according to the story, Cleopas and his companion only learned of the appearance to Simon *after* returning to Jerusalem. Hence there is no contradiction. Again, Fuller judges that "19a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and now our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him' are 'performed kerygmatic materials inserted by the Evangelist into his narrative source' (p. 105). But why shouldn't such characters as Cleopas and his companion in that sort of situation say something like this? And hence, why shouldn't the earliest source of the story contain something like this? A similarity to kerygmatic speeches in Acts shows, at most, that these were common themes in the early Christian community. Finally, consider verses 25–7: "25And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.' Fuller says that they 'are typical expressions of Lukan theology' (p. 106). This is undoubtedly *some* basis for ascribing them to Lukan redaction, but it still amounts to no more than a live possibility. Further reasons would have to be given for regarding this as more likely than the supposition that the risen Jesus said something of the sort to some followers. Indeed, we would also have to exclude the possibility that Luke incorporated these ideas into his theology because of his acquaintance with (possibly reliable) traditions as to what Jesus said here and elsewhere. This, of course, gets us into the whole question of what can be attributed to Jesus by way of views on Old Testament prophecy of his status and career, something I cannot deal with here. My present point is only that highlighting the similarity to Lukan convictions is not enough to support the attribution to redaction.

Here is Fuller's summary statement of his dissection of the Emmaus story:

It may contain a basic nucleus of historical fact, if it can be identified with one of the appearances included among the appearances 'to all the apostles' and especially if the name Cleopas warrants some connection with James. A primitive *statement* of such an appearance, if it is historical, was later thrown into the form of a *narrative* with the kind of legendary elements one might expect in such an environment as Syria—still fairly Semitic in outlook, but with overtones of the *theios aner* (divine man) Christology. This stage contributes such elements as: Jesus as the Risen One traveling as an earthly figure yet mysteriously incognito, the earthly form of the conversation, the meal (though, as we have seen, this may belong to earlier and perhaps even historical tradition), the recognition. . . .

Lastly, there comes the Lukan redaction. Drawing upon other traditional materials (the synoptic predictions, Palestinian and Hellenistic forms of the Christological kerygma, the primitive motif of the resurrection 'in accordance with the scriptures') and adding the corrective reference to the first appearance to Peter, Luke refabricates this story. (p. 113)

Well, it may be so. But, as we have seen with certain points, Fuller falls far short of showing that it must be so, or even that it is more likely to have this history than any of innumerable others. In particular, he has failed to rule out the possibility that all the main elements of the story derive from early memories of an incident that, in fact, involved many of those elements.

Turning to the appearance to the eleven on Easter evening (Luke 24: 36–49), after relating it to the Pauline appearances to the twelve and to 'all the apostles', Fuller has this to say:

But the character of this appearance has received a highly apologetic coloring not merely absent from 1 Corinthians 15: 5, but quite contrary to it. The motif of doubt . . . has been redirected to provide the occasion for a massively physical demonstration. The Risen One invites his disciples to touch him so that they can see for themselves that he is not a 'spirit' or 'ghost', but a figure of flesh and blood. This new interpretation of the mode of the resurrection (resuscitation of the earthly body) is quite contrary to the apocalyptic framework of the earliest kerygma of 1 Corinthians 15: 5, to Paul's concept of the *pneumatikon soma* . . . and to the presentation in Mark 16: 1–8 and in Matthew 28: 16–20. But it was made inevitable by the development of appearance narratives. . . . For appearances could be narrated only by borrowing the traits of the earthly Jesus—he must walk, talk, eat, etc., as he had done in his earthly life. These features . . . are now drawn out and emphasized in the interests of apologetic. (p. 115)

Here we find some familiar themes—attributing a spiritual conception of resurrection to Paul and the earliest tradition, identifying a bodily resurrection with mere ‘resuscitation’, the incompatibility of exaltation and bodily appearance, and the explanation of ‘materialization’ as needed for narrative. The new element is the suggestion that the insistence on corporeality is introduced also for apologetic reasons, directed to those who would reject a resurrection of the body.³⁰⁵ This is a special case of another favourite device of Gospel critics—taking any feature of a speech or narrative that is in line with interests, needs, or convictions of the early Church to have been inserted by the early Church, and hence not to be an accurate account of the deeds or words of Jesus. This is one more instance of the ‘it could have happened this way, and so it did’ principle. Some scholars not only argue in this way, but erect it into a principle. Here, for example, is Perrin setting out what he calls the ‘criterion of dissimilarity’, which he says to be the ‘fundamental criterion for authenticity upon which all reconstructions of the teaching of Jesus must be built’.³⁰⁶ ‘[T]he earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church’ (p. 39).

Perrin credits Bultmann with originating this criterion: ‘We can count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus, and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features’ (p. 205).³⁰⁷

We can see the untenability of this methodology if we consider how it might be applied by some historian of the far distant future to the alleged utterances of Martin Luther King, jun. The historian would reject as inauthentic everything King allegedly said that was in accordance either with the civil rights movement of his time or with the movement as it developed after his death. In doing so, he would not be left with much, and he would be rejecting an enormous

³⁰⁵ A similar suggestion is found in many authors, including Perkins, *Resurrection*, 87; Perrin, *Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 67; Carnley, *Structure of Resurrection Belief*, 67–8.

³⁰⁶ Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 39.

³⁰⁷ In the section of his book from which the above formulation is taken, Perrin refers to formulations and uses of the criterion by Jeremias, Käsemann, and Conzelmann.

mass of discourse actually produced by King. Of course, some of the Gospel material deemed unhistorical on this basis may well have been inserted in the early church period. But it is going far beyond reasonable procedure to suppose that the mere parallel of the material with early Church interests and convictions is sufficient to show that this was its provenance.

Though my main concern has been to combat Fuller's arguments against the supposition that the risen Jesus appeared in a (more or less) human bodily form, I will also say a word about his dismissal of some of what the risen Jesus is alleged to have said to the disciples. In opposing certain of Fuller's claims about this, I have no wish to maintain that the Gospels give us verbatim transcriptions of Jesus' words in these appearances, any more than they do in their accounts of his ministry. At best, we have a faithful summary of the content of what he said. And it is Fuller's rejection of that at certain points to which I shall take exception. We must also remember that one's attitude toward the accounts of corporeal appearances affect this issue. If one takes seriously a bodily appearance, one can think in terms of speech in a much more literal sense than if one does not. Nevertheless, the issue of how close the accounts come to a faithful reflection of the message Jesus was conveying, however that was done, arises in both perspectives.

Here I will confine myself almost entirely to Fuller's treatment of Jesus' 'great commission' in the final scene of Matthew. Some of his negative points are well taken. We cannot suppose that Jesus gave, as this point, a command to 'make disciples of all nations'. If he had, the mission to the Gentiles would not have been such a problem for the Jerusalem Church (p. 84). Nor does what we know about baptism in the early Church allow us to suppose that the risen Lord enjoined the Trinitarian formula for baptism (pp. 86–8). However, I can't go as far as Fuller in taking the speech to be a rewrite. We find the 'attribute to redaction wherever possible' principle at work when he ascribes the command to 'teach them to observe all that I have commanded you' to Matthew's view of Gospel as the new Torah and his associated special interest in teaching the rules (pp. 88–9). Fuller rightly observes in this connection that a commission to teach is found only in Matthew. But there are other possible explanations of this. It is a familiar point that accounts of many incidents differ among the Gospels, and not all of

these are plausibly attributed to theologically motivated redaction. Surely they are sometimes due to the facts that (a) witnesses don't always see and report things the same way, and (b) details get altered in the course of transmission without anyone deliberately doing this. Thus, so far as I can see, it is at least as likely that Jesus did issue such a commission, which was preserved in one tradition but omitted in others. Again, Fuller opines that the combination of the three sayings in the scene—the declaration of authority, the missionary charge, and the promise of the abiding presence—was due to Matthew, on the grounds of the large number of Mattheanisms that the verses contain (pp. 90–1). But this could just as well be due to Matthew's way of formulating a combination he found in the tradition.

Finally, the 'I am with you always, to the close of the age' Fuller takes to be, in its original form, 'a creation of Christian prophecy, circulated as a logion of the Exalted Christ, declaring the presence of the Exalted One in the assemblies of the faithful' (p. 90). He ascribes the 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' of John 20: 23 to a similar source (p. 141). But this would seem to be another 'it could be that way, so it is that way' inference.

VI

Let me review what I have said and have not set out to do in this essay. Though my topic is the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts of resurrection appearances, and although I am, in a way, defending a positive attitude, I have not even sought to establish *some* degree of accuracy of these accounts. Instead, I have examined a representative attempt by a New Testament scholar, Reginald Fuller, to show, or at least show it to be very likely, that for the most part these accounts have very little historical value; and I have contended that his arguments for that conclusion are very weak. To be sure, the conflict between Fuller and myself is less stark than it might have been because each side is far from being as radical as possible. Fuller, as I noted, does not deny that the accounts contain at least germs of historical truth. I, for my part, do not deny that they cannot be taken as accurate in every detail. Hence, to

sharpen the issue, I focused on a question on which Fuller and I are in flat disagreement, whether Gospel portrayals of the risen Jesus as existing in a (more or less) human body can be shown to be without historical value. I examined several aspects of Fuller's defence of an affirmative answer to this question and argued, in each case, that the considerations he adduces are much too weak to support his conclusions. Even though I have not attempted to mount an argument *for* the thesis that Jesus did in fact appear after his death and burial in this form, I believe that my critique of Fuller does have an important bearing on what it is reasonable to believe about this matter. For, as I suppose, the fact that the Church proclaims a message that includes such appearances is, for the Christian at least, a prima-facie reason to suppose that such appearances did occur. Hence, if one can knock down attempts to show that they did not occur (or that it is not reasonable to suppose that they did), that will, for the Christian, leave Church doctrine on this point in possession of the field.

Let me emphasize once again the modesty of my claims. I do not assert that the accounts of Matthew, Luke, and John are accurate in every respect. Indeed, I have agreed that they cannot be correct in every detail. My claim is only that it is reasonable for a Christian to believe that there were appearances to the disciples that were of the general character reported by the evangelists. I have left it pretty much open just how much of the Gospel accounts it is reasonable to accept, except for saying that we cannot accept all the placing and dating they give us, and that we can accept that Jesus appeared to them in human bodily form. Of course, what I have actually argued for here is much less than a full claim formulated two sentences back about what it is reasonable for a Christian to believe. I have supported only one aspect of that claim: namely, that New Testament criticism has not shown that it is not reasonable to believe this. (And even there my argument supports this only on the assumption that the arguments against Fuller can be generalized to other critics who draw similar conclusions.) To fully support the claim, I would have to move on to the positive side of the coin, indicate what grounds there are for accepting the accounts (for the most part), and show that they are sufficient for rational acceptance. Other than just suggesting that Church proclamation provides some basis, I have not attempted that here. It is a major task in itself. So what I claim to have done here is to have shown that

one representative attempt to discredit belief in a humanly corporeal resurrection of Jesus fails.³⁰⁸

I should mention one other relevant task that I have not undertaken. Fuller, like other recent Gospel critics, undertakes a reconstruction of the emergence of Gospel materials from the earliest stages of the tradition. We have seen that he takes this development to be such as to leave the appearance accounts in Luke and John with little credibility as factual reports. It is natural to expect one who rejects Fuller's treatment to suggest some alternative story of the formation of these accounts as at least equally well supported by the evidence. I do not agree that one cannot support a claim to the rationality of accepting the Gospel accounts without succeeding at this task. Nevertheless, it obviously would be desirable to have in hand a 'history of the tradition', or at least some suggestions thereto, that would be consonant with a more positive attitude toward the historical value of the appearance narratives in Luke and John. I could not provide this even if I had space to do so, for I lack the necessary expertise. I will have to content myself with pointing out that there is a wealth of possibilities here, all falling under the following general rubric.

Let us say that Jesus really did exist in a (highly unusual) human body of the sort depicted in Luke and John, one that rendered him visible and tangible, but that also made his identity only sometimes recognizable and that enabled him to appear and disappear in an instant. Naturally, stories of such appearances would circulate in the very early Church, and they would undergo modification, elaboration, displacement, corruption, and all the rest, in accordance with well-known tendencies of oral tradition. By the time the three Gospels containing such narratives came to be written, these stories existed in versions not wholly consonant with one another in terms of places and times as well as in more minor respects. And, of course, some appearances will have been preserved in some traditions

³⁰⁸ My concentration here on the issue of whether the risen Jesus existed in a (more or less) human bodily form may give the impression that I suppose that it is crucial for the Christian faith to believe this. But that would be a mistake. As I see it, what is crucial in this matter is that Jesus of Nazareth was alive shortly after his crucifixion and death, and that he continues to live and be active in the world. Compared with that, the question of just what form this continued life takes, in the immediate post-crucifixion period or otherwise, is of secondary importance. Nevertheless, it is of some interest whether the accounts of his appearances in Luke and John can, in the main, be relied on.

and not in others. Finally, each evangelist put his own theological 'spin' on his version. Yet certain basic facts come through. After his death and burial Jesus appeared more than once to one or more disciples in quasi-human form, spoke to them and gave them commissions, and assured them that he was alive and would continue to be alive and active in the mission he assigned them. It is something like this that I have been arguing that treatments like Fuller have not eliminated from rational acceptance.

Though my criticism has been restricted to one scholar's treatment of one bit of the Gospels, I believe that some of my points have much more general application. I take myself to have identified certain failings that are prominent in much New Testament criticism. Here are a few of these.

- (1) There is the line of argument I have encapsulated in the slogan, *'It is possible that it happened this way, therefore it did'*. Forms of this include:
 - (a) Taking any material that reflects interests, needs, or convictions of the early Church to have been added to the tradition because of that, rather than being based on actual happenings at the period the narrative concerns.
 - (b) Any material that is in line with an evangelist's theological perspective must have been due to his reconstrual of the matter.
 - (c) If stories could have originated because of a 'story-telling proclivity', then we will assume that they did.
 - (d) If certain alleged words of Jesus could have originated with a Christian prophet in the early Church, then we will suppose that they did.
- (2) *The argument from silence that we saw to be so pervasive in Fuller*. If our (admittedly extremely scanty) sources do not contain a certain kind of material, it must not have been available when those sources were composed.
- (3) *Extremely speculative suggestions that are allowed to play a major role in an argument*. An example from the above would be Fuller's supposition that the appearance to Paul was typical of all the appearances of the risen Jesus.
- (4) *A low threshold for conflict*. See, for example, the contradiction Fuller purports to find in the Emmaus story.

Behind these defects, and others, I find some general tendencies. Perhaps the most pernicious of these is the attempt to extract too much from too little. Recent Gospel critics seem driven to achieve definite results at any cost, despite the thinness of the data at their disposal. In particular, inspired by the path-breaking work of Bultmann and Dibelius, they strive to reconstruct the history of the

pre-Marcian Gospel tradition, in spite of lacking sufficient basis to do so. They are thus led into such extravagances as excessive reliance on the *argumentum ex silentio* and the confusion of free speculation with historical fact. As I have already made explicit, I do not, by any means, deny all value to the Gospel researches of this century. Quite the contrary. They have made contributions of great value to our understanding of the documents, their settings, their background, and the different historical values of their components. But, at the same time, they have, if Fuller's book is any indication, produced much chaff along with this wheat. It is high time that some interested and qualified parties, who are able to take a discriminating look at this literature without opposing the whole enterprise, set out to separate the wheat from the chaff, so that the fruits of contemporary Gospel scholarship may be properly appreciated.

To return to Fuller, when one finds that the arguments against corporeal appearances are so weak, one is naturally led to look for a hidden agenda that is at least partially responsible for the conclusions. Here is a speculative suggestion, which I throw out for your consideration.

There are Gospel critics who reject, on principle, any reports of divine intervention in the affairs of the world, anything that God is reported to have brought about other than what would have happened had only natural, this-worldly influences been involved. Bultmann is only the most famous of these, and he has had many followers. Fuller is not of this company; nor is anyone else who recognizes that Jesus of Nazareth, that very individual person, resumed his life after his death and burial and continues to live and be active in the Church and in the lives of his followers. Surely that involves innumerable happenings in this world that are other than what they would have been had only natural causes been involved. Every interaction of this risen Jesus with human beings is a signal case in point. But though Fuller, and other scholars who fall within the limits I set out in this essay, do not reject the miraculous in general, they are inclined, I would suggest, to look askance at forms of it that they find crude, sensational, melodramatic, or blatant. I strongly suspect that this antipathy to the crudely obvious is behind a reluctance to take seriously the possibility that the risen Lord existed in a human bodily form and interacted with his disciples in this guise. If some such attitude is behind the scenes, that would help to explain how otherwise brilliant and acute scholars would reject the

Lucan and Johannine accounts of the resurrection appearances on the basis of such arguments as I have been examining. But such an attitude is far from a respectable reason for the position. Surely it is the height of folly to try to second-guess God. If God should, in his infinite wisdom, see fit to raise Jesus in human bodily form, having earlier seen fit to become incarnate in that form, who are we to cry 'How gauche!'