The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
Part I—Can It Persuade Skeptics?

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

Among the religions of the world, Christianity is unique in many ways. One area of uniqueness concerns the evidence supporting its basic claims. As lawyer, theologian, and philosopher Dr. John Warwick Montgomery points out, “The historic Christian claim differs qualitatively from the claims of all other world religions at the epistemological point: on the issue of testability.” In other words, only Christianity stakes its claim to truthfulness on historical events open to critical investigation. And only this explains the number of conversions by skeptics throughout history.

Indeed, other religions in the world are believed in despite the lack of genuine evidence for their truth claims; only Christianity can claim credibility because of such evidence. Regrettably, what is often overlooked in the field of comparative religion today is that no genuinely historical/objective evidence exists for the foundational religious claims of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or any religion other than Christianity. As scientist, Christian apologist and biblical commentator Dr. Henry Morris observes, “As a matter of fact, the entire subject of evidences is almost exclusively the domain of Christian evidences. Other religions depend on subjective experience and blind faith, tradition and opinion. Christianity stands or falls upon the objective reality of gigantic supernatural events in history and the evidences therefore. This fact in itself is an evidence of its truth.”

Evidence is defined in the Oxford American Dictionary as, “1) anything that establishes a fact or gives reason for believing something, 2) statements made or objects produced in a law court as proof or to support a case.” One of the most interesting evidences for the truth of Christianity and, in particular, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the testimony of former skeptics, many of whom attempted to disprove Christian faith. In this article we will supply several examples. We hope this will not only be an encouragement for Christians to take their faith seriously, but that it will also spur non-Christians to earnestly examine the claims of Christ on their own lives.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Lord George Lyttelton (a member of Parliament and Commissioner of the Treasury) and Gilbert West, Esq., went to Oxford. There, they were determined to attack the very basis of Christianity. Lyttelton set out to prove that Saul of Tarsus was never really converted to Christianity, and West intended to demonstrate that Jesus never really rose from the dead. Each had planned to do a painstaking job, taking a year to establish his case. But as they proceeded, they eventually concluded that Christiani

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West eventually wrote Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 747). George Lyttelton wrote a lengthy text titled The Conversion of St. Paul (rpt. 1929). Their correspondence back and forth, showing their surprise at the quality of the evidence, can be found in any university microfilm library. West became totally convinced of the truth of the Resurrection, and Lyttelton of the genuine conversion of Saint Paul on the basis of it. For example, Lyttelton wrote to West in 1761, “Sir, in a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his reflection by all the other apostles, I thought the conversion and apostleship of Saint Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity a divine revelation.”

In the 1930s a rationalistic English journalist named Frank Morison attempted to discover the “real” Jesus Christ. He was convinced that Christ’s “history rested upon very insecure
foundations”—largely because of the influence of the rationalistic higher criticism so prevalent in his day. Further, he was dogmatically opposed to the miraculous elements in the Gospels. But he was nevertheless fascinated by the person of Jesus, who was to him “an almost legendary figure of purity and noble manhood.”

Morison decided to take the crucial “last phase” in the life of Christ and “to strip it of its overgrowth of primitive beliefs and dogmatic suppositions, and to see this supremely great Person as he really was…. It seemed to me that if I could come at the truth why this man died a cruel death at the hands of the Roman Power, how he himself regarded the matter, and especially how he behaved under the test, I should be very near to the true solution of the problem.”

But the book that Morison ended up writing was not the one he intended. He proceeded to write one of the most able defenses of the Resurrection of Christ in our time, Who Moved the Stone?

Giovanni Papini was one of the foremost Italian intellects of his period, an atheist and vocal enemy of the Church and self-appointed debunker of religion. But he became converted to faith in Christ and in 1921 penned his Life of Christ, stunning most of his friends and admirers.

The Cambridge scholar C. S. Lewis, a former atheist, was converted to Christianity on the basis of the evidence, according to his text Surprised by Joy. He recalls, “I thought I had the Christians ‘placed’ and disposed of forever.” But, “A young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere—‘Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,’” as Herbert says, ‘Fine nets and stratagems.’ God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous.

But C. S. Lewis became a Christian because the evidence was compelling and he could not escape it. Even against his will he was “brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting [my] eyes in every direction for a chance of escape.” The God “whom I so earnestly desired not to meet” became His Lord and Savior. His book on Christian evidences, Mere Christianity, is considered a classic and has been responsible for converting thousands to the faith, among them the keen legal mind of former skeptic and Watergate figure Charles Colson, author of Born Again.

As a pre-law student, Josh McDowell was also a skeptic of Christianity and believed that every Christian had two minds: one was lost while the other was out looking for it. Eventually challenged to intellectually investigate the Christian truth claims, and thinking this a farce, he accepted the challenge and “as a result, I found historical facts and evidence about Jesus Christ that I never knew existed.” He eventually wrote a number of important texts in defense of Christianity, among them Evidence That Demands a Verdict, More Evidence That Demands a Verdict, More Than a Carpenter and Daniel in the Lion’s Den.

Dr. Gary Habermas was raised a Christian. But he soon questioned his faith. He concluded that while the Resurrection might be believed, he personally doubted it and was skeptical that any evidence for it was really convincing. But after critical examination, it was the evidence that brought him around and he concluded the Resurrection was an established fact of history. He proceeded to write four important books in defense of the Resurrection: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus; The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry; The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic; and Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate.

As a brilliant philosophy student at Cornell University, John Warwick Montgomery was a convinced skeptic when it came to Christianity. But he, too, was challenged to investigate the evidence for Christianity. As a result, he became converted. He recalls, “I went to the university as a ‘garden-variety’ 20th century pagan. And as a result of being forced, for intellectual integrity’s sake, to check out this evidence, I finally came around.” He confessed that had it not been for a committed undergraduate student who continued to challenge him to really examine the evidence, he would never have believed: “I thank God that he cared enough to do the reading to become a good apologist because if I hadn’t had someone like that I don’t know if I would have become a
Christian.”

Montgomery went on to graduate from Cornell University with distinction in philosophy, Phi Beta Kappa. Then he went on to earn the Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, a second doctorate in theology from the University of Strasbourg, France, plus seven additional graduate degrees in theology, law, library science and other fields. He has written over 125 scholarly journal articles, plus 40 books, many of them defending Christian faith against skeptical views. He has held numerous prestigious appointments, is a founding member of the World Association of Law Professors, a member of the American Society of International Law and is honored in Who's Who in America, Who's Who in American Law, The Directory of American Scholars, International Scholars’ Directory, Who's Who in France, Who's Who in Europe, and Who's Who in the World. There are many individuals with the kind of background and philosophical premises as Dr. Montgomery. They simply do not believe in Christianity apart from sufficient evidence.

Among great literary writers, few can match the brilliance of famous author Malcolm Muggeridge. He, too, was once a skeptic of Christianity. But near the end of his life he became fully convinced of the truth of the Resurrection of Christ, writing a book acclaimed by critics, Jesus: The Man Who Lives (1975). He wrote, “The coming of Jesus into the world is the most stupendous event in human history....” and “What is unique about Jesus is that, on the testimony and in the experience of innumerable people, of all sorts and conditions, of all races and nationalities from the simplest and most primitive to the most sophisticated and cultivated, he remains alive.” Muggeridge concludes, “That the Resurrection happened... seems to be indubitably true” and “Either Jesus never was or he still is.... with the utmost certainty, I assert he still is.”

The famous scholar and archaeologist, Sir William Ramsay, was educated at Oxford and a Professor at both Oxford and Cambridge. He received gold medals from Pope Leo XII, the University of Pennsylvania, the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and was knighted in 1906. He was once a skeptic of Christianity, convinced that the Bible was fraudulent.

“He had spent years deliberately preparing himself for the announced task of heading an exploration expedition into Asia Minor and Palestine, the home of the Bible, where he would ‘dig up the evidence’ that the Book was the product of ambitious monks, and not the Book from heaven it claimed to be. He regarded the weakest spot in the whole New Testament to be the story of Paul’s travels. These had never been thoroughly investigated by one on the spot. Equipped as no other man had been, he went to the home of the Bible. Here he spent fifteen years literally ‘digging for the evidence.’ Then in 1896 he published a large volume, Saint Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen.

“The book caused a furor of dismay among the skeptics of the world. Its attitude was utterly unexpected because it was contrary to the announced intention of the author years before.... for twenty years more, book after book from the same author came from the press, each filled with additional evidence of the exact, minute truthfulness of the whole New Testament as tested by the spade on the spot. The evidence was so overwhelming that many infidels announced their repudiation of their former unbelief and accepted Christianity. And these books have stood the test of time, not one having been refuted, nor have I found even any attempt to refute them.”

Ramsay’s own archaeological findings convinced him of the reliability of the Bible and the truth of what it taught. In his The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament and other books, he shows why he came to conclude that, e.g., “Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness” and that “Luke is a historian of the first rank.... In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”

One of the greatest classical scholars of our century, the outstanding authority on Homer, Dr. John A. Scott, Professor of Greek at Northwestern University for some 40 years, at one time
president of the American Philosophical Association as well as president of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South, wrote a book at the age of seventy, concluding a lifetime of ripened convictions, *We Would See Jesus*. He, too, was convinced that Luke was an accurate historian: “Luke was not only a doctor and historian, but he was one of the world’s greatest men of letters. He wrote the clearest and the best Greek written in that century.”

Here we have two of the greatest intellects of recent time (Ramsay and Scott), among many that could be cited, vouching for the historical accuracy and integrity of the Apostle Luke, who wrote not only the Gospel of Luke, but the Book of Acts as well. In the latter book he claimed that the Resurrection of Christ had been established “by many convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3). It is only by means of such *convincing* proofs that skeptics such as the above individuals could have ever been converted in the first place. Indeed, the entire history of Christianity involves the conversion of skeptics to Christian faith.

Unfortunately, however, there are also plenty of scholars who have the evidence laid out clearly before them and still do not believe. For example, Michael Grant, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, Professor of Humanity at Edinburgh University, and President and Vice Chancellor of the Queens University, Belfast, holds doctorates from Cambridge, Dublin and Belfast and is the author of numerous books, among them *The Twelve Caesars*, and *The Army of the Caesars*. In his book *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels*, he fully admits, “But if we apply the same sort of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient literary sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty.”

But he does not believe in the Resurrection: “Who had taken the body? There is no way of knowing.... at all events, it was gone.” Yet he proceeds to show how the subsequent events of Christian history astonish the historian, “For by conquering the Roman Empire in the fourth century A.D., Christianity had conquered the entire Western World, for century after century that lay ahead. In a triumph that has been hailed by its advocates as miraculous, and must be regarded by historians, too, as one of the most astonishing phenomena in the history of the world, the despised, reviled Galilean became the Lord of countless millions of people over the course of the 1900 years and more between his age and ours.”

Still, perhaps if Dr. Grant had been both a historian and a lawyer, he might have better understood the reason for, in his words, “the most astonishing phenomena in the history of the world.” (In part two, we will examine what some of the finest legal minds in history and today have concluded concerning the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus and the truth of Christianity.)

Obviously, if Christianity is true, it makes all the difference in the world whether we personally accept it or not. Indeed, for each of us, it makes all the difference between heaven and hell. As Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16) and “For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ—Part 2: Could the Evidence Stand Cross-Examination in a Modern Court of Law?

by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

In Part 1, we indicated that the historical evidence for the Resurrection of Christ was sufficient to convert even skeptics. In Part 2, we will examine what leading lawyers have concluded about the
evidence for Christ’s Resurrection.

In Acts 1:3, the historian Luke tells us that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead by “many infallible proofs.” The Greek *en pollois tekmarioi* is an expression which is defined in the lexicons as “decisive proof” and indicates the strongest type of legal evidence.¹

Lawyers, of course, are expertly trained to deal in the matter of evidence. Skeptics can, if they wish, maintain that only the weak-minded would believe in the literal, physical Resurrection of Christ, but perhaps this only reveals their own weak-mindedness when it comes to taking the evidence at face value.

Lawyers are not weak-minded. Hundreds of lawyers are represented by The National Christian Legal Society, The Rutherford Institute, Lawyers Christian Fellowship, Simon Greenleaf University, and other Christian law organizations, schools and societies. Among their number are some of the most respected lawyers in the country, men who have graduated from our leading law schools and gone on to prominence in the world of law. The law schools of Cornell, Harvard, Yale, Boston, New York University, University of Southern California, Georgetown, University of Michigan, Northwestern, Hastings College of Law at U. C. Berkeley, Loyola, and many others are all represented.²

Among the Board of Reference or distinguished lectureships given at Dr. Weldon’s alma mater, Simon Greenleaf University, we could cite Samuel Ericsson, J.D., Harvard Law School, Renatus J. Chytit, formerly a lecturer at Cornell and an expert on Czechoslovakian law, Dr. John W. Brabner-Smith, Dean Emeritus of the International School of Law, Washington, D.C., and Richard Colby, J.D., Yale Law School, with Twentieth Century Fox.³ All are Christians who accept the Resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. In actuality, the truth of the Resurrection can be determined by the very reasoning used in law to determine questions of fact. (This procedure is also true for establishing the historical reliability and accuracy of the New Testament documents.)

So let us proceed with specific examples of noted legal testimony concerning the Resurrection.

**Lord Darling**, a former Lord Chief Justice in England, asserts: “In its favor as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”⁴

**John Singleton Copley** (Lord Lyndhurst, 1772–1863) is recognized as one of the greatest legal minds in British history. He was Solicitor General of the British government, Attorney General of Great Britain, three times the High Chancellor of England and elected High Steward of the University of Cambridge. He challenges, “I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet.”⁵

**Hugo Grotius** was a noted “jurist and scholar whose works are of fundamental importance in international law,” according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He wrote Latin elegies at the age of eight and entered Leiden University at eleven.⁶ Considered “the father of international law,” he wrote *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1627) in which he legally defended the historical fact of the Resurrection.

**J. N. D. Anderson**, in the words of Armand Nicholi of the Harvard Medical School (*Christianity Today*, March 29, 1968), is a scholar of international repute, eminently qualified to deal with the subject of evidence. He is one of the world’s leading authorities on Muslim law, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of London, Chairman of the Department of Oriental Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London.⁷ In Anderson’s text, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, he supplies the standard evidences for the Resurrection and asks, “How, then, can the fact of the resurrection be denied?”⁸ Anderson further emphasizes, “Lastly, it can be asserted with confidence that men and women disbelieve the Easter story not because of the evidence but in spite of it.”⁹
Sir Edward Clark, K. C., observes:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as a testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.\(^{10}\)

Irwin H. Linton was a Washington, D.C. lawyer who argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. In *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, he challenges his fellow lawyers "by every acid test known to the law...to examine the case for the Bible just as they would any important matter submitted to their professional attention by a client...."\(^{11}\) He believes that the evidence for Christianity is "overwhelming" and that at least "three independent and converging lines of proof," each of which "is conclusive in itself," establish the truth of the Christian faith.\(^{12}\) Linton observed that "the logical, historical... proofs of... Christianity are so indisputable that I have found them to arrest the surprised attention of just about every man to whom I have presented them...."\(^{13}\) He further argues the Resurrection "is not only so established that the greatest lawyers have declared it to be the best proved fact of all history, but it is so supported that it is difficult to conceive of any method or line of proof that it lacks which would make [it] more certain."\(^{14}\) And that, even among lawyers, "he who does not accept wholeheartedly the evangelical, conservative belief in Christ and the Scriptures has never read, has forgotten, or never been able to weigh—and certainly is utterly unable to refute—the irresistible force of the cumulative evidence upon which such faith rests...."\(^{15}\)

He concluded the claims of Christian faith are so well established by such a variety of independent and converging proofs that "it has been said again and again by great lawyers that they cannot but be regarded as proved under the strictest rules of evidence used in the highest American and English courts."\(^{16}\)

Simon Greenleaf was the author of the classic three-volume text, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1842), which, according to Dr. Wilbur Smith "is still considered the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature on legal procedure."\(^{17}\) Greenleaf himself is considered one of the greatest authorities on common-law evidence in Western history. The *London Law Journal* wrote of him in 1874,

> It is no mean honor to America that her schools of jurisprudence have produced two of the finest writers and best esteemed legal authorities in this century—the great and good man, Judge Story, and his eminent and worthy associate Professor Greenleaf. Upon the existing law of evidence (by Greenleaf) more light has shown from the New World than from all the lawyers who adorn the courts of Europe.\(^{18}\)

Further,

Dr. Simon Greenleaf was one of the greatest legal minds we have had in this country. He was the famous Professor of Law at Harvard University, and succeeded Justice Joseph Story as the Dane Professor of Law in the same university. H. W. H. Knotts in the *Dictionary of American Biography* says of him: "To the efforts of Story and Greenleaf is ascribed the rise of the Harvard Law School to its eminent position among the legal schools of the United States."... Greenleaf concluded that the Resurrection of Christ was one of the best supported events in history, according to the laws of legal evidence administered in courts of justice.\(^{19}\)

In his book *Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice*, Greenleaf writes:

> All that Christianity asks of men... is, that they would be consistent with themselves;
that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things; and that they
would try and judge its actors and witnesses, as they deal with their fellow men, when
testifying to human affairs and actions, in human tribunals. Let the witnesses [to the
Resurrection] be compared with themselves, with each other, and with surrounding facts and
circumstances; and let their testimony be sifted, as if it were given in a court of justice, on the
side of the adverse party, the witness being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The
result, it is confidently believed, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability and
truth.20

Lord Caldecote, Lord Chief Justice of England, observed that an “overwhelming case for the
Resurrection could be made merely as a matter of strict evidence”21 and that “His Resurrection has
led me as often as I have tried to examine the evidence to believe it as a fact beyond dispute.....”22
(cf., Thomas Sherlock’s Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which places the
Resurrection in a legally argued forum and in the words of lawyer Irwin Linton, “will give anyone so
reading it the comfortable assurance that he knows the utmost that can be said against the proof of
the central fact of our faith and also how utterly every such attack can be met and answered.”23 At
the end of the legal battle one understands why, “The jury returned a verdict in favor of the
testimony establishing the fact of Christ’s resurrection.”24)

But lawyers familiar with the evidence could do the same today either for themselves or an
impartial jury. Although admissibility rules vary by state and no lawyer can guarantee the decision
of any jury (no matter how persuasive the evidence), an abundance of lawyers will testify today that
the Resurrection would stand in the vast majority of law courts.

In conclusion, in these two installments, we have shown that both those who were committed
skeptics and those who are expertly trained to sift evidence have declared, on the basis of the
evidence, that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. Those who ignore the evidence
do so at their own risk.

Evidence (2) Could it Stand in a Court of Law 1203

FOOTNOTES – Part One
Warwick Montgomery (ed.), Evidence For Faith: Deciding the God Question (Dallas: Probe/Word,
2. e.g., cf., John Warwick Montgomery, “How Muslims Do Apologetics” in Faith Founded on Fact
(New York: Nelson, 1978); David Johnson, A Reasoned Look at Asian Religions (Minneapolis, MN:
Bethany, 1985); Stuart C. Hackett, Oriental Philosophy (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press,
1979); John Weldon, Buddhism, (MA Thesis) on file at Simon Greenleaf University, Anaheim, CA,
and John Ankerberg and John Weldon, The Facts On Hinduism in America and The Facts on
Islam.
6. Ibid., p. 10.
7. Ibid., p. 11.
8. In Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers,
10. Ibid., pp. 228–229.
13. The John Ankerberg Show, transcript of a debate between Dr. John Warwick Montgomery and
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., pp. 190–191, emphasis added.


Notes – Part 2:
2 See the Simon Greenleaf University 1989-1990 and later catalogs.
3 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 105.
12 Ibid., p. 192.
13 Ibid., p. 120.
14 Ibid., p. 50.
15 Ibid., p. 45, cf., pp. 16-17.
16 Ibid., p. 16.
17 Smith, Therefore Stand, p. 423.
18 Linton, p. 36.
20 In John Warwick Montgomery, The Law Above the Law (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1975), pp. 132-133. (Greenleaf’s Testimony of the Evangelists is reprinted as an appendix).
21 In Linton, p. XXIV.
22 Ibid., p. XXV.
23 Ibid., p. 242; Sherlock’s text is reproduced herein. 
24 Ibid., p. 277.