

Resurrection

And

The Skeptics

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Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. (John 20: 25).

These words were uttered by the Apostle Thomas in response to reports from eyewitnesses who proclaimed to him: "We have seen the Lord," that is, the Risen Christ. The significance of the attitude of Thomas is underlined by the fact that this is the same man who was chosen by Christ as an Apostle, who travelled with him for three years, and who saw Him perform countless miracles. He even heard Christ predict His own death and resurrection

Matthew tells us that Christ showed "His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes,

and be put to death, and on the third day rise again." (Mt. 16:21). And still again, in Galilee, Jesus said, "The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and the third day He shall rise again." (Mt. 17:21-22). And still again, to the Scribes and the Pharisees He said, "As Jonas was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days in the heart of the earth." (Mt. 12:40).

In light of Our Lord's own prophecies and the testimonies of those who saw the Risen Christ, one cannot help but see in Thomas' "I will not believe" shades of Lucifer's "I will not serve." Mind you, Thomas did not say "I doubt your story, I doubt that Christ has risen," or "I am not sure." He categorically declared not only his lack of belief, but his positive disbelief and his refusal to believe on any

conditions but his own. There was nothing uncertain about his response.

We today, looking back, marvel at his lack of faith. And yet Thomas was really not so different from the rest of the Apostles who were really not much better on this score. When it had been reported to them that Christ had risen by other eyewitnesses, Luke tells us, "this tale seemed to them to be nonsense, and they did not believe the women." (Lk. 24:11).

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In retrospect, their incredulity is incredible. Yet it is this very skepticism, together with other considerations, which makes their later testimony, based on their own eyewitness experiences, so believable. Again we can see God drawing good from evil.

The Apostles were not



wishful dreamers who imagined that they saw the Risen Christ, nor were they bold enough to hatch what would have to be a short-lived conspiracy or a lie to perpetuate His memory. The very skepticism of the Apostles makes them more credible witnesses showing, as it does, that they were unwilling to listen to "nonsense."

Likewise, their cowardice destroys any notion of deliberate deception, not to mention the impossibility of bringing hundreds of others into such a scheme. No, the cowardice and faithlessness of the Apostles confirms for us the authenticity and accuracy of their testimony.

These cowardly skeptics were turned into courageous believers against their dispositions, because the resurrection of Christ had become a proven fact in their eyes. It was history as real as the fact of the crucifixion. Due to the fact of the Resurrection, they spent their lives and shed their blood in confirmation of their eyewitness testimony. Their testimony has been accepted as true by hundreds of millions of men and women over twenty centuries. The most brilliant and the most simple have believed them. The high and the mighty, the lowly and the weak—all have knelt before the image of the crucified Savior because they believed that the testimony of the Apostles was honest and accurate.

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Nevertheless, there are the doubters and disbelievers. Some attack the physical resurrection by spreading the notion of a purely spiritual one. These are the enemies of Christ who say, "Oh, we believe in the 'resurrection,' but we must re-evaluate what is meant by this doctrine in

terms of our experiences." Others deny it outright, and some heap ridicule on our firm belief that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead on the third day.

One of the most frequently invoked and certainly one of the most curious arguments against the resurrection is the one which appeals to the testimony of the guards who were posted at the sealed tomb, and who, after the resurrection, were bribed into saying that while they were asleep, "His disciples came and stole Him." As Saint Augustine so keenly observed, these enemies of Christ invoke "sleeping men as witnesses. Really, shrewdness itself has fallen asleep when its search comes up with no better plot than this."

The enemies know well that if one can destroy the doctrine of the physical resurrection of Christ, one can destroy Christianity and Christian civilization. For, as Saint Paul says, "If Christ has not risen, vain then is our preaching, vain too is your faith." (1 Cor. 15:14). But we know that our faith is not in vain, for Christ indeed did rise from the dead.

Against those who put forward the testimony of sleeping witnesses, we have the testimony of those who were awake, and who were at first, at least, determined disbelievers and disheartened skeptics. Remember, at first, our witness for the resurrection did *not* believe. The Jewish officials who put Him to death, it seems, did not really concern themselves with whether or not Christ rose: they were simply not interested. However, they were interested in whether men would *believe* that He rose. On the other hand, the Apostles simply did not believe at first. Thus when Our Lord later appeared to them, Mark tells us "He upbraided them for their lack of faith and

hardness of heart, in that they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." (Mark 16:14).

Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene. St. Paul tells us that He was seen by St. Peter, and "after that by the Eleven. Then He was seen by more than five hundred brethren at one time. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the Apostles. Last of all, He was also seen by me." (1 Cor. 15:5-9). Thus, we have also the powerful testimony of the Apostle Paul, at one time a dedicated enemy of Christ who sought the destruction of the Church, and who, in turn, was converted by Christ Himself, and who became the Apostle to the Gentiles, and who died for Christ as a martyr.

During the appearances of Christ, He not only spoke with His disciples, but He allowed them to touch Him. He even ate with them to prove to them conclusively that He was no mere vision or ghost.

On one occasion, we find the disciples engaged in a heated argument after having received reports of the resurrection of Christ. Luke tells us that, "While they were talking of these things, Jesus stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be to you! It is I, do not be afraid.' But they were startled and panic-stricken, and thought they saw a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you disturbed, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself. Feel me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' And having said this, he showed them His hands and His feet. But they still disbelieved and marvelled for joy, He said, 'Have you anything to eat?' And they offered Him a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb. And when He had

eaten in their presence, He took what remained and gave it to them.” (Luke 24:36-43).

No, there is no fraud here, no myth-making and no “nonsense.” Reasonable, well-balanced men do not shed their blood in the service of myths they themselves create. So many good, reasonable and, we may say, skeptical men would not shed their blood testifying to a lie. To propose for belief such an explanation is to expect an act of faith so blind as to be irreconcilable with the dictates of reason. Indeed, it takes more faith to disbelieve the witnesses than to believe them.

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Great then is the evidence in favor of the resurrection of Christ. Indeed, it is so great that only a blind man or a fool would say in his heart that Christ did not rise from the dead. If people do not believe it, it is not for lack of overwhelming evidence. It is rather because the consequences of belief are overwhelming. It is because men know that if they are not with Christ, they are against Him. So they find it easier to do violence to their reason by disbelief, than to do the kind of violence to the flesh that obedience to the commandments entails.

If one lives in violation of the commandments, one can either live with that sense of guilt, repent, or deny that the commandments of God have anything to do with his own situation. Or, one can go to a psychiatrist who, for fifty dollars an hour, will tell him that there is no such thing as sin. Thus are men led to deny the resurrection of the Commandment-giver. But a denial of reality does not change the facts.

If every calculator and every computer in the world were programmed to act as though two plus two equalled three, reality would pay no attention to them, except to insure that the consequences, based on the denial of this reality, could not be avoided. We can refuse to acknowledge reality, but we cannot avoid the consequences of such a refusal in the practical order

When the modern sophists, skeptics, atheists, agnostics, Communists and modernists come to stand before the throne of the King of Kings who is their Risen Lord, Master and Judge, they will no longer be able to appeal to their perverse theories by which they attempted, either directly or indirectly, to deny the resurrection. Indeed not. Then they shall have to deal with the cold, dire consequences of the reality which they sought so desperately to deny.

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It is true that we are not eyewitnesses to the resurrection. It is equally true that we are eyewitnesses of very little. We do not neglect to punish criminals because members of the jury were not eyewitnesses. Indeed, juries are able to arrive at their conclusions on the basis of the testimony of honest, reliable witnesses. And they do not need a dozen witnesses or five hundred to arrive at a just judgment. Two such eyewitnesses would be believed by any jury of reasonable men. The dispelling of all reasonable doubt is what is required.

We have a duty to assent to the truth, and we will be judged by God according to whether we do or not. We do not have the right to be agnostics, or to withhold belief. We may have the power to, but again, if we do, we

must live with the consequences. Belief in the resurrection of Our Lord, apart from being an infallible teaching of the Church, is a compelling logical conclusion based on evidence. But we do have the power to assent or refuse. For there is, after all, a question of goodwill and honesty. As Christ said to the crowds: “When you see a cloud rising in the West, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming,’ and so it comes to pass. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be a scorching heat,’ and so it comes to pass. You hypocrites! You know how to judge the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that you do not judge this time? *But why even of yourselves do you not judge what is right?*” (Luke 12:54-56).

Again, Our Lord said: “The queen of the South will rise up in the judgement with this generation and will condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” (Mt. 12:42).

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Those who have goodwill and want the truth will believe; those who do not want to believe will find an excuse. They will avoid belief and withhold assent. But they will not avoid the consequences.

On the other hand, those who have good will, and who assent to the testimony given by the Apostles, handed down to us over two thousand years by the Roman Catholic Church will be well-blessed by the same words which Our Divine Savior spoke to doubting Thomas: “Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen me and have believed.”