

J. D. ATKINS

# The Doubt of the Apostles and the Resurrection Faith of the Early Church

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe  
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Mohr Siebeck

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J. D. Atkins

# The Doubt of the Apostles and the Resurrection Faith of the Early Church

The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the  
Gospels in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate

Mohr Siebeck

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To Alice, Isaiah, and Elijah  
*for your unwavering love and support*

and

πᾶσιν τοῖς διστάζουσι·  
εἰρήνη ὑμῖν



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*Easter 2019*

*J. D. Atkins*

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in addition to those found in P. H. Alexander, ed., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) and in Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Ach	Achmimic Coptic
AJ	<i>Acts of John</i>
Adamant. Dial.	<i>Adamantius Dialogue (De Recta in Deum Fide)</i>
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BCNHE	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études”
BCNHT	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Textes”
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BLC	Bardaişan of Edessa, <i>The Book of Laws of Countries</i>
Boh	Bohairic Coptic
EBC	The Expositor’s Bible Commentary
Ephrem, <i>Comm. Diat.</i>	Ephrem of Syria, <i>Commentary on the Diatessaron</i>
Ephrem, <i>Hymn. c. haer.</i>	Ephrem of Syria, <i>Hymns against Heresies</i>
Ephrem, <i>PR II</i>	Ephrem of Syria, <i>Prose Refutations</i>
Keph.	<i>The Kephalia of the Teacher</i>
Manich. Ps. Bk. II	<i>A Manichaean Psalm-Book, Part II.</i> Edited by C. R. C. Allberry. Manichäische Handschriften der Sammlung A. Chester Beatty 2. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938.
MKAW	<i>Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeeling Letterkunde</i>
Nemesius, <i>Nat. Hom.</i>	Nemesius of Edessa, <i>De natura hominis</i>
NCenBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NTApoc	<i>New Testament Apocrypha.</i> 2 vols. Revised edition. Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. English translation edited by Robert McL. Wilson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
Philastrius, <i>Div. her.</i>	Philastrius of Brescia, <i>Diversarum hereseon liber</i>
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
SAAA	Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
Sah	Sahidic Coptic
SECA	Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha
Smyth	Smyth, Herbert Weir. <i>Greek Grammar.</i> Revised by Gordon M. Messing. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

**Part I**

**Introduction and Context**



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Modern critical study of the resurrection narratives in the canonical gospels has often been driven by the question of heresy and orthodoxy in the second century, i.e., was the “proto-orthodox” church justified in its claim that Jesus rose in the flesh, or did the various “lost Christianities” that argued for a docetic/spiritual-only notion of resurrection reflect the more original form of Easter faith?<sup>1</sup> This is no doubt an important question both historically and theologically, but it can be misleading. The reason is that it may be a question that the evangelists themselves were not attempting to answer.

For better or worse, the questions that we bring to the biblical text shape our interpretation of it. The interpreter who approaches the resurrection narratives with this question of orthodoxy and heresy in mind is predisposed, at least on some level, to seeing the evangelists taking one side or the other in an early church debate. And when the stories are read in light of the categories posed by the question, it is easy to notice details that appear to be directly relevant to the controversy over docetic Christology in the second century. So when Jesus invites the apostles to touch his body and eats fish (Luke 24:36–53; John

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<sup>1</sup> I here borrow terminology from Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); idem, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13–14. On the wider modern debate over orthodoxy and heresy in the early church, see Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerrei im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1934) (ET: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* [trans. Paul J. Achtemeier; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971]); Walther Völker, review of *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerrei im ältesten Christentum*, by Walter Bauer, *ZKG* 54 (1935): 628–31 (ET by Thomas P. Scheck in Walther Völker, “Walter Bauer’s *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerrei im ältesten Christentum*,” *JECS* 14 [2006]: 399–405); H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954); Hans Dieter Betz, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity,” *Int* 19 (1965): 299–311; Thomas A. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 11; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1988); Andreas J. Koestenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010); Paul Hartog, ed., *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christian Contexts: Reconsidering the Bauer Thesis* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2015).

20:24–29), it is not surprising that a diverse set of commentators – conservative, liberal, and skeptical alike – can all come to the same conclusion: Luke and John are attempting to refute docetists who advocated a non-physical view of Jesus’s resurrection.

Indeed, interpreters can support this conclusion by appealing to second-century texts that emphasize these same details as part of their polemic against docetic Christology. The most frequently cited of these is Ignatius of Antioch’s *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*. In his refutation of some early docetists, Ignatius recounts a resurrection appearance story that closely parallels that of Luke 24. Both depict Jesus as touchable (“handle me and see [ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἰδετε],” Luke 24:39 = *Smyrn.* 3.2) and able to eat (“he ate before them [ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ἔφαγεν],” Luke 24:43; “he ate with them [συνέφαγεν αὐτοῖς],” *Smyrn.* 3.3). Because the verbal correspondence is close and because Ignatius is relatively early (ca. 115 CE), it has seemed reasonable to many to infer that Luke is also confronting docetism.<sup>2</sup> And although the verbal agreement is not as close (“Bring your finger here and see [φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὥδε καὶ ἰδε!]), the same inference is often made regarding to Jesus’s invitation to Thomas in John 20:24–29.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 71, 89; Hans von Campenhausen, *Tradition and Life in the Church: Essays and Lectures in Church History* (trans. A. V. Littledale; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 52 n. 42; C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (SBT 2/12; London: SCM, 1970), 109; Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 147; Michael D. Goulder, “The Baseless Fabric of a Vision,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered* (ed. Gavin D’Costa; Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 56–67; Stuart G. Hall, “Docetism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (eds. Adrian Hastings et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173; François Bovon, *Luke* (3 vols.; Hermeneia; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2002–2012), 3:389; Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 140; Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (SHBC 21; Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys, 2008), 753; Lidija Novakovic, “Jesus’ Resurrection and Historiography,” in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions* (eds. James H. Charlesworth and Brian Rhea; Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 926–27.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 71, 89; Georg Richter, *Studien zum Johannesevangelium* (BU 13; Regensburg: Pustet, 1977), 180–84; Walter Schmithals, *Johannesevangelium und Johannesbriefe: Forschungsgeschichte und Analyse* (BZNW 64; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 412–13; Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 92–99; Hall, “Docetism,” 173; Wolfram Uebel, “Viele Verführer sind in die Welt ausgegangen”: *Die Gegner in den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochien und in den Johannesbriefen* (BWANT 151; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 113–16; Mark A. Matson, *John* (Interpretation Bible Studies; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 120; Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 246–47; Brent, *Martyr Bishop*, 140–42; Novakovic, “Resurrection,” 926–27.

But what if these modern readings of Luke's and John's resurrection narratives have mistaken correlation for causation? As Samuel Sandmel observed in his famous 1961 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature on the (mis)use of parallels in the study of the NT, "Two passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their context, but when seen in context reflect difference rather than similarity."<sup>4</sup> What if Luke's and John's Gospels are not responding to the docetic/antidocetic debate but are themselves the subject matter of the debate? What if it is not that Luke and John are reacting to the rise of docetism, but that docetism is in part a reaction to Luke's and John's depictions of the risen Jesus?

Luke and John, like Matthew and Mark, reveal very little about the circumstances in which their gospels were written, and the information that can be gleaned from other first-century sources is limited as well. It is therefore quite understandable that scholars turn to the more abundant second-century materials for clues about what kind of issues the evangelists might be addressing. In fact, one could argue that by including a commissioning of the apostles in their accounts of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances the evangelists point us forward to a future generation of believers and so in some sense encourage us to consider the after-story.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, because the evangelists reveal so little about their own historical situations, it is difficult to determine how much of the after-story as it is known to us from second-century sources was also known to the evangelists and to what extent, if any, they reshaped their sources in light of this after-story. In other words, how are we to evaluate the theory that the evangelists were aware of and responding to an early form of docetism?

This study attempts to shed light on the relationship between Luke's and John's resurrection narratives and early church debates over docetic Christology by examining the *reception* of the canonical appearance stories in the second and early third centuries. I have sought to determine whether or not these earlier readings are in fact compatible with the modern antidocetic hypothesis. As will emerge, it is my contention that a close comparison of the canonical accounts with those of second and early-third century writers will reveal (i) that Luke's and John's treatments of the group appearance tradition differ fundamentally from antidocetic polemic; (ii) that Luke 24 and John 20 were written independently of controversies over docetic Christology; (iii) that the docetic/antidocetic debate in the early church, at least as it pertains to Jesus's resurrection, was primarily an exegetical battle over how the canonical

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 2. While Sandmel was addressing the misuse of parallels from the Dead Sea Scrolls and from rabbinic literature in the interpretation of the Gospels, his warning applies equally to second-century parallels to the resurrection narratives.

<sup>5</sup> In John, Jesus even pronounces a blessing on "those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29).

appearance stories are to be interpreted; and (iv) that the weight of the apologetic argument in both Luke 24:36–53 and John 20:24–29 rests not on physical proofs of the resurrection but on the fulfillment of OT prophecy.

In addition to the themes of touching, eating, and prophecy, I examine two other features in the canonical stories from a reception-critical perspective: the narration of Jesus's appearance, e.g., “he stood in their midst” (Luke 24:36; John 20:25), and the motif of the doubt of the apostles (Luke 24:38, 41; John 20:25, 27). Because the latter also appears in Matt 28:17, I have included Matthew’s group appearance narrative in my reception-critical analysis. Modern interpreters of Luke and John often understand the doubt as serving to enhance the apologetic value of the physical demonstrations by showing that the eyewitnesses were not easily convinced. I argue that this apologetic reading is incompatible with both the early reception of the narratives and the way ancient Christians understood doubt.

## 1.1 The Antidocetic Hypothesis in Previous Scholarship

Some have attempted full-scale defenses of the antidocetic hypothesis, e.g., C. H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics*, and Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John*.<sup>6</sup> But more often interpreters seem to judge the parallel in Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 3 sufficient to demonstrate that the evangelists are refuting docetists.<sup>7</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, for instance, offers the following assessment of Luke 24:39: “Given such realism, one can hardly avoid seeing here an opposition to Docetism. Evidently in this verse Luke is combating challenges to the bodily reality of the resurrection of Jesus as Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans* 3.2,

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<sup>6</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966); idem, “Anti-Gnostic Tendency in Lucan Christology,” *NTS* 14 (1968): 259–71; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). While most have not been convinced of Talbert’s claim that all of Luke-Acts is antignostic, his argument for an antidocetic interpretation of Luke 24:36–43 has been well received (see, e.g., W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989], 302; Barbara Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context* [JSNTSup 215; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 283–85).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Campenhausen, *Tradition*, 52 n. 42; Evans, *Resurrection*, 109; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 63–64, 569, 572; Schmithals, *Johannesevangelium*, 412–13; Goulder, “Baseless Fabric,” 56–67; Hall, “Docetism,” 173; Matson, *John*, 120; Josep Rius-Camps and Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, *The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae: A Comparison with the Alexandrian Tradition* (4 vols.; LNTS 415; London: T&T Clark International, 2004–2009), 2:274 n. 211; Brent, *Martyr Bishop*, 140; Vinson, *Luke*, 753; Novakovic, “Resurrection,” 926–27.

does at the beginning of the second century.”<sup>8</sup> Georg Richter makes a similar argument as part of his contention that John 20:24–29 was inserted by an antidocetic redactor.<sup>9</sup>

Today the antidocetic hypothesis has established itself as a mainstream view in reference works and textbooks.<sup>10</sup> It has proven so attractive that it is most often treated not as a hypothesis but as a historical given: the mere fact that the evangelists refer to the risen Jesus in physical terms is considered sufficient evidence of antidocetic intent.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 147; similarly idem, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (2nd ed.; Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 109.

<sup>9</sup> Richter, *Studien*, 180–84.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., E. Earle Ellis, “Luke, Gospel according to,” *ISBE* 4: 183; Hall, “Docetism,” 173; Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 291; Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (2nd ed.; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 416; Charles B. Puskas and C. Michael Robbins, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2011), 241–42; Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 244.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Paul Schubert, “The Structure and Significance of Luke 24,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag am 20. August 1954* (ed. Walther Eltester; BZNW 21; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1957), 172; J. G. Davies, “The Origins of Docetism,” *StPatr* 6 (1962): 18 n. 1; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1964), 449; Evans, *Resurrection*, 117; Marvin W. Meyer, *The Letter of Peter to Philip: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (SBLDS 53; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 110–11; R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion, On the Restitution of Christianity: An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century* (AARAS 46; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 119; Jerome Kodell, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Collegeville Bible Commentary 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982), 117; Robert L. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 21–22; Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 172; Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke’s Gospel* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 396; Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 292; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 494; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Beyond Resurrection* (London: SCM, 1999), 125, 277 n. 289; Mark A. Matson, *In Dialogue with Another Gospel? The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke* (SBLDS 178; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 212–13; Robert J. Karris, “Invitation to Luke,” in *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist, 2002), 321; Shellard, *New Light*, 285; Richard B. Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (eds. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 231 n. 37; Paul Foster, “Polymorphic Christology: Its Origins and Development in Early Christianity,” *JTS NS* 58 (2007): 72; Heikki Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 125–26; Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine Complexity: The Rise of Creedal Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 41; Yoseop Ra, *The Origin and Formation of the Gospel* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 92–93; Mark T. Finney, *Resurrection, Hell, and the Afterlife: Body and Soul*

### 1.1.1 The Materializing-Trajectory Theory and the Antidocetic Hypothesis

One reason that a physical conception of resurrection is so readily equated with antidocetic polemic is that the antidocetic hypothesis is often bound up with a larger theory about the development of resurrection appearance traditions in the early church. According to this theory, the original appearance traditions consisted of visions of a luminous, non-physical Jesus, and over time the stories were modified to be more concrete and physical. The historical-critical reconstruction runs as follows: (i) the earliest evidence comes from Paul, who speaks in 1 Cor 15 of a “spiritual body,” and from Acts, in which Paul is said to have had a vision of a luminous Jesus from heaven; (ii) since Paul in 1 Cor 15:5–8 seems to put his experience of the risen Jesus on a par with those of Peter and the Twelve, the latter appearances must have also been heavenly visions of a luminous Christ; (iii) the resurrection accounts in the Gospels, which include an empty tomb and a palpable Jesus who does not appear from heaven, must therefore be later apologetic fabrications; and (iv) these changes were motivated by an antidocetic *Tendenz* similar to that which drove Ignatius’s retelling of the post-resurrection appearance story in *Smyrn.* 3.

First popularized by Hans Grass and introduced to the English-speaking world by Reginald H. Fuller, with various modifications this materializing-trajectory theory has gained numerous adherents.<sup>12</sup> One of the most influential

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*in Antiquity, Judaism, and Early Christianity* (BibleWorld; New York: Routledge, 2016), 129, 132.

<sup>12</sup> Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*. Reginald H. Fuller, “Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte,” *ATHR* 45 (1963): 95–98; idem, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971). Within a few years of the publication of Fuller’s version of Grass’s reconstruction, John E. Alsup could write of Grass’s study: “No other work has been so widely used or of such singular importance for the interpretation of the gospel accounts – and that includes the pastor’s study” (*Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition: A History-of-Tradition Analysis* [Calwer theologische Monographien 5; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975], 32). Grass’s version of the theory, though it proved to be the most influential, was by no means the first. Similar proposals appear at least a century before Grass, e.g., Christian Herman Weisse, *Die Evangelienfrage in ihrem gegenwärtigen Stadium* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1856), 272–92; Daniel Schenkel, *A Sketch of the Character of Jesus: A Biblical Essay* (trans. Hendrikus Martinus Klaassen; London: Longmans, Greek, and Co., 1869), 319; Kirssopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Crown Theological Library 21; London: Williams & Norgate, 1907), 219–26.

While the full impact cannot be assessed here, it is telling that the materializing-trajectory theory quickly made significant inroads into systematic theology. On the basis of the materializing-trajectory theory, theologians from a variety of traditions found it necessary to exclude Luke’s and John’s accounts of the risen Jesus as unreliable sources for Christology, e.g., Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 89–93; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (trans. William V. Dych; New York: Seabury, 1978), 276; idem, *Man in the Church* (vol. 2 of *Theological Investigations*; trans. Karl-H. Kruger; Baltimore: Helicon, 1963), 214;

among them is James M. Robinson. In his 1981 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Robinson updated Grass's reconstruction by incorporating texts from Nag Hammadi and by introducing a new modification.<sup>13</sup> Like Grass, he argues that the original resurrection appearances were of a luminous figure from heaven, but Robinson proposes that Paul's term "spiritual body" sparked two competing streams of tradition. A "materializing" trajectory, which is reflected in the Gospels, developed in reaction against an early gnostic stream that preserved the original luminous appearances from heaven, but made them even less "bodily." According to Robinson, the evangelists retain "vestiges" of an earlier luminous appearance tradition, e.g., Jesus's "sudden appearances and disappearances," but have for apologetic reasons emphasized a physical resurrection.

Since Robinson's address, variations of the materializing-trajectory theory have appeared frequently in the secondary literature.<sup>14</sup> One or another form of the theory has been endorsed by, e.g., Lüdemann, Michael Goulder, A. J. M Wedderburn, G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Heikki Räisänen, Markus Vinzent, and Lidija Novakovic.<sup>15</sup> And recently Bart D. Ehrman has produced an accessible version of the theory written for popular audiences.<sup>16</sup>

Specialized studies applying the materializing-trajectory model to individual gospels have also appeared. Taking up a similar but more narrow line of argumentation than that of Robinson, Gregory J. Riley proposed that the Thomas pericope in John 20:24–29 was written to refute the view of an early Thomasine community that denied a bodily resurrection and composed the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Thomas*, etc.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Crispin H. T. Fletcher-

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Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 67–68, 234–249.

<sup>13</sup> James M. Robinson, "Jesus from Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles' Creed)," *JBL* 101 (1982): 5–37.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson's essay has proven so significant that the Jesus Seminar judged it worthwhile to vote on aspects of it in the same way they voted on the biblical texts themselves (The Jesus Seminar, "Voting Records: The Resurrection Appearances," *Forum* 10 [1994]: 256–57).

<sup>15</sup> Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*; idem, *Resurrection of Christ*; Goulder, "Baseless Fabric," 55–58; Wedderburn, *Beyond Resurrection*, 125, 277 n. 289; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* (HTS 56; exp. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 246–47; Räisänen, *Christian Beliefs*, 125–33; Markus Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 77–191; Novakovic, "Resurrection," 926–27.

<sup>16</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 181–83, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 69–175; similarly Kevin Madigan and Jon Douglas Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 221–22. See also the critique of Riley's reconstruction in Ismo

Louis and David Catchpole have argued that Luke, in an attempt to correct early resurrection appearance traditions that envisioned the risen Jesus as an incorporeal angel, depicts Jesus as inviting touch and eating fish.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.1.2 The Resilience of the Antidocetic Hypothesis

The antidocetic hypothesis has proven so attractive that it is retained even by those who strongly criticize the materializing-trajectory models of Grass, Robinson, and others. An early voice of dissent was registered in the tradition- and redaction-critical study of John E. Alsup.<sup>19</sup> Alsup challenges Grass's notion of a development from luminous appearances to the "anthropomorphic" appearances found in the Gospels by demonstrating that the latter are independent of luminous appearance stories found elsewhere. Yet despite this potentially devastating critique, Alsup never questions the theory that Luke's "chief redactional goal" in the group appearance narrative is to counter docetism. Alsup's study – because it is so critical of Grass's model – is an early and striking illustration of the fact that the antidocetic label, once attached on Luke (and/or John), has exhibited extraordinary sticking power in the history of interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

Much the same could be said of Gerald O'Collins's response to Robinson. O'Collins offers a scathing critique of Robinson's proposal of competing trajectories by arguing that Robinson forces the various texts to fit his theory. But when it comes to Robinson's antidocetic reading of Luke 24 and John 20, O'Collins concedes,

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Dunderberg, "John and Thomas in Conflict," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (eds. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHMS 44; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (WUNT 2/294; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 62–71; David R. Catchpole, *Resurrection People: Studies in the Resurrection Narratives of the Gospels* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 88–98; similarly Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 246–47.

<sup>19</sup> Alsup, *Appearance Stories*, 33–54, 266–74.

<sup>20</sup> Alsup, *Appearance Stories*, 172. It is unclear exactly why Alsup does not call for the abandonment of this part of Grass's reconstruction as well, especially since Alsup's analysis leaves little if any new "antidocetic" material to assign to Lukian redaction. Indeed, on the basis of his own results the only way that Alsup can attribute "antidocetic" editorial activity to Luke is by positing the "tentative" (Alsup's term) theory that in 24:36–43 Luke has combined two distinct sources, each of which already depicts Jesus in physical terms (*Appearance Stories*, 171–72). Lukian redaction in this case is minimal; it consists in little more than combining and reiterating what Luke found in his sources. Possibly, like many before and after him, Alsup has accepted second-century parallels, e.g., Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 3.2 and *Ep. Apos.* 11–12, as sufficient proof of Luke's antidocetic motivations. Alsup, in a footnote, cites these texts as parallels to Luke and John (*Appearance Stories*, 174 n. 504).

In their realistic and bodily presentation of the risen Christ's appearance, Luke and John clearly want to guard against errors. Robinson rightly observes their "apologetic" against "spiritualizing the resurrection away" (*Jesus*, 12). At the same time, these two evangelists also qualify their presentation by including details which indicate the transformed existence of the risen Lord. Closed doors do not prevent his coming (John 20:19, 26); he suddenly appears and disappears (Luke 24:31–36).<sup>21</sup>

O'Collins makes this concession even while admitting that an antidocetic interpretation stands in tension with the observation that Jesus "suddenly appears and disappears" in the gospel accounts.<sup>22</sup>

Further proof of the resilience of the antidocetic hypothesis can be found in conservative evangelical readings of Luke 24 and John 20. Evangelical scholars, as might be expected, reject the theory of a materializing-trajectory because it implies that the physical demonstrations in Luke 24 and John 20 are unhistorical embellishments. Some are nevertheless willing to accept a chastened version of the antidocetic hypothesis. In reference to the Lukan Jesus inviting the apostles to touch him, I. Howard Marshall argues that this detail "may have been *remembered* in the fight against docetism, *but that does not mean that it was invented for this purpose.*"<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Andreas Koestenberger, commenting on John 20, suggests: "From the evangelist's perspective, Thomas's objection *becomes a welcome foil* for forestalling the incipient gnostic notion that Jesus only appeared to be human (the heresy later termed 'Docetism')."<sup>24</sup>

### 1.1.3 Objections to the Antidocetic Hypothesis

Despite the popularity of the antidocetic hypothesis, it has not been without detractors. Brief but significant objections to an antidocetic reading of Luke 24:36–43 and/or John 20:24–29 have been voiced by a variety of scholars.

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Risen: A Historical, Fundamental and Systematic Examination of Christ's Resurrection* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 228 n. 9, citing Robinson, "Easter to Valentinus," 12.

<sup>22</sup> Oddly, O'Collins agrees that Luke is "'antidocetic' in a broad sense" but then argues for a docetic interpretation of Jesus's meal: the risen Jesus didn't really eat ("Did Jesus Eat the Fish [Luke 24:42–43]?" *Greg* 69 [1988]: 69–70).

<sup>23</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Luke," *TynBul* 24 (1973): 92, emphasis added; similarly Osborne, *Resurrection Narratives*, 247–48. Craig Blomberg suggests that Luke 24 emphasizes the reality of the bodily resurrection, "perhaps against incipient docetic trends in Luke's day" (*Jesus and the Gospels*, 416).

<sup>24</sup> Andreas J. Koestenberger, *John* (BECNT 4; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 579, emphasis added. Robert H. Gundry, though he argues against the "fabrication" of the group appearance narrative in Luke 24:36–53, affirms in essence Riley's proposal about the Thomas pericope: "John even uses Thomas, a Gnostic hero (compare the Gnostically tinged so-called *Gospel of Thomas*), against the Gnostics. Though at first skeptical of Jesus as the physically risen Lord and God, Thomas comes around to this orthodox belief" (*Survey*, 250, 291).

Some have noted the presence of features that seem to be in conflict with anti-docetic interests. As Ernst Käsemann, alluding to John 20, famously asked, “In what sense is he flesh, who walks … through closed doors?”<sup>25</sup> Along similar lines, Michael R. Licona has recently raised the following objection: “If Luke and John were inventing stories to combat the Docetic idea of a Jesus who existed in a ‘spiritual,’ that is, an immaterial sense, why portray Jesus as appearing, disappearing and materializing through walls at will (Lk 24:31, 36; Jn 20:19, 26)?”<sup>26</sup>

Others have drawn attention to the absence of features that they would expect from an antidocetic argument. Rudolf Schnackenburg observes that the Thomas pericope does not state “whether Thomas really placed his finger in Jesus’s wounds.” This suggests to Schnackenburg that the Thomas pericope is not an antidocetic insertion, as Richter has suggested.<sup>27</sup> Richard Dillon likewise argues that the absence in Luke’s account of a confirmation that the physical demonstrations actually convinced the disciples implies a lack of anti-docetic interest on Luke’s part.<sup>28</sup>

Probably the most comprehensive counter-response to the materializing-trend theory, and with it the antidocetic hypothesis, is N. T. Wright’s monograph, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.<sup>29</sup> In explicit polemic against Robinson and Riley, Wright contends that the resurrection narratives in the Gospels preserve early traditions “with only light editing.”<sup>30</sup> Wright argues that the term “resurrection” in first-century Palestine was never understood to involve the raising of disembodied spirits or souls, and that – with the exception of cases when it was metaphorically applied to the restoration of Israel – it always denoted a literal restoration of human bodies. He concludes that the notion that Jesus rose bodily could not have been a later development. Wright calls for the abandonment of the materializing-trajectory theory:

The idea that traditions developed in the church from a more hellenistic early period (in this case, a more “non-bodily” view of post-mortem existence) to a more Jewish later period (in

<sup>25</sup> Ernst. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. Gerhard Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 513.

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (3 vols.; trans. Cecily Hastings; New York: Seabury, 1980), 3:329.

<sup>28</sup> Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (AnBib 82; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 163–67.

<sup>29</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). A number of Wright’s arguments are anticipated in brief in the earlier but lesser-known study of William Lane Craig (*Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* [Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 16; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1989], 337).

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 611.

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