



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Little Book - Volume 3

**EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICITY
AND DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST**



Content by: Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D.

Summary by: Michael Powell

And Fr. Robert Spitzer

**Credible Catholic Little Book
Volume Three**

**Evidence for the Historicity
and Divinity of Jesus Christ**

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part One—The Profession of Faith**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to respond to current secular myths advocating atheism, agnosticism, and materialism. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ to bolster your faith.

Part One from the **CCC** is titled, **THE PROFESSION OF FAITH**. The first 5 volumes in the Credible Catholic Big Books and Credible Catholic Little Books fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, **THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY**. This is covered in volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is **LIFE IN CHRIST** and information related to this topic will be found in volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Books volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **CHRISTIAN PRAYER**.

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven...”

It is therefore incumbent upon us to use contemporary academically credible evidence to support Christian faith.

Please note: The following Table of Contents correlates with that of “The Big Book” (the much larger Compendium). If readers want fuller explanations, footnotes, original sources, and complete arguments, they need only click on that particular link (below), and they will be taken to it in “The Big Book.”

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Chapter One: Six Questions from a Creator to Jesus

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Why do we need Jesus? If the scientific evidence or philosophic reasoning is persuasive, and we conclude that there must be a Creator behind the universe of space-time, why isn't that enough?

It comes down to *who* that Creator is. Jesus is about the unconditional love of God, a Creator intimately concerned with human beings. But many people think this view of God is implausible, indefensible, perhaps even too good to be true—they hold an alternative view of the Creator as someone indifferent to humanity, a remote powerful being that simply set the Universe in motion and is too great to be involved with lowly human beings. This “detached Creator” may seem the more rational idea, but the following series of questions may help illustrate how what we know of the Creator and ourselves could instead lead us logically to the “unconditionally loving Creator” of Jesus.

1. What is the most positive and creative power or capacity within you?

One of many remarkable human powers might spring to mind—intelligence, creativity, artistic genius. However, in practice, these powers are not necessarily positive. They can be used for good or misused for evil ends. Even virtues like courage and self-control can be used for selfish or harmful ends (by a power-hungry dictator, for instance). The only exception is *agapē* love, which is inherently directed to the positive end of seeking the good of the other, without any other end or reward. (See the Big Book Vol IV, Chapter 2 & 3, for more detail on *agapē* and how it is distinguished from other forms of love) This is why we look to love as the guiding force that gives meaning to our other powers—a truth universally celebrated in religious sermons and pop songs alike.

2. If love is the one power that seeks the positive in itself, and we are made to find our purpose in life through love, could God (the unique unrestricted act of thinking that creates everything else), who created us with this loving nature, be devoid of love?

Where else indeed could this power of love come from? Like our intelligence and our existence itself, our love is a power that can only be consistently accounted for by a Creator with the same power.

3. Is your desire to love and to be loved merely conditional, or unconditional?

Our desire for perfect love is another theme that's widely affirmed in both religion and popular culture. We recognize every imperfection of love in others and in ourselves. Our ongoing pursuit of love is driven by the awareness of a perfect love that leaves us dissatisfied with the more conditional love we give and receive in daily life (See Volume 2, Chapter 2).

4. If our desire for love can only be ultimately satisfied by unconditional love, then could the Creator of this desire be anything less than unconditional love?

Basically, if we know from Question 2 that our Creator is a loving God, then our desire for unconditional love would seem to have been created by Him and intended to be fulfilled by Him. It doesn't make sense for a loving God to give us an unfulfillable desire for unconditional love. Creating this desire only to frustrate it would be contrary to His loving nature. If He does intend to fulfill our desire for unconditional love, He must have the capacity to do so—and therefore He must be unconditionally loving.

5. If the Creator is Unconditional Love, would He want to be with us and enter into a personal empathetic relationship with us—face to face? Would he be Emmanuel (“God with us”)?

Now we come to the heart of the matter. An unconditionally loving God will hold precisely the deep interest in us that seemed so implausible. A love without limits means a God who wants to share himself completely with each of us, who will always do good for us without looking for reward, who will keep loving us no matter how much we sin or reject him, who will even sacrifice himself for us. It may sound shocking to us, especially if we have not had much experience of love, but all this is what we would logically expect from an unconditionally loving God.

6. Inasmuch as the unconditionally loving God would want to be perfectly present to us, is Jesus the One?

This is the question we will endeavor to address throughout the rest of this volume. As we reflect on this question in light of the historical evidence given below, it will impart a gradual freedom to believe. Instead of thinking, “God with us is too good to be true,” we begin to think that an unconditionally loving God would really want to be with us—and if He were to come, that Jesus would be his perfect presence to us.

Chapter Two: Corroboration of Jesus Outside the New Testament

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We begin with what we know about Jesus from outside the New Testament. Outside of the gospels, there are three notable sources from the period—sources that were not interested in Christ as the messiah but mention him in passing in their own historical works.

The Roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus

While recounting how Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome, in his *Annals*, he provides a non-Christian historical reference to Jesus. It states that Christus was executed by crucifixion at the hands of Pontius Pilate during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius.

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus

Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jewish People* was written for a Roman audience around 93 AD. In addition to citing Jesus' crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, it refers to Jesus as wise, having authority, a teacher and a wonder-worker. This reference to miracles is rare in Josephus' history—John the Baptist receives a long description but without any mention of miracles, for example. The fact that a Jewish historian writing for the Romans would mention not only Jesus' execution by crucifixion, but also the positive attributes of his wisdom, authority, teaching, and miracle-working indicates how well-known Jesus' reputation was for these attributes.

The Babylonian Talmud

This Jewish source contains several references to Jesus, including his crucifixion and his reputation for supernatural power. It is especially notable as evidence since the passages indicate a Rabbinical hostility toward Jesus, and their negative tone precludes any suspicion of Christian influence.

In sum, Tacitus speaks to the historicity of Jesus' trial and crucifixion—naming both Pontius Pilate as procurator and Tiberius as Caesar. Josephus also speaks to Jesus' crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, explicitly mentioning Jesus as wise, authoritative, teacher and miracle worker. The Babylonian Talmud affirms Jesus' crucifixion and miracle working.

Chapter Three: The Preaching of the Apostolic Church

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The earliest information we have about Jesus is found in the *kerygmas*—brief texts that express simple credal teachings. These were the first proclamations of the Early Church, written within a mere decade of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and they have been preserved in the New Testament within the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul. (See: Acts 2:14-39, Acts 3:13-26, Acts 4:10-12, Acts 5:30-32, Acts 10:36-43, Acts 13:17-41, 1Thess 1:10, 1Cor 15:1-7, Rom 8:34.)

These proclamations have eight repeated themes:

1. Jesus was a descendant of David,
2. Jesus was predicted by the Prophets,
3. Jesus worked miracles,
4. Jesus was crucified and buried for our sins (in all major *kerygmas*),
5. Jesus rose in glory (in all major *kerygmas*),
6. Jesus gave his disciples the Holy Spirit,
7. Jesus is now exalted in God,
8. Jesus is therefore, Messiah and Lord.

Since these themes form the foundation of Christian creeds today, they might strike us as routine and familiar. But these are radical claims that Christians were making about Jesus right at the beginning.

Calling a man the Lord (The term in New Testament Greek—*ho Kurios*—is a translation of the Divine name Yahweh) would be blasphemous in the eyes of other Jews, and calling a crucified man God would be repulsive to everybody. Furthermore, the early Christians suffered terribly for this claim of Jesus’ divinity—they lost their social and financial status, were religiously ostracized and ultimately expelled from the synagogue and persecuted to the point of death. Why risk alienating your audience, getting expelled from the synagogues, losing social status and facing persecution and death for making this claim about Jesus’ divinity, if you were not sure that it was true? Why make these huge sacrifices? All these sacrifices could have been avoided by simply calling Jesus a holy man, or a martyr-prophet who lost his life for the truth. Something must have impressed the early Christians to

make such specific, radical claims in the face of such strong disincentives. Three possible reasons why the Church would have believed in Jesus' divinity so strongly in the face of such sacrifices would seem to be His resurrection and glory, His gift of the Holy Spirit, and the miracles He worked by His own authority during His ministry. We will be looking in this volume at more evidence for these indications of Jesus' divinity.

Chapter Four: The Evidence of the Heart

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We are looking at a lot of hard evidence in this volume, but any time we are genuinely being persuaded of something—rather than just scoring points in an argument—there are usually additional factors beside the evidence itself. One of these factors is the trustworthiness and general “feel” we get of the person giving the evidence. In the case of the New Testament, there are several striking patterns that can inspire confidence in the authors.

Restraint—miracles are reported in simple factual prose, like a news report, without the dramatic embellishment that we find in any other ancient story of miracles (such as the gnostic gospels)

Doubt—all three gospel accounts of Jesus' risen appearance to the apostles report the initial doubts of the apostles, a notably honest admission for an account intending to inspire belief.

Humility—other unflattering details like the insults the religious authorities leveled at Jesus or the failings and weaknesses of the apostles (e.g. Peter's betrayal) are also included, indicating that reporting the whole truth was more important than making the early Church leaders look good.

Challenging tone—the restrained reporting, the honest inclusion of unpleasant details, the refusal to explain away challenging teachings: all of this conveys a tone of authors who are convinced of the truth of what they are reporting, but are not making an effort to soften the difficulty of that truth to win people over with a flattering presentation. There is a bracing earnestness.

Inspiring appeal—paradoxically, laying out the mission of the Gospel without trying to soften it or downplay its challenges can be inspiring, inviting us to aspire to the same high calling.

Chapter Five: Jesus' Resurrection in Glory

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While belief in Jesus as “God with us” requires a movement of the heart to recognize our need for love and to be open to receiving that love, it also requires evidence for the mind that Jesus is actually divine. This is why Jesus’ Resurrection, as a demonstration of his Divine power, is so central to Christianity. St. Paul even says that if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, Christians are essentially wasting their time (1 Cor 15). Is there any historical way of verifying whether the resurrection happened?

We’ll look at four main areas of evidence in this chapter:

1. The common elements in the gospel narratives about Jesus’ risen appearance to the apostles (Section II).
2. The historical evidence of the resurrection in the writings of St. Paul (Section III).
3. N.T. Wright’s historical analysis of the resurrection (Section IV).
4. The historical status of the empty tomb (Section V).

I. Gary Habermas’ Study of Recent Scholarship on the Resurrection

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First, a brief look at what scholars currently think about the Resurrection. A recent survey of exegetes (scholars who analyze the scriptures) by Gary Habermas indicates that most agree the early disciples at least had experiences that they perceived as the risen Christ. A few exegetes propose natural causes for these experiences (e.g. subjective visions caused by “religious intoxication” and “enthusiasm”). But, perhaps surprisingly, most seem to conclude that there was a supernatural cause—that something actually happened to Jesus after his death. The consensus is that Jesus’ body was actually transformed; in other words, Jesus didn’t just appear to the apostles as a vision or ghost (a “luminous appearance”) but fully came back to life as himself, with a risen and transformed body (a “transformed corporeal” appearance). What evidence has led them to this consensus?

II. The Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Risen Appearances to the Apostles

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The gospel accounts of Jesus's risen appearances to the Apostles share many common elements, and one of the most telling of these is that the apostles weren't expecting what they saw. As we mentioned, all the gospels show the apostles as initially doubtful of the resurrection. They are so overwhelmed by his transformation that they seem to think they are witnessing a divine vision—not the Jesus they had worked with during His ministry. Jesus has to reassure them that—however wondrously transformed—it is really him and really his actual body.

Far from something the apostles were expecting, let alone planning, this transformed Christ that appeared to them was so radically unfamiliar that St. Paul would have to coin a new word to describe it: a "*Soma pneumatikon*" or "Spiritual Body." (Check out the Big Book to see how this concept shaped St Paul's description of how the dead will be raised in the general Resurrection as well.) We'll see in section IV below just how radical the consequences were for Christianity in receiving and adopting this new concept.

The Big Book (Volume III, Chapter 5, Section 2) presents this general pattern of the Resurrection narratives (Jesus' appearance as a spiritually and gloriously transformed body, the apostle's initial doubts about this being Jesus, and Jesus' assurance that it is really He) in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.

III. Paul's Testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus

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One of the earliest *kerygmas* contains a list of the witnesses to the Resurrection:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he
appeared to Cephas,
then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time
most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to
James,

then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1Cor. 15:3-8)

Paul seems to be offering this list with an eye to its value as legal evidence. He mentions of the five hundred that most “are still alive,” implying that his audience could still consult them to corroborate the story. The list also does not include the women at the tomb—the earliest witnesses mentioned in the Gospel narratives—as Jewish law of the time would not have held their witness admissible.

Paul’s Witness Dilemma

Having offered the evidence of these witnesses, Paul probes the value of their evidence by laying out a dilemma in 1 Cor 15. Either the witnesses believe in God, or they do not believe in God. In either case, Paul argues, they had everything to lose and nothing to gain by falsely claiming to have witnessed the resurrection.

For believers

For a believer to publicly lie that he had witnessed the Resurrected Christ would jeopardize his own salvation by bearing false witness that undermined and caused apostasy to the Jewish faith. If Paul really believed in the God of his forefathers, he would have viewed lying about the resurrection (that undermines the Jewish faith) to be the worst possible crime that would seriously jeopardize his salvation. As he himself said, “we would be perjurers before God and the worst of all men.” He had everything to lose and nothing to gain if he were a believer.

For unbelievers

Those who did not believe in God, would also have to make great sacrifices to preach the resurrection, which would make lying about it virtually unintelligible, because such a lie would bring needless suffering onto oneself. The resurrection doctrine set the early Christians at odds with the Jewish tradition they lived in, causing them to get expelled from their synagogues and ostracized by their communities. Soon, it led to hounding by the Roman authorities as well. Ultimately, it meant active persecution, torture, and death. Indeed, Paul himself suffered repeatedly from these threats and would soon die for the faith. If the Resurrection was a lie, all that suffering would be for nothing. As he himself indicates—If the resurrection is a lie, why am I being persecuted for it? I may as well eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow I will die.

Paul uses this dilemma to show (in a legal fashion) that he and the other witnesses have everything to lose and nothing to gain by bearing false witness to the resurrection of Christ. Their testimony is more reliable since it goes against their own self-interest.

IV. N.T. Wright's Two Arguments for the Historicity of Jesus' Resurrection

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N.T. Wright argues from the historical record that two aspects of the early church are difficult to account for without the resurrection – the remarkable success of Christian messianism and the Christian mutations of Second Temple Judaism.

The Remarkable Success of Christian Messianism

There were many messianic movements in the time of Christ. Wright lists several of these: “Judas the Galilean, Simon, Athronges, Eleazar ben Deinaus and Alexander, Menahem, Simon bar Giora, and bar-Kochba.” In every case, a charismatic leader would attract an enthusiastic following, the leader would die (usually at the hands of the authorities), and the followers would scatter and the messianic movement would die. One example of this pattern is even found in the gospels with John the Baptist.

Christianity is the one dramatic exception to this pattern. After the public humiliation and execution of their leader, the disciples don't fade away, but instead begin preaching throughout the surrounding countries that their crucified leader is in fact the Messiah, has somehow succeeded in fulfilling the ancient prophecies, is risen from the dead, and in fact is Divine. Even more shockingly, the Messianic movement grew exponentially, and in a few generations, Christianity would be the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. Where did this momentum come from? What inspired them with such conviction?

Wright believes that the apostles would have had no credibility with this message among the Jewish or Gentile people were it not for two extraordinary occurrences – (1) the apostles' ability to perform healings and miracles on a regular basis through the Holy Spirit, and (2) the fact that they worked these miracles through the name of *Jesus*. As the apostles explained, if Jesus is not risen from the dead as we have preached, then how could we work miracles through His Spirit in His name? Given that no other messianic movement worked regular miracles in the name of their messiah (including the movement

of John the Baptist), it explains how Christianity’s preaching of the resurrection was so credible and therefore, how the early Church grew so rapidly. This gives evidence not only of the power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the apostles, but also of the resurrection of Jesus.

The Christian Mutation of Second Temple Judaism

The other historical anomaly is in the teaching of the Early Church. Wherever possible, the early Christians tried to maintain continuity in teaching with the broader Jewish community (whose teachings are referred to as Second Temple Judaism). There is one area, though, where Christianity made several unprecedented changes in doctrine, changes dramatic enough to get them expelled from the synagogues. That area, as you might expect, was the Resurrection.

Here are the changes:

Second Temple Judaism	Christianity
Resurrection means return to same kind of body	Resurrection means transformation into a spiritual and glorified body (the <i>soma pneumatikon</i>)
No one will rise before the end times	Jesus and others are risen already
Messiah is not associated with Resurrection	The hope for a Messiah and the hope of a Resurrection are both fulfilled in Jesus
The end times (<i>parousia</i>) are in the future	The end times have begun with Jesus, and will be completed in the future
Resurrection is a minor doctrine	Resurrection is the central doctrine that justifies and connects the entire faith

Historians have tried to theorize where these new ideas came from—perhaps from paganism, or the Christians’ own desire to come to terms with the death of their leader. The problem with these theories is that the ideas are unprecedented—no one had proposed them even outside of Judaism, so it’s hard to find a plausible source other than the one given in the gospels – namely, that Jesus really did rise from the dead and appeared to the disciples in a spiritual and glorified body. (Remember that Paul even had to make up a new term to describe the idea of a spiritual and glorified body; they literally didn’t have a word for it.) Combine the novelty of the doctrine with how uniquely controversial it was—

the only area where Christians opposed the prevailing Jewish doctrine—and again we must ask, where did this conviction come from, if not from a Resurrection that the early Christians witnessed?

V. The Empty Tomb

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The empty tomb does not give direct evidence of the Resurrection, of course, but does provide indirect corroboration. When the Apostles began gaining converts by preaching the resurrection, it was in the interests of the Jewish authorities to undermine this claim by producing the body of Jesus, which they apparently could not do. This points to the likelihood that the body really wasn't there. We know this from the charge they make in the gospels that the Apostles stole the body (an accusation that would not be necessary unless there was an identifiable burial site that was now empty).

We are quite sure about the historical reliability of the Jewish authorities' claim that the apostles had stolen the body because it is unthinkable that the Christians would have reported such a damaging claim to their own credibility in the gospel (Mt. 28:13) unless it were really *true*.

The empty tomb also indicates continuity between the original body and the glorified body of the Resurrection—i.e. it was the same body that was buried that was later raised and left the tomb transformed in glory.

VI. Correlations Between the Resurrection of Jesus and Near Death Experiences

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While the above evidence deals directly with historic evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus, we can also find some interesting parallels between Jesus' resurrection and the accounts of people who have had near death experiences. Part of the significance of Jesus' Resurrection, in addition to establishing his own Divine power, is to show us the new life for which believers will be destined.

What do we know of our own future after combining the evidence of Christian revelation and near death experiences? There are a few recurring details in accounts of near death experiences that correlate with details of Jesus' resurrection:

1. Human beings are not limited to corporeal life or the physical world—they have a transphysical consciousness and spiritual embodiment that can survive bodily death. This has been amply demonstrated in Volume II, Chapter 1. In near death experiences, people experience continued conscious awareness after medical brain death has occurred. Furthermore, when patients encounter deceased relatives and friends, they report that they have a recognizable body (from when they were a young adult – and without physical imperfections). This continued spiritual embodiment and consciousness after death is also demonstrated by Jesus' spiritual resurrection appearance – though Jesus' body is not just spiritualized, but glorified, appearing like a manifestation of God (a theophany).
2. The transphysical dimension of human beings has continuity with embodiment—but is not limited by physical laws or structures. Several near death experience accounts report an ability to see and hear as well as an ability to move beyond the confines of the room they were in, often reporting on events and conversations in other parts of the hospital that they could not have otherwise witnessed. Gospel accounts also ascribe to Christ's glorified body a similar freedom from physical laws boundaries (e.g. passing through walls).
3. The transcendent deity (and the “other side”) are overwhelmingly loving (from both near death experiences and Jesus' revelation). One of the more well-known details of near death experiences, perhaps, is the “white light.” Many people spontaneously use the adjective “loving” to describe this light, often portraying this love as not just obvious but even overwhelming. Not only is God's unconditional love a central teaching of Jesus, but it is an unprecedented teaching of his, not found in any religions prior to Christianity.

However, the reports of near death experiences only provide partial corroboration—the revelation of the Resurrected Jesus contains other truths about our final destiny that we would not otherwise know. For instance:

4. Our transphysical embodiment will be transformed in power and glory—like Jesus'.
5. Life after death is eternal.
6. God's and Jesus' intention is to give eternal life to all who accept and seek it—still allowing for the possibility of some to freely reject love, a loving God, and loving people.

VII. Conclusion

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Let's review what we've gathered from surveying the historical evidence on the Resurrection.

1. There is significant reason to believe that Jesus appeared to the apostles (and other witnesses) after the women had discovered his empty tomb. He appeared spiritually transformed—possessing transphysical capacities (such as the ability to pass through closed doors—John 20:19-20), with spirit-like qualities (that caused the disciples to think he was a spirit—Luke 24:37). Though transformed, He maintained continuity with His former embodiment, revealing the wounds of His crucifixion (John 20:20- 21 and Luke 24:41). He was not just a vision, but a transformed and risen body, a “spiritual body.”

These appearances account for all five of the changes Christians made to Second Temple Judaism's teaching on the subject of Resurrection.

2. After Jesus' powerful transformed appearance to the witnesses, He imparts the Holy Spirit upon them, and they are able to perform the same miracles as He did (in His name). This inspiration gave them the momentum to grow, to defy prevailing teaching, to risk persecution, and (unlike other messianic movements) to exponentially grow after the death of their founder.

This evidence for resurrection is essential to the foundation of believing that Jesus is truly “the unconditional love of God with us.” We will proceed to look in more depth at two other parts of the foundation -Jesus' miracles and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Again, it is important to recall, though, that Reason alone will not bring us to faith. It can give evidence to show why faith is reasonable but there is a personal choice involved nonetheless. We must still assent to the need for God and for accepting his teaching and his commandment to love.

Chapter Six: Miracles by His Own Authority Jesus' Miracles and Spirit

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Can Jesus' miracles be examined historically? Doesn't everyone assume they were made up, just embellishments that people added to stories back then to impress readers? Wouldn't it be easier to focus on Jesus' moral teachings and not worry about having to believe in the literal wonder-working?

In fact, far from being a sideshow, Jesus' miracles are quite central to his mission. As acts of healing and deliverance, they were part of his mission to initiate God's Kingdom in the world. And by performing these miracles by his own power (unlike the earlier prophets, who invoked the power of God), Jesus demonstrates his Divine authority and validates his claim as Emmanuel, "God with us".

Since this claim is the very question we are exploring in this volume, we will want to investigate the historical evidence for Jesus' miracles. As with the Resurrection, the evidence is more extensive than one might assume.

I. The Purpose and Distinctiveness of Jesus' Miracles

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The first point to note is that Jesus' miracle-working was acknowledged by his contemporaries—several non-Christian sources reference it, as we saw in Chapter Two above, and even his enemies didn't deny it. Instead, they accused Jesus of performing those miracles by demonic power – an accusation that is reported not only in the scriptures, but also in the Babylonian Talmud – a non-Christian source.) Miracles are documented extensively in the New Testament, with specific verifiable references to public places and times, and are mentioned in the earliest *kerygmas* of the Church.

These documented miracles have several unique distinctions:

1. **Jesus does miracles by His own authority.** Every other Old Testament prophet prayed to be an intercessor of *God's* power, but Jesus claims that the divine power to heal comes from himself alone ("I say to you, arise"). This not only differentiates Jesus from the Old Testament prophets, but implies his divinity.

2. **Jesus' miracles have the purpose not of showing His glory, but of actualizing the coming of the Kingdom and the vanquishing of evil.** Jesus' miracles always free someone from the affliction of evil, and in some cases—like exorcisms—they free people explicitly from the bondage of Satan.
3. **Jesus is not a wonderworker or magician in either the pagan or Jewish sense.** A magician, then as now, is focused on doing amazing feats simply to astonish, not to effect change in the world, as Jesus did.
4. **Jesus combines teaching with his miracles.** Lessons on faith, forgiveness of sins, giving thanks to God, etc. are often integrated into the performing of miracles.
5. **The faith/freedom of the recipient is integral to the miraculous deed.** Before working a miracle, Jesus frequently asks the recipient if they believe he can heal them—he involves their free participation in seeking healing, just as their free participation is needed to receive God's deeper healing of salvation.)

This unique sense of purpose in Jesus' miracles are reflected in how the gospels report on them. As we mentioned in Section Four, the gospels show marked restraint in reporting miracles—there is no hyperbolic aggrandizement, no frivolous or punitive miracles. This is unlike pagan accounts of miracles during the same period and unlike the gnostic gospels (which show a young Jesus bringing clay sparrows to life and striking down a child that bumped into him, for example). Jesus' miracles have a clear purpose—to deliver people from suffering and evil and to introduce God's Kingdom.

II. The Historicity of Jesus' Exorcisms and Healings

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Exorcisms and Healings are complementary aspects of Jesus' mission. Exorcisms emphasize the vanquishing of evil while Healings emphasize the presence of God's redeeming love—both of which actualize God's kingdom in the world.

Exorcism

Exorcisms are frequently cited across the Gospels (seven individual cases are narrated, in addition to several “summary” mentions of exorcisms in Jesus' ministry) indicating that they formed a significant part of Jesus' ministry. The accounts are consistent and restrained, featuring Jesus' unique use of his own power, as he himself commands the demons to come out of the people they are afflicting.

Healing

References to healing are even more frequent in the Gospels. Fifteen unique cases are described, in addition to dozens of references in other contexts, including the accusations of the Scribes that Jesus performs miracles by the power of demons and the account of Jesus conferring the power of healing on his disciples.

Again, the accounts of these miracles illustrate Jesus exercising his own power. Miracles occur typically in response to someone's petition to help them with a need, so the miracle is worked through the faith of the petitioner. It is often further linked to a relevant spiritual teaching. Notably, these stories frequently contain place names, personal names, and unusual details that would be easy for a contemporary reader to verify or refute.

We can see all these characteristics in perhaps the most dramatic miracles Jesus performed—the raising of the dead.

III. The Historicity of Jesus Raising the Dead

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Raising the dead is more rare in the gospel accounts than other kinds of miracles—there are three specific stories that are reported in three different narrative traditions (Mark, Luke special, and John), all of which have Palestinian origins (showing composition near the time of Jesus) and proper names of people, towns, and local details (all of which were verifiable when the narratives were circulated). These stories of raising the dead should be distinguished from the story of Jesus' Resurrection—they are not a transformation like the Resurrection, but simply a restoration of the person's former corporeal state. They are also temporary, where spiritual resurrection is eternal. Despite these differences, the incidents of raising the dead are significant in demonstrating Jesus' power over life and death (and thus illustrating his Divinity, since this power is reserved to God alone).

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Mk. 5:21-43)

Jairus, a synagogue leader, asks Jesus to heal his sick daughter. On their way, news comes that the daughter has died and Jairus should not waste Jesus' time. However, Jesus persuades Jairus to continue, and he brings the daughter to life.

The historicity of this story is supported by its local and verifiable details, such as including a high-ranking personage by name. As with other gospel stories, the strict reporting doesn't shy away from embarrassing and disturbing elements—when Jesus

arrives at the house full of mourners and announces his intent to raise the girl, they laugh him to scorn and he has them removed from the house.

There are also several Semitisms (Hebrew or Aramaic expressions), such as “Talitha Kum,” that show an ancient Palestinian origin (indicative of Jesus’ time, but not the time when the gospels were written).

The Son of the Widow of Nain (Lk. 7:11-17 – Luke special source)

Jesus encounters a funeral procession in the small village of Nain—a widow is burying her only son. He is moved with compassion for her and, stopping the procession, tells the young man to rise.

Again, details of the story favor its being historical rather than invented. Many idiosyncratic terms in the story are not found elsewhere in the gospel and are thus unlikely to have been invented by the writer. How would the writer know and include specific details of this remote village like its gate (a fact which has only recently been confirmed by archaeology)? Also, one must question why a writer would single out such a small obscure village by name for a made-up miracle. At that size, everyone in town would know whether such an unusual miracle had happened.

Lazarus (Jn. 11: 1-44)

Perhaps this is the most well-known account of Jesus raising the dead. This narrative recounts Jesus raising a man four days after his death. Like the other accounts, it contains verifiable local details—naming the man, Lazarus, his sisters, Martha and Mary and the region, Bethany, where the story takes place. And like the other accounts, it demonstrates Jesus raising the dead through the power of his own command, calling Lazarus to “come forth” from the tomb.

IV. Conclusion

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Let’s briefly recap some of the evidence for Jesus’ miracles we’ve reviewed.

1. The testimony about his miracles in non-Christian sources written near the time of Jesus (Flavius Josephus and the Babylonian Talmud—mentioned in Chapter Two).
2. The accusations against Jesus (“It is by the power of Beelzebul that he cast out demons”) implying that his adversaries acknowledged his miraculous power.
3. Attestation of Jesus’ miracles in the early *kerygmas* (see above Chapter 3).

4. Multiple attestations of exorcisms and healings throughout the gospels, including three distinct accounts of raising the dead.
5. Jesus' unique style of performing miracles which is unlike any other miracle worker in the ancient world and unlike the performance of miracles in the apocryphal gnostic gospels.
6. Mention of particular places and people in miracle narratives which could have been checked within living memory of Jesus—noted particularly in the narratives concerned with raising the dead.
7. The presence of idiosyncratic terms that point to original sources that the gospels are drawing on (see more on this point in the Big Book)

As we said at the outset, the question of Jesus' miracles is significant both because it demonstrated his identity as Emmanuel "God with us" and because it formed an active part of his mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

How did Jesus continue that mission? We turn now to the unique gift that Jesus conferred on the early Church – the gift of his Holy Spirit.

Chapter Seven: Jesus' Gift of the Holy Spirit

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We have discussed how the Early Church was galvanized by the Resurrection, filled with enthusiasm and outreach right at the point when other Messianic movements would normally be disbanding. But the Early Church grew into a worldwide movement because it also galvanized others, and it accomplished this in part by continuing Jesus' mission of healing and miracles. Whereas Jesus had performed miracles through his own power, his disciples now performed miracles in Jesus' name. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples and it was the power of the Holy Spirit to which they attributed their new ability to work miracles.

I. Jesus' Gift of the Holy Spirit

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Looking through the account of the early years of Christianity as laid out in the New Testament's Acts of the Apostles, we find there were 3 kinds of powerful experiences in the Early Church that the disciples attributed to the "Power of God":

1. Healing and Miracles
2. Prophecy
3. Ecstatic Experiences, such as glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and visions

St. Paul also discusses these experiences in some of his letters in the New Testament. The term he uses for these visible gifts of the Spirit is "charismata", a term that refers to a gratuitous gift for the good of another—in this case, God's gratuitous gift of salvation. Paul makes it clear that these wonders are always being done through the Power of God (in the name of Jesus), and are intended to lead people to conversion.

These experiences illustrate

1. that the early Church saw the charisms as explicit manifestations of God's power through his Spirit, and
2. that the risen Jesus is seen to be the source of this power/Spirit (because the Spirit works through His name).

Many of the miracles in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as many of the reflections in Paul's New Testament letters, can be reviewed in more detail in the Big Book.

II. The Interior Gifts of the Spirit According to St. Paul

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Paul emphasizes that the visible gifts of the Spirit are not an end in themselves, but should lead people to the interior gifts of the Spirit that produce deep conversion of heart. The Holy Spirit is not just a force that can create powerful healings and miracles, but also leads us to personal conversion, a conversion revealed in experience of the Spirit's gifts: prayer, hope, trust, love, zeal, peace, and joy. These gifts are less dramatic than the miraculous visible gifts, but they are ultimately more important for building the Church and strengthening our own personal conversion. This is the lasting legacy that Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit is intended to bring us.

III. Conclusion

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Thus far, we have encountered four significant clues in our investigation of the evidence for Jesus as the unconditionally loving “God with us” (Emmanuel):

1. His unconditional love—he preached about the unconditional love of God, His Father (Abba), and he demonstrated this special *agapē* love in his willingness to sacrifice Himself totally for all humankind.
2. His resurrection in a glorious spiritual body.
3. The exorcisms, healings, and raising of the dead done by His own authority and power.
4. His gift of the Holy Spirit, enabling the apostolic church to perform miracles in His name.

These various forms of complementary evidence give strong reasons to conclude that Jesus is the unconditionally loving Emmanuel; yet at the same time, it raises the final question—the final clue—did Jesus really say that He was “God with us”? We will discuss this in the next volume.

Chapter Eight: Science and the Shroud of Turin

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Before we finish this volume, though, there are some interesting pieces of important historical evidence to look at—chief among these is the Shroud of Turin. This simple linen burial shroud, measuring roughly 14 feet by 3.5 feet, is by far the most scientifically tested relic ever, and for good reason. Despite having surfaced in 1349 AD, the shroud contains a perfect photographic negative of a crucified man, an image executed in such accurate anatomical detail that modern medicine can diagnose many of the injuries by analyzing it. Most intriguing of all, scientific tests have revealed the image was not produced by any kind of paint, dye, chemical, vapor, or scorching.

The numerous and wide-ranging tests on the shroud strongly suggest that it is the burial shroud of Christ, due to dating analyses that place it at the time of Christ, anatomical details that correspond to the unusual set of injuries described in the gospel, and a scientifically

unique image formation suggestive of the Resurrection. We conclude with a brief survey of some of this evidence, which can be reviewed in more detail in the Big Book.

I. The Blood Stains in Relation to the Image

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In addition to the image itself—which, as we noted, is anatomically perfect and a perfect photographic negative—there are several blood stains on the Shroud as well. The image was formed after the blood stains congealed on the cloth, yet the image and blood stains, relative to one another, are anatomically correct. (This means a potential forger would need to place all the blood stains on the cloth before there was an image on which to place them — unlikely, even before we add the question of how the image itself was put on the shroud without any paints, dyes, chemicals, vapors, or scorching).)

Inasmuch as the blood is real, and the image was not produced by a medieval forger (see below Section VI), the Shroud seems to have enveloped a real man who was crucified in a similar way to the unique crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth—including the unusual combination of being crowned with thorns, being flogged, and being pierced in the side by a spear similar to a Roman pilum. The precise nature of the torments undergone by the man on the Shroud is detailed by Dr. Pierre Barbet in his famous work, *A Doctor at Calvary*.

II. Dating the Shroud

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Before detailing the many methods used to date the Shroud, all of which have placed it in the time of Christ, we should address the one test that does not match these findings. A Carbon-14 test done in 1988 on a sample of the Shroud placed the sample at 638 years old (roughly 1350 AD). As a rule, Carbon-14 is a reliable way of measuring the age of an artifact, but several factors potentially compromised the results of this particular test:

Only one sample

Usual protocol for a carbon-dating test would be to take samples from several parts of the shroud; however in this case, only one sample thread was taken and used by all three testing labs. You might wonder—why would that matter, if all the cloth is the same age, anyway? As it happens, the Shroud has been visibly patched with newer cloth in several places to cover large holes, so in this case it would matter a good deal.

Taken from a cloth that patched the original shroud

This one sample was not subjected to any chemical or microscopic analysis to establish that it was part of the original cloth, rather than a later patch. Later analysis would reveal several discrepancies between the sample and the original portions of the shroud—the sample had cotton fibers and was dyed, most likely to make the fresh white patch blend in with the much older original shroud (which is linen, with no cotton fibers, and not dyed). Since the sample is not part of the original material, the carbon-dating tells us when the shroud was patched, but nothing about when it was originally made.

Because the shroud was in a fire

The reason the Shroud was being patched in the first place is also significant, because the patches were to cover the charred holes left by a fire in 1532. This adds an unrelated, additional wrinkle to carbon-dating this particular artifact. Since carbon-dating measures the amount of carbon left in a sample, based on a known rate of decline, an event like a fire which adds carbon to an artifact can contaminate the sample and must be taken into account.

III. Four New Scientific Dating Methods

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As stated above, a variety of dating methods place the origins of the Shroud much earlier. Here are some examples:

Vanillin Test

Vanillin is an organic compound that—like carbon—decays with age. Linens from the middle ages typically retained 37% of their vanillin when tested, while older artifacts like the Dead Sea Scrolls had lost all of theirs. Comparison of the Shroud's results with these other linens established a possible age range of 1300 to 3000 years old (i.e. date of origin must be between 1022 BC—678 AD).

Fourier Transformed Infrared Spectroscopy Test of Cellulose Degradation

This test took nine ancient textiles of different ages (from Egypt, Israel, and Peru) as well as two modern fabrics, and tested them to establish the rate at which cellulose (yet another decaying compound) disappears over time. By applying this test to the Shroud and comparing it with the other known samples, a date of origin range for the Shroud was set at 700 BC—100 AD (mean=300 BC).

Raman Laser Spectroscopy Test for Cellulose Degradation

Same kind of test as the previous one, just using a different method (lasers) to probe the same samples and compare results. Date of origin range found in this test: 700 BC—300 AD (mean=200BC).

Mechanical tests of compressibility and breaking strength

These are tests that compare ancient fabrics on physical properties of the fibers, like how much tensile strength individual fibers retain over time. By correlating the Shroud fibers with other known ancient fabrics, the date of origin range produced by this test was 1 AD—800 AD (mean=400 AD). If we average the means of all three of Fanti's tests, the origin of the Shroud might be placed at around 33 BC—very close to the time of Jesus.

IV. Other Indications of the Shroud's Age

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In addition to the above dating methods that place the Shroud somewhere in ancient times, there are also circumstantial indications that point more specifically to the age of Christ.

The presence of pollen grains discovered by Max Frei.

Max Frei is a Swiss botanist and criminologist. He took dust samples from the shroud and identified 58 pollen grains by comparing them to pollen grains in botanical museums. Of the 58 pollen grains, 45 were from Israel (specifically from sediment deposits from 2000 years ago near the Sea of Galilee) including 13 that are unique to that region. 6 grains were from the Middle East (including 2 from Edessa, Turkey and 1 grain unique to Istanbul/Constantinople) and the rest were from France (where the shroud surfaced in the Middle Ages) and Italy (where the shroud is now). The predominance of 2000-year-old, Israel-based pollen not only strongly places the Shroud in the time and region of Christ, it also renders a medieval forgery even more implausible.

The presence of two Roman coins (leptons) on the eyes of the man in the Shroud.

Numismatists have identified partial imprints of coins on the eyes of the shroud. Overlaid photographs correlate these coins with a specific variant of a type of coin minted in Judea in 29 AD by Pontius Pilate. It is hard to conceive of a more pinpointed marker of date and time connecting the Shroud to Christ.

Similarities to the Facecloth of Oviedo (known as the “Sudarium Christi”) indicating that the same face touched both cloths.

The Facecloth of Oviedo is a bloodstained cloth that according to tradition was laid over the face of Christ after his death (this was a typical part of Jewish burial custom). It has been identified with many of the same pollens from ancient Israel as the Shroud, and analysis strongly suggests that it touched the same face as the Shroud did. How do we know this? The bloodstains form a sort of “fingerprint”—when the stains of the Oviedo cloth and the stains of the Shroud are superimposed, they have 120 points of coincidence, meaning the face they touched had an identical pattern of injuries and blood flow.

Why is this significant for dating the Shroud? The Facecloth of Oviedo has a continuous recorded history traceable to 616 AD (compared to the Shroud’s documented history from 1349 AD) so if the two cloths touched the same face, it establishes that the Shroud must be at least as old (616 AD).

When we combine the evidence of the pollen samples, the Roman coins, and the Facecloth of Oviedo with the four new dating methods of Dr. Ray Rogers and Dr. Giulio Fanti, it gives strong probative evidence that the Cloth originated in First Century Palestine around the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. This correlates well with the highly unique crucifixion of Jesus portrayed both on the Shroud and in the Gospels—the crowning with thorns, being nailed to the cross, being pierced with a Roman legionnaire’s spear, and multiple lashes from a three-stranded whip with bone fragments on the end (used by Roman legionnaires). When we combine all the evidence, it seems highly probable that it is in fact the burial cloth of Jesus. The investigation of the images’ formation corroborates this conclusion.

V. The Image on the Shroud

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Finally, there are many striking anomalies about the image that raise significant scientific questions about how it was formed.

- 1. The image is limited to the uppermost surface of the cloth.** The fibers themselves are only discolored on their outermost edge—the image does not penetrate into the fibers anywhere. This doesn’t just exclude paint and dyes—this implies that the image was not produced by chemicals vapors, or scorching of any kind. The most likely remaining explanation is that it was caused by light radiation (but, significantly, not by heat radiation).
- 2. The image is also not a scorch** (but rather discoloration coming from

dehydration). This implies that the image could not have been produced by slowly dissipating radiation (which would have scorched it). So the burst of light radiation would have to be very brief and intense.

3. The image is a perfect photographic negative in which the image intensity is related to the distance of the cloth from the body. Thus, the image was present regardless of whether the cloth touched the body. This again implies that radiation—and not chemicals or vapors—was the source of image formation.

The kind of light radiation that might fit these conditions is called vacuum ultraviolet radiation. And in fact, scientists in 2010 successfully reproduced the kind of surface coloration found on the Shroud by firing a burst of vacuum ultraviolet radiation through an excimer laser at a linen. Based on their results, they concluded that the image produced on the shroud would require a burst of radiation incredibly brief (less than one forty-billionth of a second) and incredibly intense (several billion watts). Such a burst of light energy would be tantamount to focusing one million search lights (ten thousand watts each) on a single spot seven feet in length—exceedingly bright.

We can assume that a medieval forger would not have access to this kind of “firepower.” But for a corpse to emanate such a powerful burst of radiation necessary to produce this image, something very transformative and supernatural must have been occurring in the body in that moment. And if this wasn’t singular enough, there are two more anomalies to consider.

4. Parts of the frontal image—particularly the hands—show an image which is resolvable into three dimensions, in which the inside skeletal parts of the hand are proportionately related to the surrounding exterior flesh on the hand. In other words, the radiation that discolored the cloth was emanating equally from every point of the body, inside and outside. This implies that the cloth collapsed into and through the body.

5. There is a double image on the frontal part of the cloth (a more intense image on the front surface—nearest the body—and a less intense image on the back surface—furthest from the body—without any effects between the two surfaces). This implies that the radiation was surrounding both surfaces of the cloth, further implying that the cloth collapsed into and through the body.

There is obviously no known scientific precedent for a body becoming “mechanically transparent” such that solid objects like cloth can pass through it.

Certainly, by this point, it would be disingenuous to ignore the parallels with the *Soma Pneumatikon* (spiritual body) of the Resurrection when we ponder a body that suddenly produces a burst of billions of watts of radiation in a fraction of a second and at the same instant gains a spirit-like mechanically transparent property, enabling solid matter to pass through it. The need for some kind of transphysical (supernatural) causation and the correlation of these anomalies with the description of Jesus' resurrected spiritual body in the Gospel narratives (and the letters of St. Paul) point quite probatively to the risen Jesus as the origin of the image. When we combine this with the three dimensional image of Jesus' unique crucifixion as well as the probable origin of the cloth in first century Palestine, the evidence strongly corroborates the accuracy of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and glorious resurrection appearance.

VI. Conclusion

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The odds of this First Century Palestinian burial shroud—with the unique features of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection—being that of anyone but Jesus is exceedingly remote.

Inasmuch as the image is not a forgery, and it originated from a real person living at the time of Jesus, crucified in the unique way of Jesus, and producing a burst of intense vacuum ultraviolet radiation from his decomposing body, who else would it be?

Given all this, we might reasonably infer that the Shroud is the burial cloth of Jesus which contains not only a relic of his crucifixion, but also his resurrection in glory. If so, it shows both the truth of the most significant event in human history as well as the accuracy of the Gospel accounts of it.

Chapter Nine: Miracles Associated with Mary, Saints, and the Holy Eucharist

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In Chapter Seven, we mentioned that there were thousands of miracles associated with the risen Jesus (done in His name). Throughout Church history, these miracles have been complemented by those connected with apparitions of His Mother, the intercession of saints, and Eucharistic miracles. We'll review several well-documented and scientifically tested miracles below. Such miracles help show that the risen Jesus is still powerfully

present in our age – manifesting Himself in ways that are open to scientific and medical testing.

People sometimes think miracles require suspension of inviolable physical laws—in other words, believing in miracles requires accepting that God is “breaking” the laws of science. But miracles can be seen as much more orderly interventions: God is simply introducing transphysical (supernatural) causes and events into the natural patterns of physical nature; just like the author of a play might introduce a new line of dialogue. In fact, many scientists view the complexity and regularity of nature’s laws (and the mind’s power to grasp such laws) as itself miraculous, indicating the presence of the same Divine intellect that shows itself in the rare interventions that we commonly call ‘miracles’

I. Three Marian Apparitions

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The Church is quite careful about approving Marian apparitions as valid—in the past 500 years, there have been only nine approved apparitions. Approval requires four criteria:

1. Moral certainty or great probability that something miraculous has occurred (can’t be explained by natural causes or fakery).
2. The person(s) receiving the alleged revelation must be mentally sound, honest, of upright conduct, and obedient to Church authority.
3. The content of the revelation must be theologically and morally sound, free of error.
4. The apparition must yield consistent spiritual benefits: conversion, prayer, etc.

Let’s look at three notable apparitions that received this approval.

I.A The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1531, the Spanish bishop of Mexico City was visited by a native Aztec, Juan Diego, who claimed that the Virgin Mary had appeared to him and told him to ask the bishop to build a church on Tepayac Hill. Skeptical, the bishop told Juan Diego to request a miraculous sign as proof of this apparition. When Juan Diego returned, he told the bishop that the Virgin had sent him to Tepayac Hill where he would find the bishop’s sign. He dramatically opened his cloak to reveal the Spanish roses (not native to Mexico) that he had found growing on the hill. But the more striking sign was on the cloak itself, which was imprinted with an image of the Virgin who had appeared to Juan. Bishop Zumarraga was convinced and built the church. The image, still on display today, has many extraordinary

attributes:

1. It's still intact—the cloak is still structurally sound almost 500 years later. Most replicas of this kind of garment (called a 'tilma') start to disintegrate within 15 years.
2. The image of the Virgin has not been painted—no brush strokes, sketches, or corrections are detectable. It appears to have been produced in a single step, according to analysis by NASA consultant Dr. Philip Callahan.
3. The image is not produced by any known pigment—animal, mineral or vegetable—according to analysis by Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Richard Kuhn.
4. Like the tilma, the original image is intact after 500 years. The paint and gold leaf added onto the image in later years has cracked and flaked, but the image itself, inexplicably, has not.
5. The eyes in the image of the Virgin exhibit scientifically accurate details—the curvature of the cornea, the Samson-Purkinje effect, even a reflection of the Bishop and others present in the room when the tilma was unveiled—that would be difficult for an artist with today's knowledge and tools, let alone an artist in 1531.

Other miracles have been associated with the image over the centuries, including several healings and a remarkable incident in 1921 when a bomb detonated underneath the tilma yet failed to damage it (even though the explosion was strong enough to bend a brass crucifix nearby).

Finally, the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 16th century Mexico carries an enduring spiritual and cultural significance. The message of Our Lady to Juan Diego – filled with love and affection for the native people of the western hemisphere has inspired tens of thousands of people beyond the boundaries of Mexico, and she is now considered to be the patroness of all the Americas.

I.B The Apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes

The appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at the Grotto of Lourdes in 1858 is probably the most well-known Marian apparition in history—not so much because of the apparition itself as the thousands of miraculous cures that have taken place through the water of the Grotto. On February 11, the 14-year-old Bernadette first saw the lady, dressed in white with a blue sash, holding a gold rosary. Speechless and scared, Bernadette was calmed when the lady invited her to pray the rosary with her. Bernadette continued to see the lady several times between February and June, drawing rapidly-growing crowds (especially after the lady revealed a spring whose waters produced many

inexplicable medical healings). Alarmed by this runaway popularity, the state authorities briefly boarded up the grotto before bowing to popular pressure, and the church authorities convened a committee to assess the veracity of Bernadette's apparitions. The apparition was judged authentic in January 1860, and Bernadette was canonized as a saint in 1933. Today, almost 4 million pilgrims per year visit the shrine at Lourdes, and hundreds receive extraordinary and miraculous cures.

I.B.1 The Miraculous Cures

There have been so many miraculous cures reported at Lourdes that a commission of doctors and scientists was established to evaluate such reports. Since 1905, the Lourdes Medical Bureau has recognized 69 documented cures as definitively miraculous—i.e., cures that happened instantaneously, endured throughout life, and were scientifically inexplicable. (Many other cures, of course, are extraordinary or implausible without being definitively inexplicable.) All the bureau's cases are open to review, and information can be found online. Right now, we'll look at three of these cases.

I.B.2 Marie Bailly and Alexis Carrel—1902

The cure of Marie Bailly was witnessed by the physician Dr. Alexis Carrel (who would go on to win the Nobel Prize in 1912 for his innovations in vascular surgery). Marie Bailly suffered from acute tuberculous peritonitis, which visibly distended her abdomen with large hard masses and crippled her with pain. At the spring of Lourdes, three pitchers of water were poured over her abdomen, at which point according to Dr. Carrel's notes, "The enormously distended and very hard abdomen began to flatten and within 30 minutes it had completely disappeared." Marie's pain was gone, and she went on to live an active life working with the sick and the poor as a Sister of Charity.

The dramatic, instantaneous cure made international headlines. Dr. Carrel was an agnostic and skeptic who hesitated to affirm the existence of miracles, but based on what he had seen, he was drawn to keep visiting Lourdes over the years. Eventually, he was moved to recognize the existence of God and of the soul, and he entered the Catholic Church.

I.B.3 Gabriel Gargam—1901

Gabriel Gargam was thrown 52 feet when the train he was riding collided head on with another train traveling at 50mph. After eight months, his injuries had brought him to death's door—a mere 78 pounds with gangrenous feet, Gabriel could only eat once a day through a feeding tube. His Catholic relatives prevailed on him to visit Lourdes, but

in his condition the strain of the trip itself nearly killed him. In fact, he fell into a swoon when he was brought to the waters, and the attendants believed him to be dead. They covered his face and placed him in a carriage, but on the way back to the hotel, the carriage encountered a passing Eucharistic procession, and Gabriel Gargam suddenly sat up of his own power and even got out of the carriage to walk around. On August 20, he was examined by 60 physicians, all of whom pronounced him completely cured. No physical cause could be explained, then or now, for the cure.

I.B.4 John Traynor—1923

A paralyzed right arm with atrophied muscles, partially paralyzed legs, daily epileptic fits, a permanent hole in the skull—John Traynor’s injuries from machine gun fire in World War I were enough to persuade everyone that a trip to Lourdes would kill him. They were almost right. But on his tenth outing at the spring’s baths, he felt his legs stir, and upon a blessing with the Eucharist immediately afterward, his atrophied arm (paralyzed for eight years) became strong enough that he could burst through his bandages, and he stood up and began to walk. His attendants put him to bed, fearing he might hurt himself, but he got up in the middle of the night and ran back to the Grotto to pray. So complete was Traynor’s transformation (even the hole in the skull was closed) that he went into the coal and hauling business, routinely lifting 200-pound sacks. In 1926, the Lourdes Medical Bureau certified that all Traynor’s injuries had been instantly and permanently cured in a scientifically inexplicable way.

I.B.5 Conclusion

The many miraculous healings at Lourdes indicate the Divine power working in the world, and more specifically point to God’s love. Even those pilgrims who don’t receive physical healing at Lourdes often report spiritual renewal. They return to their lives aware of God’s loving presence, helping them with whatever crosses they must bear on the path to eternal life.

And just as Mary’s appearance at Guadalupe showed her motherly care for Juan Diego and the people of the Americas, her appearance at the healing site of Lourdes brings that same motherly care to the afflicted of our own modern age.

Some people avoid a relationship with Mary out of concern to avoid “Mariolatry”—a divinization and worship of Mary. We certainly want to avoid worshiping Mary, but this shouldn’t stop us from appreciating her vital role in the order of salvation. When the Father made all of us adopted children through His Son Jesus, He also made us adopted children

of Jesus' Mother Mary. She accepts us within the divine-human family she initiated through her consent to be the Mother of His Son. We are her children – not just in the first century – but for all time – and the miracles of Guadalupe and Lourdes confirm this logic of familial love.

In fact, Mary's appearance at Lourdes included an affirmation of a doctrine about her role in God's family. She announced herself as "the Immaculate Conception." The phrase probably didn't mean anything to young Bernadette, but it affirms God's special care for Mary as the mother of his Son. ("The Immaculate Conception" refers to God's long-standing providential plan to choose Mary as the mother of His son, and to keep her from being affected by concupiscence—one of the effects of the fall. This would protect Mary's capacity to raise Jesus with a perfected love.)

I.C The Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima

In the spring of 1916 three Portuguese shepherd children – Lucia Santos and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto were visited three times by an angel who identified himself as "The Angel of Peace." The angel taught them prayers and encouraged them to spend time in adoration. On May 13, 1917, the children were visited for the first time by the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Cova da Iria in Fatima, who appeared to them as exceedingly radiant. She wore a white mantle edged with gold, and carried a rosary, telling the children to devote themselves to the Holy Trinity and to daily recitation of the rosary for an end to the First World War. The visions continued monthly until the final apparition on October 13, 1917, at which Mary had promised an extraordinary miracle.

About 50,000 people had gathered to witness this promised miracle. It had been raining and then it began to clear. Lucia shouted, "Look at the sun." The sun appeared to be rotating on its own axis, throwing out a variety of colors, and then it appeared to approach the earth causing many to believe that the world was ending. It then returned to its normal state. Though the ground had been quite wet from the rain prior to the miracle, the sun's activity during the miracle dried the ground significantly, baffling many of the engineers and scientists present. (The amount of energy required for this would be extraordinary).

The miracle was variously described by reporters, doctors, and scientists—you can find several quotes from contemporary newspaper accounts in the Big Book, as well as information on the three books of research Fr. John DeMarchi assembled about the miracle. The phenomenon was witnessed by people within a 40km radius of the site, which is too narrow an area for an astronomical explanation (the whole world would have noticed if the sun itself was moving) and too wide an area for a "mass hallucination" explanation

(some of the witnesses were miles away from the crowd and had no expectation of seeing anything). Ultimately, whether the event was produced by a convergence of highly unusual atmospheric factors (at a time and place somehow predicted months in advance by Lucia) or had a purely supernatural cause (such as a transphysical spinning lens or prism), it seems reasonable to conclude the presence of supernatural power. The miracle serves to verify the apparition and its message of prayer for world peace.

II. Validated Miracles through the Intercession of Contemporary Saints

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There are many well-documented medically confirmed miracles by objective scientific panels that occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries in connection with the canonization of some well-known saints. (Two documented, scientifically-verified miracles are required before sainthood is declared.) Here are a few examples.

II.A A Miracle Attributed to St. Padre Pio

Many miraculous interventions were attributed to Padre Pio during his life, but of course the miracles connected with the canonization process are much more extensively documented and verified. One such miracle was the case of Consiglia De Martino, who was scheduled for emergency surgery after a sudden pain led to a fast-moving growth in her neck. The growth quickly reached the size of a grapefruit, and was found to contain two quarts of fluid from a ruptured lymph canal. Consiglia prayed to Padre Pio and requested prayers at his monastery. The day before the surgery, the pain and swelling rapidly decreased, and a pre-surgery screening by doctors revealed that the fluid and damage had simply disappeared. The surgery was cancelled, and follow-up tests confirmed the complete, permanent and inexplicable cure.

II.B A Miracle Attributed to Fulton J. Sheen

Bonnie and Travis Engstrom were at home for the birth of their son James. When the baby emerged, he was pulseless, his arms and legs flopped to the side and he was blue in color. They discovered that the umbilical cord had become knotted during delivery, cutting off blood, oxygen and nutriment to the baby during the delivery process. The midwife and others urgently performed CPR during the 20 minute wait for the ambulance, but at the hospital, doctors could not resuscitate the baby, and after 61 minutes were about to declare him deceased. Throughout the ordeal, the parents and friends had prayed through the intercession of Archbishop Sheen, and just as death was about to be called, James' heart

began to beat normally. Despite the hour of cardiac arrest and massive oxygen deprivation, James Fulton Engstrom did not go on to manifest the organ failure, brain damage or numerous other disabilities expected, but grew up as a normal healthy child. A panel of medical specialists concluded that this recovery could not be explained by scientifically-known causes.

II.C A Miracle Attributed to St. John Paul II

After a brain aneurysm in April 2011, Floribeth Mora Diez was given one month to live. She began praying for the intercession of John Paul II, whose beatification (the step before canonization) was coincidentally happening on May 1. Floribeth watched the beautification on TV and went to sleep, at which time she had a vision of John Paul II speaking to her, saying “Get Up! Don’t be afraid!” She got out of bed and told her husband what had happened—and that she felt well. Several medical tests confirmed that she was cured and that the cure was scientifically inexplicable.

III. A Contemporary Eucharistic Miracle

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The act of transubstantiation is itself miraculous, but “Eucharistic Miracle” usually refers to rare external signs of Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist—most notably, bleeding hosts, or the transmutation of a consecrated host into a piece of cardiac (heart) muscle tissue. Usually, it’s difficult to preserve the chain of evidence to certify such miracles, but one opportunity came in the diocese of the future Pope Francis in 1996. A consecrated host was found desecrated at the Church of Santa Maria y Caballito Almagro in Buenos Aires Argentina. Fr. Alejandro Pezet placed the host in a glass of water to dissolve (the customary practice in such cases) and left it in the tabernacle. When Fr. Pezet opened the tabernacle a week later, he found the host had been transformed into a piece of bloody tissue which was much larger than the original host. He notified Archbishop Bergoglio, who asked him to have the host professionally photographed. It was decided to keep the host in the tabernacle without any publicity.

After three years, the bloody tissue—unaccountably—had not decomposed. Archbishop Bergoglio asked that the tissue be scientifically examined, and it was sent to a scientific committee in New York (whose members were not told of the source). The committee determined the sample was a fragment of heart muscle taken from the left ventricle. White blood cells were present (indicating the heart was *alive* when the tissue fragment was taken) and embedded in the tissue (indicating great stress to the heart, as from the

person's chest being severely beaten). The blood type was AB positive, consistent with both the Shroud of Turin and the Facecloth of Oviedo. The moral and logistical barriers to taking a tissue sample that meets these criteria and keeping it intact for three years in an ordinary tabernacle would certainly seem to point to a Eucharistic miracle. It can scarcely be imagined that the Church would torture a person, then surgically remove a piece of the wall his left ventricle (while he was still alive, and which would have ultimately killed him) in order to “fake” a Eucharistic miracle. Inasmuch as this is out of the question, then the appearance of that tissue in place of the Eucharistic host would appear to be a miracle manifesting the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

IV. Conclusion

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The above three Marian apparitions (and the miracles associated with them), the three intercessory miracles of the saints, and the Eucharistic miracle witnessed by (now) Pope Francis, are but a very small sample of miracles manifest in the 20th century. They are recounted here because they have been subject to considerable scientific scrutiny by experts who are believers and non-believers. Such miracles not only help to give credence to Christian faith, the risen Jesus, and His real presence in the Eucharist, but also ground the rich theology of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints that constitute the mystical body and the living tradition of the Catholic Church.

Our interactions with Mary and the saints help us experience God's love and goodness, just as we often experience God's love and goodness through the kindness and beauty of our friends and family in our communities here below.

As we contemplate the life of the Virgin Mary and include her in our prayers – and further contemplate the lives of the saints, in their goodness, holiness and love, we put a prism in front of the light of God's unrestricted glory making it a myriad of interwoven colors and shapes – a veritable symphony of holiness and love. The above miracles not only serve to validate this view of the God of Jesus Christ, but also reveal the same beauty that they validate. Miracles – scientifically and naturally inexplicable events occurring through apparitions and prayer—validate the truth of God's presence, goodness, and love. They fill us with wonder, awe, fascination, and delight – the very thing lacking in a purely mundane materialistic view of reality. If we are to enjoy their richness to the full, we will also want to practice devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (through the rosary) and allow ourselves to be moved by lives of the saints who reflect the glory and grandeur of God. Above all,

we will want to have particular devotion to the Holy Eucharist, which is the real presence of Jesus' body and blood miraculously manifest through the Catholic Church He initiated 2,000 years ago (See Volume VI). We will discuss these devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, and the Eucharist in Volume 12.