



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?  
Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them,  
is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



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## JP Holding: Affirming Jesus' Resurrection - his arguments are confused and absurd

This is a review of JP Holding's defence of Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus. The defence is called Affirming Jesus' Resurrection: Breaking the Black Box.

He argues that the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John read like they are probably true when they say Jesus rose from the dead and he considers Paul who was the first to write that Jesus rose. Paul wrote within a few decades after Jesus' alleged demise.

**Holding:** Holding says only Matthew worried about the stolen body rumour so that was why he decided to put in the story of the guards guarding the tomb. He adds that the other reason the guards would have been there was to prevent rites of mourning at the tomb. That could be right but it is interesting how Matthew never says that. That could be a reason for believing that there were guards there or that Matthew made them up. Who knows? Holding writes,

“No one could be allowed to mourn the death of this condemned criminal, especially because of his prior prominence.”

“The burial of Jesus was designed to deny him an honourable burial...He was buried in a tomb that did not belong to him or to his family; and public rites of mourning were not observed.”

Holding agrees with the scholar McCane that Jesus would have been put in a cave tomb for the sake of dishonor like other criminals and they think Joseph of Arimeatha took advantage of that tradition to put him in a tomb of his own carved out of a cave.

**Holding:** Holding admits that Jewish law did allow the removal of a body from the tomb if it were a temporary burial.

**Me:** Holding mentions how Gamaliel was taken to Jerusalem for burial for it was a way of honouring him. Holding does not explain how Jesus who died in disgrace was allowed to be buried in Jerusalem! It contradicts how he says “Jesus’ burial had been intended to be dishonourable.” He mentions how Jesus mother and family did nothing to mourn him as evidence. If Jesus was buried in Jerusalem then it was probably a temporary burial. And even more so if Jesus was king of the Jews pretender!

**Me:** Nothing mentions Jesus being buried in a tomb but the gospels. Jesus could have been buried in the ground. Paul simply writes that Jesus was buried. The gospels may be lying about Jesus being entombed and if he were not then the story of the tomb being found empty with the stone rolled back is fiction.

**Holding:** “The word used by Paul for ‘bury’ would hardly be used for the unceremonious dumping of a criminal into an unmarked trench as dog food.” Some reasons why Paul did not tell us anything about the burial include that an empty burial place only indicates a possible resurrection but is not evidence for it. It was women who witnessed to the burial place. The tomb was unavailable for inspection.

**Me:** A dump burial is still a burial. Saying Jesus was dumped and rose does not sound very natural. Holding thinks there could have been things about Jesus' funeral that were unusual so why is he so sure that Jesus being buried as a criminal means Jesus was necessarily thrown into a common burial pit? He even says Joseph of Arimathea managed to get Jesus buried in a cave tomb as a criminal instead of the cave tomb reserved for such! Plus gospels saying women saw where Jesus was buried is no good. That is not evidence for the women were there but the gossellers were not. That is no good for you need witness testimony. Testimony is not perfect but that is no good at all.

**Me:** Paul complains that the believers in Corinth had stopped believing in the resurrection of the dead.

**Holding:** Paul never says the Corinthians denied or doubted that Christ rose from the dead.

Verse 15:2 is not framed as if it is directed at people who deny Jesus' rising.

If the Corinthians did not believe they would rise from the dead though Jesus did it is suggested that it is because Jesus was different from anybody else as he was God or the Son of God. Paul seeks to show them that you cannot affirm one and deny the other.

**Me:** Verse 15:2 has Paul saying the Corinthians believed that Jesus rose and must hold fast to this and not believe in vain.

Paul tells the Corinthians that they believed 1 Corinthians 15:11. He says they believed the testimonies provided by himself and the apostles. Holding tries to make out that here Paul did not mean "once believed." That is not relevant for he is addressing the believing Corinthians. He only addresses those who ceased to believe in 15:12. Why is Holding deliberately lying? Because he wants to make out that those who ceased to believe in still believed Jesus rose.

Paul complains that if Jesus did not rise then the faith is in vain and spends some time developing this and thus proves the heretics believed neither Jesus or anybody else will rise. There was no need to mention or concentrate on that if the heretics really believed that Jesus rose.

Paul goes on to say that as Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection that means that if he does not rise then nobody does. So resurrection is a collective thing. That is all he says. Its just bare. He never tells us that Christ said that or intended that. It says and does nothing to change the minds of anybody who sees no problem with Jesus rising but who thinks nobody else will rise. It does not read at all like it is meant for somebody who reasons that way. It reads like giving just extra information about the resurrection. And worse - even if Jesus were the first fruit a tree can produce first fruit and get a disease or be interfered with and get no other.

Holding mentions how the Corinthians were asking what kind of body the risen would have and asking in a way to make resurrection sound crazy. He dishonestly refuses to admit the obvious. If that question had been answered in the resurrection of Jesus the question would have been absurd. They seem to think that a rotting body cannot be restored. A lot of sceptics have thought along those lines because they usually think a resurrection means somebody dying and being restored to the same condition as before they died. Paul denies that the risen person is just a resuscitated corpse and argues they are very different. The episode makes you think that the notion of a resurrection body that cannot be hurt or die was invented by Paul in response to the Corinth sceptics.

Holding says "Paul cleverly forced the Corinthians into a dilemma in which they either abandoned their objections, or they abandoned the idea that Jesus rose from the dead". His logic drives him to that conclusion because his logic is wrong in the first place. Paul obviously would prefer his flock to believe that Jesus rose than that he didn't. It led to hope that he could get them to see the rest of us will rise too. If Paul was that willing to sacrifice the truth - if it was truth - that Jesus rose for the sake of a general resurrection selling point then he was not sincere.

**Holding:** He quotes Acts where Jesus goes back to Heaven for good and promises to send the Holy Spirit later.

**Me:** Given that Christianity is a religion that God is intimately involved in and is a divinely inspired religion in which God speaks to the heart and in an inspired book the Bible we would expect testimonies about how the Holy Spirit guided the resurrection witnesses. There is none of that at all. In fact no Spirit was given until after Jesus left for good! The Holy Spirit and mundane secular evidence for Jesus being alive after he died are compatible and should complement each other. Jesus gave the Spirit to the disciples before he left for good according to John's gospel but that was about discerning sinners and not about the resurrection evidence. This major error shows that even if God inspires and could inspire this is not a divinely inspired religion. Claims that it is are pure speculation.

**Holding:** Paul is often accused of having a guilty conscience over what he did to the early Christians which was the real reason he converted for he wanted it soothed. He had been responsible for many terrible deaths. But he says he was a good keeper of the law and loved keeping it (Philippians 3:4-6).

**Me:** The argument seeks to explain why Paul converted without it being a miracle. I have no problem with it but it is interesting how Paul states that he finds the law lovely. The law was in fact cruel and evil.

**Holding:** Holding interestingly denies that the expression in the Bible that Jesus rose in accordance with the scriptures means the resurrection was predicted. Rather he says it could mean that the resurrection was simply echoed.

**Me:** It stretches accordance too much. The New Testament does seek out direct predictions and in desperation distorts texts to do that and Jesus talks as if anybody with a brain should see his resurrection was predicted. The greatest wonder of all time would be predicted in the Old Testament clearly. It makes no sense to hold for example that Psalm 22 is discussing the death of Jesus and there is nothing on his triumph in rising from the dead.

**Holding:** Holding argues that no other return from the dead mentioned in the Bible was described as resurrection. For example Lazarus.

**Me:** By resurrection he means coming back from the dead in a body that can never get sick or die again. But the gospels never say Jesus had that kind of resurrection. Only Paul seems to say it and Paul did make out his experiences of the risen Jesus were not the same authority as those of the others who seen him.

Holding correctly observes that the resurrection accounts of Jesus alleged speak of a man who could make himself hard to recognise and who could just appear in places at will. But otherwise there is nothing out of the ordinary. There are no accounts of Jesus looking glorious and exalted.

**Holding:** Holding worries about how much speculation is needed to make the stories of the missing tomb and the Jesus visions fit and argues that general reliability is enough to regard the accounts as sufficient grounds for taking the resurrection of Jesus story seriously.

**Me:** But that means some details might be wrong. And it is the detail that apologists pore over to "verify" the stories. The whole story falls apart with the detail that Jesus' tomb was open when there was nobody around meaning that there was ample opportunity for some prankster to take the body. The open tomb could even be evidence that the witnesses went to the wrong tomb!! Maybe Magdalene planted clothes there to fool the others?

The gospels never say if the witnesses of the risen Jesus really seen or experienced the same thing or not. We don't know if they would have told the same story as the rest in isolation. That is fatal to the story. If the gospels are trying to be evidence they prove they are not. In any other case, believers would feel free to reject short apparition accounts involving a group of seers when there is nothing to say they really agreed on what they seen and heard. The gospels do not even say they did - all the gospels do is talk as if they did. But the gospels are not the witnesses so that is no good.

**LASTLY:** Holding seems convincing until you see how much self-contradiction and wishful thinking and cherry-picking he does. If that is the price we have to pay to believe in the resurrection then shame on us! Also the risen Jesus gives no example of how having a relationship with him as risen saviour works. His appearances are all about doctrine and show. There is nothing about how the visions gave meaning and morality and a sense of walking through life with Jesus. The disciples feeling a relationship with Jesus outside of having visions means nothing for all religions - even ones with fake gods induce the same experience of being close to a god who is not seen or heard.