

have died of suffocation. Breathing during crucifixion required the active raising of the body on the nailed arms and legs. This was the exquisite torture of this method of execution. (Hence the breaking of the legs to hasten death.) Once Jesus had swooned He would no longer be able to breath and death would rapidly supervene.

The handling of the evidence on the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection is also open to criticism. The statement that 'with the exception of the Ascension, no-one saw (visualised) him' is not in keeping with the text. Accepting that 'horao' may carry the meaning of seeing with the mind as well as its primary meaning of to see or to behold (as does our own verb to see), it is not true to say that this is the only verb used of the disciples' experience of the Risen Christ. The verb 'theoreo' (meaning to view with attention, to inspect) is used in some instances [8]. Further, the circumstantial details given suggest a real presence and not a psychological experience; hallucinations do not commonly prepare breakfast for those experiencing them [9]. The subject demands more discussion than can be afforded here but the evidence is readily available to anyone wishing to investigate the matter for themselves.

The fact of the death of Jesus on the cross is of central importance in the Christian faith. In the face of all the suffering in the world, we base our belief in a God of love on the fact of Jesus 'voluntary death for us on the cross' [10]. The attempt to show that Jesus did not actually die raises the possibility of major theological problems. I submit that the attempt has failed to achieve its purpose on scientific and literary grounds. The traditional Christian faith, accepting as it does the intervention of God as a cause for the resurrection, requires less credulity than this attempt at rationalisation.

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- 7 John 19:35.
- 8 John 20:14.
- 9 John 21:9.
- 10 Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:7-10.

Resurrection or Resuscitation?

Sir—It is regrettable that a recent article in the *Journal* [1] should have given credence to a tenuous hypothesis first propounded by Venturini at the end of the 18th century [2]. The suggestion that resuscitation rather than resurrection explains the events of the Easter period does not stand up to historical, medical or theological examination.

Historically, Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies [1] suggest that the body of Jesus was not placed in the tomb and that, apart from the ascension, no one saw the risen Christ. Among other writers Luke, a physician and frequently acclaimed historian, presents the historical facts showing how the unbelieving followers of Jesus came to believe. He emphasises the physical nature of the resurrection, describing the Jesus of flesh and bone, who ate fish in their presence [3]. Thomas was as dubious as Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies, until he was confronted by the risen Christ with an invitation to stretch out his hand and feel the wounds of Jesus—then he cried, 'My Lord and my God'.

The medical likelihood of resuscitation, which received an even more bizarre twist in Hugh Schoenfield's 'The Passover Plot' [4], is so remote as to be untenable [5-8]. Jesus was scourged before crucifixion—a many thonged leather whip in the ends of which were embedded metal and bone—inflicted horrific injuries. Someone else was forced to carry his cross, doubtless because he was too weak to do so. Despite this, six hours was a short period for death to ensue. But to make doubly sure, since his job depended on it, the centurion (a professional executioner) thrust his spear into the side of Jesus. We then have the interesting medical detail, 'there came out blood and water' [9]. The likelihood is that the upward thrust of the spear pierced the diaphragm, a pleural or pericardial effusion [10], and then the heart. If so, Christ undoubtedly died [10, 11].

The rationalists of the 18th century, however, asked us to believe that the body was taken, bound tightly with graveclothes and put in the tomb without food and water for three days. Jesus then recovered sufficient strength to unwrap the graveclothes, roll away a stone which was too heavy for two women to move, and appear to his disciples in such a way that they believed he had returned from the dead.

Moreover, it would make Jesus (regarded as the greatest moral teacher of all times) party to the greatest hoax foisted on mankind. It is interesting that the most vigorous defendants of the resurrection have been lawyers [2, 5, 11-14], ranging from a Professor of Oriental Laws [2] to a sceptic who determined with the acumen of a legal mind to disprove the resurrection, but the opening chapter of whose book was entitled 'The Book That Refused to be Written' [13]. Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies [1] ask, 'If he was dead, how did the Romans and Sanhedrin, both of whom

had all-pervading intelligence organisations, fail to find the body?' The answer is obvious, he rose from the dead. It is on that rock all manner of alternative views have foundered.

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Resurrection or Resuscitation?

Sir—In arguing that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a case of resuscitation Dr Lloyd Davies and Mrs Margaret Davies claim to accept the historical events surrounding the crucifixion. But by repudiating large parts of the Gospel records they show a complete contempt for the historical record.

The only detailed accounts of the crucifixion are contained in the New Testament. The New Testament is the best documented of all ancient writings; manuscripts date back to the early part of the second century. Therefore any speculation on the events of the crucifixion which contradict the historical record is a work of fiction.

The authors have re-stated an old theory (the article contains nothing new) and whenever the Gospel record contradicts their theory they reject the record. Thus we are informed that the spear thrust into the side of Jesus was a soldier pricking a blister, that Jesus speaking in a loud voice from the cross was the exhalation of a dying man, that Jesus was not laid in a tomb, that no-one actually saw Jesus after his resurrection and that his encounters with his followers were hallucinations.

Their theory is logically flawed because if Jesus had been taken down from the cross and revived by friends then his followers would have seen him afterwards and would not have been hallucinating.

Moreover, can we believe that this quintessentially honest man could make bogus claims about his resurrection from the dead, knowing that he had not died?

Furthermore the hallucination theory is implausible because hallucinations arise from expectations or wishful thinking, whereas the record tells us that the followers of Jesus had abandoned hope and it was only with difficulty that he persuaded them that he was a real person, not a ghost.

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Deceased or deceit?

Sir—The article 'Resurrection or resuscitation' by Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies in the April issue of the Journal puts forward an hypothesis (that Jesus collapsed and was removed from the Cross, later to be resuscitated) that is far from novel (eg Paulus 1828) and has been propounded with variations many times; in recent years, for example, Schoenfield [1]. Whilst this may appear an appropriate physiological explanation for the events as narrated by the gospel writers, (though resuscitation some two hours after profound and sustained syncope, with the victim vertical, in agony and unable effectively to use the muscles of respiration, seems most unlikely to me), it falls far short of offering a plausible explanation of subsequent historical events. The authors quite rightly state that 'faith does not require the abandonment of thought' but in stretching credulity to the limit they appeal to this very thing!

Both the Jewish religious and the Roman administrative authorities would have been at great pains to avoid such an untidy conclusion to the Jesus saga. Moreover, if Jesus was indeed smuggled away, later to be revived, is it likely that this would have remained a well-kept secret amongst his many followers? After all, the gospel narratives make it clear that they did not then understand the significance of these events and none would have wished him dead if he were not. His fame was such that he could not simply be hidden indefinitely. Later sightings would have attracted attention. What of his subsequent death? And which of the interested parties might have been responsible for resuscitation and rehabilitation? Not the establishment of the day and not followers who would later willingly die for a lie! On the other hand, if resuscitation failed and he was later buried in secret, is it likely that many of those party to these events would have spent their remaining lives proclaiming a false message, often dying a similar death in order to attest the veracity of the facts, the significance of which they later appreciated and themselves recorded, (eg, the Apostle Peter [2])?