

Dataset Analysis of English Texts Written on the Topic of Jesus' Resurrection: A Statistical Critique of Minimal Facts Apologetics

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Abstract: This article collects and examines data relating to the authors of English-language texts written and published during the past 500 years on the subject of Jesus' resurrection and then compares this data to Gary R. Habermas' 2005 and 2012 publication on the subject. To date, there has been no such inquiry. This present article identifies 735 texts spanning five centuries (from approximately 1500 to 2020). The data reveals 680 Pro-Resurrection books by 601 authors (204 by ministers, 146 by priests, 249 by people associated with seminaries, 70 by laypersons, and 22 by women). This article also reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus' resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one. In contrast, the 55 Contra-Resurrection books, representing 7.48% of the total 735 books, were by 42 authors (28 having no relevant degrees at the time of publication). The 42 contra authors represent only 6.99% of all authors writing on the subject.

Keywords: Resurrection, Gary R. Habermas, Minimal Facts, Historical Jesus, Apologetics

Introduction

Glenn Siniscalchi is currently an assistant professor of theology at Notre Dame College, South Bend, Ohio. He made the following observation in a 2019 book review that appeared in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*: “One of the common objections to the reliability of the Gospels is that they were written by committed believers whose bias prevented them from telling us the truth about Jesus. Apparently, the weight of this objection is only

compounded by the fact that most scholars of the historical Jesus are influenced by ecclesiastical presuppositions.”¹

Is this objection a fair one? The present article will focus on examining the ecclesiastical affiliation of book authors writing on the topic of Jesus’ resurrection. To date, there has been no previous publications on the topic. A review of several pertinent writings serves as a springboard for this research.

In recent years, several Christian apologists (most notably, Gary R. Habermas) have claimed that a solid majority (about 75%) of scholars who have published books or articles on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection accept the historicity of the empty tomb. Surprisingly, this present article reveals that if we examine the authors who have published books in English on the topic of Jesus’ resurrection, the 75% figure is, if anything, an underestimate. At first sight, this finding may seem to support the Christian apologist’s claim of a solid scholarly consensus in favor of the empty tomb and Jesus’ resurrection.

Digging deeper, however, a different picture emerges. This present article reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus’ resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. Moreover, those Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one. In other words, most scholarly books written on the resurrection are by committed Christians, and we may legitimately presume that most of them already accepted the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection long before they became scholars.² Indeed, apologist Gregory Koukl admits that most apologists first came to faith through personal experiences, not evidence.³

Since belief in the empty tomb is a central tenet of orthodox Christian belief, it is fair to conclude that most scholars who believe Jesus’ tomb was empty on Easter Sunday were likely raised with this belief. Their acceptance of

¹ Siniscalchi, “Jewish Scholarship on the Resurrection,” 742–43.

² This is, in fact, the case with apologist Gary Habermas, who regularly shares stories with his students about being a committed Christian in his youth long before obtaining a college degree. As fellow apologist John Frame once observed, “Habermas in the end presupposes a Christian view of evidence and probability” (Frame, “A Presuppositionalist’s Response,” 137).

³ Koukl, *Tactics*, 55. Tony Campolo also confesses, “My apologetic, I explained, was determined by an *a priori* commitment. I believed first, then constructed arguments to support what I believed....In the end, isn’t what we believe more highly contingent upon decisions we make rather than on empirical evidence?” (McLaren and Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 108).

Jewish Converts: Pro Resurrection (BV620)	24	Jewish Detractors: Con Resurrection (BM590—591; BM648)	87
The Gospel of Mark: Pro (BS2585)	406	The Gospel of Mark: Con	0
The Gospel of Matthew: Pro (BS2555–2575)	390	The Gospel of Matthew: Con	0
The Gospel of Luke: Pro (BS2595; BS2775)	424	The Gospel of Luke: Con	0
The Gospel of John: Pro (BS2615–2616)	434	The Gospel of John: Con	0
The Acts of the Apostles: Pro (BS2625–2626)	327	The Acts of the Apostles: Con (BS2625)	1 (Gerd Lüdemann)
1 Corinthians 15: Pro (BS2640–2765)	306	1 Corinthians 15: Con	0
The Apostles’ Creed: Pro (BT990–1040)	203	The Apostles’ Creed: Con	0
Doctrines, Dogmatics, and Systematic Theology: Pro (BT19–37; BT77–98; BX1749–1752; BX8000s)	483	Doctrines, Dogmatics, and Systematic Theology: Con	0
Dissertations, Theses, and Papers: Pro	317	Dissertations, Theses, and Papers: Con [NB. This subcategory did exist. The data was gathered by reexamining subcategory 32.	1 (Robert Greg Cavin)
* Total Texts, Not Total Authors	5749		634

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

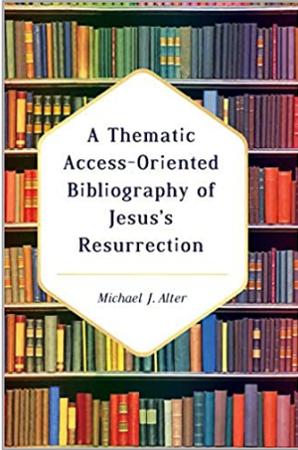
Michael J. Alter was a teacher for over forty years in the Miami-Dade County Public School System. He published *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus’s Resurrection* with Resource Publications (2020). His 602-page text identified approximately 7,000 English-language sources from books on that subject. Five years earlier, he penned *The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry* (2015) and has assisted in editing several other texts. Alter has also published with Jason Aronson, *Why the Torah Begins with the Letter Beit* (1998) and *What Is The Purpose Of Creation? A Jewish Anthology* (1991). Both books were the main selection of “The Jewish Book Club.”

Darren M. Slade (PhD) is a former Liberty University student who studied directly under Gary Habermas and took several doctoral-level courses in Habermas’ minimal facts apologetic method. Dr. Slade is President of the Global Center for Religious Research (GCRR), Adjunct Professor of Humanities at the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, and is Director of the North American Committee on Religious Trauma Research. His other academic publications include investigations into Islamic history, church history, ancient Near-Eastern hermeneutics, and the philosophy of ethics.

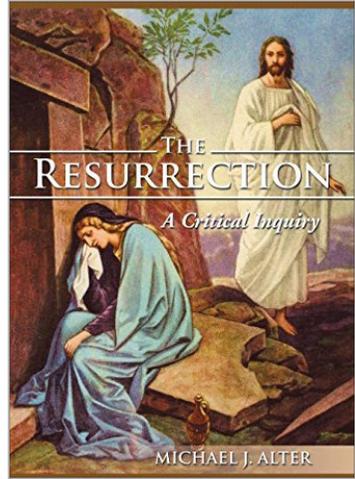
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank Dr. Vincent Torley for his valuable comments and assistance in editing the first draft.

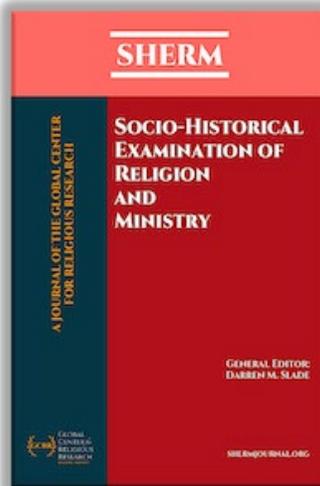
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