

Evidence for mystical encounters of the Green kind.

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Michael Green's article entitled, "*Evidence for the Resurrection*" which appeared in the Christ Church Blairgowrie Church Bulletin of APRIL/MAY 2002, on page 3, which I have included in the appendix, refers.

From an interview [www.jesus.org.uk/talking/mgreen.html] with Jesus Fellowship (UK), Michael Green is currently (?) Advisor on Evangelism to the Archbishop of Canterbury and York. He was previously Principal of St. John's College, Nottingham; Rector of St Aldates, Oxford; then Professor of Evangelism and New Testament at Regents College, Vancouver, Canada's largest theological institution. He has written 34 books. He works for Springboard, the Anglican evangelisation effort. Mr Green is a grandpa!

In the above article, Mr. Green lists a number of "facts"-----

- (1) Jesus was really dead.
- (2) The tomb was found empty.
- (3) Jesus appeared after His death to many witnesses.
- (4) The Christian Church owes its origin to the resurrection.
- (5) Many, many people have encountered the living Jesus, and have been changed by Him,

----to buttress his case for the resurrection.

Mr. Green apparently believes if one needs to know the resurrection occurred or not, one needs just examine the "evidence". This is called the empirical method. Science is built on Mr Green's principle. Empiricism has a long history, starting with Aristotle, then to Aquinas on to Hume. Empiricism has been criticised and shown to lead to scepticism and not certainty in knowledge. One of the difficulties in empiricism is defining a "fact" or "evidence." There is no such thing as a "pure fact or observation". We always need prior knowledge to make sense of our observations, which "colours" what we observe. Mr Green either chose to ignore these criticisms or he has an answer to Hume's arguments for instance, which he has decided not to publish, or is simply ignorant! Since the resurrection was a once off occurrence, an unnatural one for that matter (a miracle), it is difficult to see how a natural proof for it can be constructed.

Strictly speaking, the Bible records are testimony rather than evidence. It is someone else's word (testimony) that we have to rely upon. Evidence would be something that we see, feel or smell directly with our own senses. We must therefore look to the Bible to see how the matter is to be handled.

The Bible says we must accept it on its own authority!

On the story of Lazarus and the rich man, *Luke 16:19-31*, the rich man begs Abraham to send someone from the dead to warn his brothers about the reality of judgement (*verses 27-28*) and retribution; to which Abraham replies, "*They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*" An empirical observation, even a miracle of rising from the dead, cannot lead one to believe the truth, Abraham is saying. Abraham was apparently not an empiricist (or evidentialist). Seeing is not believing. To put it another way, an experience does not carry its own intrinsic authority. You cannot arrive at the truth through experience. **Experience is not self-authenticating.** Abraham commends us to "Moses and the Prophets", the Bible. **God has given the Bible as the final authoritative source of truth.** It is His Word. Since

God cannot lie, it is (the Bible) the truth. God has spoken and told us what we need to know. Truth is a free gift from God.

When the Jews demanded for a sign (an empirical proof) from Jesus that he was the Messiah, Jesus told them no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah the prophet. *Luke 11:29*; “*And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.*” Jesus referred them to the Bible. That is where they would learn that Jesus would rise from the dead after three days, as the prophet Jonah was three days in the belly of the fish. An empirical observation of the resurrection without scriptural foundation would not be of any use!

In spite of the miracles that Jesus performed, the Jews did not believe that He was the promised Messiah, a demonstration that seeing is not believing. *John 6:36*; “*But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not.*” Jesus said the Jews did not believe him because they did not believe Moses (the Scriptures). *John 6:46-47*; “*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*”

He said it is the scriptures that testified of Him and that is where they would have had to go to know who He was. Jesus further explained that they could not believe in Him because they were not of His sheep (those God had chosen, to believe in Him). *John 10:26-27*; “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*” Faith or believing the truth is a gift from God. It is a matter of election or predestination. One has to be appointed by God to believe the truth. Only the elect can believe the truth.

When Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do people say that I am?*” *Mathew 16:13-17*; The disciples answered, “*Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*” “*But who do you say that I am?*” Peter answered, “*Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God*”. Jesus said to Peter, “*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven*”. Jesus says here that the knowledge of who He is, is from the Father. It is not arrived at by empirical method (flesh and blood). It is not of a natural source. God had to reveal it to Peter, hence to any of us who are believers.

After his resurrection, Jesus joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were discussing recent events, that is, Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent reports of His empty tomb. *Luke 24:13-33*; Jesus did not appeal to “evidence” to convince them that indeed he had risen from the dead. The Bible says, in verse 25-27, “*Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*” At dinner they recognised Him and He vanished from their sight. Jesus relied on the authority of scripture to teach these two disciples about His own resurrection. We must therefore conclude that Jesus’ post resurrection appearances were not primarily to provide the disciples with empirical proof of his resurrection but to spruce up their theology; to prove to them from scripture that He must necessarily rise from the dead. He had to teach them about the resurrection from the Bible. This was the source of the disciples’ conviction and not just His appearances, as Mr Green seems to think. Most of the time they freaked out when He appeared to them. They even went back to fishing. As Jesus said to Thomas, “*Blessed are those that have not seen yet have believed.*” Jesus was “evidently” not an empiricist (evidentialist).

On his last point Mr Green says, *“It is not a matter of accepting one doctrine among many and defending it. It is a question of experience. I have come to this life changing encounter with Him.”* Mr Green says it is a question of experience, an experience that he calls an “encounter”, which he claims he has had. This is where Mr Green departs completely from the land of the orthodox and plunges into the murky twilight zone of subjective experience. Just what is an “encounter” with Jesus? Mr Green deprecates doctrine and suggests some mystical experience, “an encounter”, as the final test of the truth of the resurrection. As we have shown above, the proof is not in the pudding (in experience), it is in the recipe (in the Word of God). In fact, Mr Green contradicts himself. By deprecating Biblical doctrine and replacing it with an “encounter”, he has in fact just replaced the Word of God with another doctrine.

The Bible says we are to believe the Gospel to be justified, not to seek for some experience. Paul writes in *Romans 4:3*; *“What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him as righteousness.”* Abraham believed the word of God and he was justified! Mr Green suggests experience. This is an addition to scripture, which the Bible forbids! Mr Green is preaching ‘another Gospel’ and not that which was preached by Jesus and the Apostles. The object of belief is truth. The Gospel as given to us by the apostles and the Lord is a matter of truth, which is expressed as teaching or doctrines given in the Bible. Deprecating doctrine destroys Christianity, for Christianity is truth, the WORD of God. The truth is the WORD and not some experience. The question is, “What do you believe?” and not “Have you had such and such an experience?” There are many who think it is a sign of piety to sloganeer, “Not creeds but Christ!” or “Jesus not exegesis!” to which the apt reply should be, “Which Christ? Which Jesus?” If the word Christ is emptied of its scriptural content (doctrine), then there is at best nothing behind this Christ (of experience) and at worst a demonic counterfeit. It is the Christ of the Chalcedony creed who saves and not the Christ of Barth and Bruner. As we have noted above, this anti-doctrinal attitude is in itself a doctrine, except it is what the Bible calls “doctrines of devils”. This is typical satanic sophistry.

This “encounter” theology has a history. Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested a religion based on experience. Schleiermacher taught that truth is arrived at through a religious experience and not by belief in propositions, certainly not propositions in scripture. This was a development or modification of Soren Kierkegaard who had taught before him that the Bible does not make sense. He said it was full of contradictions (paradoxes). The only way to deal with the contradictions or paradoxes in the Bible is to accept it with a blind leap of faith (more like the way some people get married!). Kierkegaard developed this attitude towards the Bible after rejecting Hegel’s Rationalism. Philosophers before and up to Hegel had believed that truth is rational and can be known although they had trouble justifying their optimism (they could not justify knowledge). Their philosophies, although differing in detail and even conflicting, can be summarised by saying that they believed that with a handful of axioms and logic one could proceed to derive all of life (by reason alone). Soren believed Hegel mistaken and went on to reject logic or rationality and posited irrationality as the way forward! His disciples, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner built their theology on Kierkegaard’s irrationalism and accepted paradox in the Bible. They said, however not all is lost, and with a little help from Schleiermacher’s suggestion of a religion based on experience, we can still have “an encounter with God”. They said the Word of God was not literally true but only a pointer to the Truth. Therefore the Bible can be myth or paradox or plain lies that should not bother anybody. One should look for an “encounter with God”, which the myths in the Bible point to. If one

points to the apparent difficulty in a contradictory book “pointing” to anything at all, let alone an “encounter with God”, these gentleman will tell you how mistaken you are. It is not what you believe, they will reply, but how you believe. Kierkegaard called it infinite passion. This is the source of much subjectivism in Christendom such as in Pentecostalism and Charismania. People do not believe that it matters that much what they believe as long as they can testify to a string of experiences. If, as Kierkegaard, Barth and Brunner taught, it does not matter what we believe, then we might as well believe that the Bible is literal truth and that we are justified by faith in Christ Jesus, and stick to Reformation theology and the historic confessions of the Church, thank you very much!

Conclusion

My point in all this is that, in spite of Mr Green’s pious language, there is nothing Christian about his message. This is not the message of Easter at all. Mr Green’s apparent empiricism (naïve evidentialism) is the source of much subjectivism in Christendom today. People seek for “signs and wonders” and material success (health and wealth) as “tangible evidence” for God’s approval. This is recycled Roman Catholic superstition and fetishism; the crying statues, the Virgin Mary’s apparitions, levitation and various “miracles”. It is the same error thinly disguised as something new. In contrast, the Bible says God’s word alone is sufficient. Mr Green would have us play down the objective Word of God (doctrine) and rely on subjective mystical experience (encounter). Mr Green does not even tell us how we will know that we have had a genuine “encounter” with God. Mr Green believes “another” Gospel and not the one handed down to us by the Lord and His Apostles. Its source is the insane world of empiricism, irrationalism, Neo-Orthodoxy and subjective experience!

Truth and assurance rests on knowing and believing the certain Word of God only! It is not the Word of God plus some experience, but **sola scripta**! And borrowing from teen-age wisdom, “Mr Green’s theology really sucks!”