

HISTORICAL OR PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS:  
A HENRECIAN RESPONSE TO MICHAEL LICONA'S  
*NEW HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH*

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**ABSTRACT.** Two cross-currents from the twentieth century have affected evangelical apologetics: apologetic methodology and Carl F. H. Henry. Henry was considered the dean of American evangelicalism, who shaped the movement by providing a rational and propositional apologetic. Henry also engaged the issues in the midst of a larger question of apologetic methodology, primarily, between presuppositionalists and evidentialists. This article continues to address the two cross-currents by offering a Henrecian evaluation of Michael Licona's new historiographical approach to defending the resurrection. In particular, the article attempts to evaluate Licona's evidentialist approach through the lens of Henry's presuppositional approach.

**KEYWORDS:** Carl F. H. Henry, Michael R. Licona, presuppositionalism, evidentialism, methodology

At the heart of contemporary evangelical apologetics is the question of apologetic methodology—in particular, the most appropriate and effective method to defend the Christian faith. Two elements mentioned in the title of this article have been derived to compare broadly the evidentialist and presuppositional methods. The other element, due to the fact this journal is dedicated specifically to Carl F. H. Henry, will offer a presuppositional and Henrecian response to Michael Licona's evidentialism and his New Historiographical Approach (NHA). In particular, I will argue that Licona's method suffers from significant weaknesses and internal flaws. To accomplish this task, I will first summarize the NHA. Second, I will offer a presupposi-

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tional and Henrecian response to historiographical approaches *per se*, and Licona's NHA in particular.<sup>1</sup>

Gary Habermas claims, 'In recent years, an increasing number of studies have begun to employ what I have termed the <Minimal Facts> approach to a critical study of the resurrection' (Habermas 2012: 15).<sup>2</sup> This new angle has been utilized by professional historians for several decades. However, the Minimal Facts approach is now being incorporated by evangelicals in their approach to biblical studies and apologetic methodology. Specifically, Michael Licona has attempted to take the Minimal Facts approach and combine it with a robust historiography in an attempt to defend the historicity of the resurrection. Thus, it is Licona's method to utilize this inductive, empirical approach (like that of many other evidentialists (e.g. Gary Habermas) over and against the presuppositional approach (e.g. Carl F. H. Henry). On the one side, you have a constructive relation between history and faith where induction controls from the very beginning to end the questions of factual verification, and the litmus test of historical facts is determined by the greatest number of scholars (unbelieving scholars included). On the other side, you have an approach where deduction and revelation control from the very beginning to end the nature of fact, factual verification, and the necessity of believing scholarship.

### **Licona's New Historiographical Approach**

Evidentialist approaches to apologetics have historically argued that it is irrational to accept theistic belief or belief in the resurrection apart from sufficient evidence. Traditional evidentialists have attempted to address this challenge by providing sufficient evidence to support belief in God or the resurrection. In other words, both Christian evidentialists and their non-Christian evidentialist counterparts, start from the same presupposition, namely, that the rationality of religious belief depends upon the discovery of evidence or arguments to support that belief. These two camps part company over the question of whether such evidence actually exists, even though both agree that evidence is necessary.

Habermas attempts to explain the significant nuance between traditional evidentialist approaches to the resurrection versus the NHA. Habermas claims, 'This methodology differs from older apologetic tactics that usually argued from historically reliable or even inspired New Testament texts to

1 Unfortunately, space does not permit for me to explain each facet of Henry's approach. Instead, after I explain Licona's NHA, I will immediately start to offer a Henrecian response. Therefore, if you are interested in a better understanding of Henry's view, I would refer you to the bibliography: Roach (2015); Doyle (2010); Patterson (1983); Thornbury (2013).

2 See also Habermas (1996); Habermas and Licona (2004).

Jesus' resurrection. The Minimal Facts outlook approaches the subject from a different angle' (Habermas 2012: 15). As will be seen, this new angle does not attempt to incorporate a doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration and inerrancy into its approach. Second, honest readers of Habermas and other NHA advocates must conclude they claim to believe in the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, even though they do not argue to or from the inspiration of the Bible in their apologetic efforts.

The NHA also incorporates abductive reasoning and probabilistic accounts to provide the best explanation of the Minimal Facts (which they believe point to a bodily resurrection). This scientific and civil legal approach focuses upon the strengths and weaknesses of opposing or similar hypotheses. The NHA strives to combine both the facts of the events, with an appropriate method, to demonstrate the most coherent and provisional conclusion of the historical event. Habermas and Licona have been using the Minimal Facts approach, which seeks to start from the agreed upon historical bedrock of beliefs that all scholars affirm, regardless of their theological persuasion (Habermas 2004: 43-64). From this vantage point, Habermas and Licona rule out opposing views to the resurrection by showing their inability to account for the already agreed upon historical bedrock of facts. In brief, the differences between Christians and non-Christians is not found in the historical bedrock of facts, but in the interpretation of the facts. Hence, any impasse between the scholars is a result not of facts, but of method and hermeneutics.

Licona attempts to address this impasse between evidentialist scholars on the topic of the resurrection in his book, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. The emphasis in this title should be upon the phrase, 'A New Historiographical Approach.' At this level, Licona attempts to push beyond traditional evidentialist and historical approaches, by providing a new paradigm to address historical investigation. The strength of Licona's NHA is it attempts to address the theory and practice of evaluating historical data. In that respect, his book is a giant step in the right direction—namely, Licona attempts to address the underlying epistemological and hermeneutical issues affecting historical study and resurrection apologetics. However, as will be seen later, even this NHA suffers from internal flaws and significant weaknesses.

First of all, Licona begins by addressing the epistemological horizons that affect the historian because they are said to shape or affect the thinking of the researcher. Licona claims, 'Horizons may be defined as one's 'preunderstanding'. It is how historians view things as a result of their knowledge, experience, beliefs, education, cultural conditioning, preferences, presuppositions and worldview' (Licona 2010: 38). Licona, like many historians, claims scholars are not able to be objective with historical matters because of

their horizons. This does not mean Licona believes individuals are trapped in their historical situatedness, wholly unable to transcend their historical horizons. Instead, Licona suggests individuals lack the ability ‘... to obtain *absolute* certainty does not prohibit historians from having *adequate* certainty’ (Licona 2012: 69). Licona asks the right question, ‘How can historians work toward transcending their horizons?’ (Licona 2012: 52). Licona suggests his historical tools can overcome this problem, claiming, ‘Below, I propose six tools that, when combined, can be effective guides that bring us closer to objectivity. Total neutrality may never exist, and even if some historians are able to achieve it, an incomplete horizon may still prevent them from arriving at a correct judgment. Let us now look at a few important guides’ (Licona 2012: 52). Licona lists six criteria for his guidelines: (1) Method; (2) The historian’s horizon and method should be public; (3) Peer pressure; (4) Submitting ideas to unsympathetic experts; (5) Account for the relevant historical bedrock; and (6) Detachment from bias is nonnegotiable (Licona 2012: 52-62).

Second, Licona attempts to offer a working definition of truth. He does not affirm the traditional correspondence or coherence theories of truth (Licona 2012: 89-93). Instead, he attempts to argue for a mediating understanding of truth. In addition, Licona argues that history is knowable, even though certain hypotheses are closer to the truth than others. He claims,

[Historians] should strive to formulate a description that corresponds to what occurred but be willing to settle for a conclusion that is more modest, one that speaks of plausibility or probability based on the available data. Our knowledge of the past may not mirror reality; that is, it may not be one-to-one correspondence with the details of what occurred. Instead, historical descriptions usually present a blurred picture of what occurred with only portions of the image being quite sharp (Licona 2012: 92).

Licona, following Richard Evans, defines ‘... a historical fact as something that happened and that historians attempt to ‘discover’ through verification procedures. This is the definition I hold and will use through this volume’ (Licona 2012: 93). Licona claims, ‘This causes a dilemma for historians. As stated earlier, facts are data that have been interpreted after being marinated in the horizons of the historian. If the historian interprets facts solely through his horizon, these facts can in turn serve only to confirm his horizon. We seem to be working in a circle’ (Licona 2012: 94). Moreover, ‘Although there may be no way of breaking that circle, the historian can make traveling the circle less problematic with the six suggested [Tools] outlined

above for transcending one's horizons' (Licona 2012: 94). In other words, the essential issue affecting historiography is epistemology.<sup>3</sup>

Third, since historical facts present themselves to us through historical documents, the natural question arises: How should we approach these historical documents? Licona offers three possible responses: (1) Methodological credulity; (2) Methodological skepticism; and (3) Methodological neutrality. Each of these responses pinpoint the innocence or guilt presumed upon the historical document. They ask the question: Should these texts be presumed innocent until proven guilty or guilty until proven innocent? Licona believes both methodological credulity and skepticism are inadequate approaches. He believes methodological credulity is insufficient because it does not take into account the author's motives (either explicit or implicit) involved in the composition of the historical text, nor does it adequately answer questions pertaining to the literary genre of the document (Licona 2012: 95). On the other hand, Licona believes methodological skepticism is insufficient because it does not adequately fulfill the historian's task. This view must be considered a methodological vice since it is overly dependent upon emphasizing the subjective biases of each individual (Licona 2012: 96). Consequently, Licona believes both methodological credulity and skepticism are inadequate. Thus, he claims the best approach going forward is to affirm methodological neutrality. He believes the strength of this approach is the burden of proof rests upon the strength or weakness of each hypothesis's ability to account for all the facts (Licona 2012: 97-99).<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, Licona rightly notes there are different approaches to historiography. The fundamental differences reside at the methodological and epistemological level. One of the more predominant theories used today by evidentialists is Bayes theorem. However, Licona finds Bayes theorem insufficient because there are too many subjective factors (Licona 2012: 59).<sup>5</sup>

3 Space does not permit a full Henrician evaluation of Gadamer 'horizon-like' approaches. However, I have already dealt with Henry's understanding of horizons in hermeneutics. Please see Roach (2015: 172-204).

4 For Licona, a plausible hypothesis must be able to offer a proper understanding of the historical bedrock of facts. If a view is unable to account for this historical bedrock of facts, then it is insufficient. Consequently, scholars should hold to the view that best accounts for the historical bedrock of facts. For example, in the medical field there are varying hypothesis to address any ailment. One might claim a person is feeling pain in their left arm because they worked out too hard lifting weights at the gym. Another person might claim that same person is having pain in their left arm because the facts (e.g., sweating, chest pains, lack of breath) indicate he or she is having a heart attack. In short, Licona utilizes this approach is appropriate and useful for evangelicals because it has been used in both the legal and medical field.

5 This citation is referring to the *Southeastern Theological Review* published the same year

Licona claims, ‘... [my approach] is to employ a strictly controlled historical method and I remained unconvinced that I could assess the prior of the Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) fairly while staying within the parameters of the historical method proposed in ROJ [Resurrection of Jesus]’ (Licona 2012: 59).<sup>6</sup> One should note, Licona does not believe a historical approach can adequately account for the prior existence of God before investigating the resurrection. This does not mean Licona is an atheist or disavows arguments for the existence of God (Licona 2012: 59).<sup>7</sup> Rather, it suggests he does not believe Bayes use of the prior probability of God in its approach is sufficient or appropriate for historians (Licona 2012: 114-120). Therefore, Licona offers the following criteria used by historians for weighing hypotheses, even though not all historians are open or honest about these criteria (Licona 2012: 108-114).

1. *Explanatory scope*. This criterion looks at the quantity of facts accounted for by a hypothesis. The hypothesis that includes the most relevant data has the greatest explanatory scope.
2. *Explanatory power*. This criterion looks at the quality of the explanation of the facts. The hypothesis that explains the data with the least amount of effort, vagueness and ambiguity has greater explanatory power.
3. *Plausibility*. The hypothesis must be implied to a greater degree and by a greater variety of accepted truths (or background knowledge) than other hypotheses.
4. *Less ad hoc*. A hypothesis possesses an ad hoc component when it enlists nonevidenced assumptions, that is, when it goes beyond what is already known.
5. *Illumination*. Sometimes a hypothesis provides a solution to other problems without confusing other areas held with confidence.

According to Licona’s use of evidential apologetics, this NHA type of method is sufficient to address historical matters. In particular, Licona be-

as *The Resurrection of Jesus*. If not properly footnoted the 2012 publication is *The Resurrection of Jesus*.

6 This citation is referring to the *Southeastern Theological Review* published the same year as *The Resurrection of Jesus*. If not properly footnoted the 2012 publication is *The Resurrection of Jesus*.

7 This citation is referring to the *Southeastern Theological Review* published the same year as *The Resurrection of Jesus*. If not properly footnoted the 2012 publication is *The Resurrection of Jesus*. In fact, in this section, Licona does seem open to allowing arguments from natural theology into his approach. He values the strength they could provide to the discussion.

believes this NHA is able to account for the plausibility of the resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, questions arise over the ability of historians to address miracle claims. People ask: Do miracles meet these historical criteria? Are miracles in a class of their own? Licona responds to these types of questions in chapter two of his book. He claims historical matters should be investigated on an individual basis (Licona 2012: 143). After evaluating the claims of David Hume, C. Behan McCullagh, John P. Meier, Bart D. Ehrman, Wedderburn, and Dunn—Licona suggests there has been a turning point in the study of historical horizons (Licona 2012: 135-189, 189-191). He claims, 'If our assessments through this chapter are correct, historians are within their professional rights to give attention to miracle-claims. Moreover, there are signs from the community of professional historians that the epistemological ice age of antisupernaturalism appears to be coming to an end' (Licona 2012: 191). For miracles, 'I should not require *extraordinary* evidence but *additional* evidence that addresses my present understanding of reality or my horizon, which may be handicapped and in need of revision' (Licona 2012: 195). After his investigation, Licona argues the civil legal paradigm is best because it: (1) understands rightly appropriate burdens of proof; (2) allows for miracles to be considered historical; (3) does not require extraordinary evidence; and (4) it does not grossly misappropriate a higher burden of proof for the resurrection beyond that which is employed in the legal system (Licona 2012: 193).

Let us now explore briefly Henry's view and offer a Henrecian response to historiographical approaches *per se*, and Licona's NHA in particular. Let us also see the implications apologetic methodology plays in our defense of the resurrection.

### **A Presuppositional and Henrecian Response**

It is indubitable that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has a paramount significance for the history of redemption and for Christian theology (cf. Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 1:3). It is also evident the resurrection must be held by all biblical Christians as an event that took place in real space-time and involved Jesus' empirical body (cf. Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:4). Moreover, a refutation of the resurrection would shatter the validity of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). The Christian faith is not pessimistic about the facts and evidences of Jesus' resurrection. All facts are created facts that can be properly understood only when given the interpretation the Creator intends; as such, all facts are facts because the Trinitarian God made them facts. Therefore, evidence can have a role in the believer's apologetic efforts. Nonetheless, Henry and others would suggest we must argue presuppositionally.

Evangelicals today are often prone to generate evidential and inductive arguments for the veracity of Christianity based upon the historical resurrection of Christ and as such, those arguments play a valuable role in their apologetic efforts. It is reckoned that if a man or woman would simply consider the ‘facts’ presented and use their common reasoning ability, that individual would be rationally compelled to believe the truth of Scripture (or the existence of God or the factuality of the resurrection) (Kruger 2001: 69-87). In such a case, the evidence for Christ’s resurrection are foundational to the apologetic witness. As we canvass Licona’s writings, it is evident he recognizes the value of epistemology and methodology in evangelical attempts to demonstrate the historicity of the resurrection. For presuppositionalists, such as Henry, however; there is a certain amount of impropriety about attempting to move an opponent from the sphere of unbelief to the Christian faith by mere appeal to evidence for the resurrection, and there are many reasons to avoid the evidentialist’s attempt to build a case for Christianity upon neutral ground or the Minimal Facts already granted by the unbeliever.

The following section will address these concerns more by discussing the internal flaws of evidentialism and resurrection hypotheses. Second, it will offer a Henrecian response to evidentialism and how those critiques serve as a response to Licona’s NHA.

### ***Internal Flaws of Evidentialism and Inconsistencies of Resurrection Hypotheses***

The most influential statement of the evidentialist thesis is found in W. K. Clifford’s essay titled, ‘The Ethics of Belief’ (Clifford 1974: 246). In one sentence, Clifford sums up the essence of evidentialism, claiming, ‘It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence’ (Clifford 1974: 246). As Clifford viewed it, people have the duty to act responsibly when it comes to their epistemological activities, so much so, that it would be immoral to believe anything apart from evidence or proof (Nash 1988: 69-79). In the hands of evidentialist unbelievers on the topic of the resurrection, they might offer the following argument:

1. It is irrational to accept belief in the resurrection in the absence of sufficient evidence.
2. There is insufficient evidence to support belief in the resurrection.
3. Therefore, belief in the resurrection is irrational.

However, many Christian evidentialists would respond along this general line of reasoning:



1. It is irrational to accept belief in the resurrection in the absence of sufficient evidence.
2. There is sufficient evidence to support belief in the resurrection.
3. Therefore, belief in the resurrection is rational.

In other words, both types of evidentialists start from the same presupposition, namely, that the rationality of belief in the resurrection depends upon the discovery and validity of evidence or arguments to support that belief. They find themselves at a crossroads over whether or not evidence exists; nonetheless, they both agree that evidence is necessary (Nash 1988: 69-79).

At its core, many evangelicals play the non-Christian evidentialists game according to the evidentialists rules, which obligate them to provide sufficient evidence. However, the history of presuppositional apologetics questions this obligation at its foundation. All Christians would have to agree with premise 3. All presuppositionalists, such as Henry, would also agree with premise 2. But here comes the major move—even though there may be reasons to support belief in the resurrection (or God, or any other point apologists attempt to prove), those reasons or evidence are not necessary to make such a belief rational (Plantinga 2000). Presuppositionalists and Reformed Epistemologists, therefore, reject premise 1, the evidentialist thesis. The rationality of religious belief, including belief in the existence of God and the resurrection, does not depend upon supporting evidence (Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983: 30). The reason premise 1 is rejected is because: (1) If accepted, it would undercut nearly all epistemic activity. There are countless things we believe without evidence (e.g., the existence of other minds, that the world continues to exist, memories, and a host of other things we rationally believe apart from evidence) (Plantinga 1967). If followed to its logical conclusion, the evidentialist thesis would remove from our noetic structure all beliefs for which no proof and evidence is supplied, also it would undercut the validity of the belief if someone does not grant the validity of our proof or evidence. (2) The thesis is internally self-defeating and epistemologically immoral. Since, according to evidentialists, they are asking us to believe the evidentialist thesis without offering proof to support *that* very claim.

In brief, the evidentialist thesis is unwarranted. All presuppositionalists, including Henry, recognize this point (Carswell 2007). The wise apologist should refuse to fall for the evidentialist trap. At the very foundation of the argument itself evidentialism places most people at a disadvantage. At the most fundamental level, a person may be rational in holding certain beliefs,

even if he or she cannot provide others with proofs or evidence that will satisfy their opponent.<sup>8</sup>

Second, in order to shore up their defenses and create an objective means to adjudicate resurrection hypotheses, some evidentialists make the following argument for the resurrection.

- (1) Resurrection, or Hypothesis (1) or Hypothesis (2) or... Hypothesis (n)
- (2) Not Hypothesis (1) or Hypothesis (2) or... Hypothesis (n)
- (3) Therefore, the resurrection is true.

There are few comments that ought to be considered in regard to weighing hypotheses. First, Licona does not argue solely from the insufficiency of opposing hypothesis to the truthfulness of the resurrection hypothesis. Granted, he does offer positive arguments for the bodily resurrection, even if those arguments are not conclusive. Nonetheless, Licona does adopt this type of argumentation, even though he goes beyond it by addressing more epistemological and hermeneutical issues. The validity of this type of approach will be weighed below.

Second, no human being, even the greatest of Christian apologist, has the omniscience to know *all possible* hypotheses nor the *eternity* required to test all of them. Therefore, only God could apply consistently and thoroughly this argument with any final and lasting satisfaction, and the human apologist could be driven to skepticism, agnosticism, or ignorance. The consistent evidentialist who uses a hypothesis weighing approach must question the resurrection and numerous historical events because we lack the sufficient evidence to test all possible hypotheses. Maybe there is another way to account for the data we have not considered.<sup>9</sup> Maybe new evidence will dis-

8 I respond in another work to the charge this is a form of fideism (Roach 2012: 269-325).

9 Licona makes numerous claims long this line: (1) Historicity of a miracle claim should be genre determinate on a case-by-case evaluation (Licona 2012: 143); (2) Data concerning Jesus resurrection is fragmentary and could be mixed with legend, poetic language, etc. such as the resurrection saints and angels at the tombs (Licona 2012: 186); (3) Acceptance of Talbert's and Burridge's understanding of the flexible genre of Greco-Roman Literature, which does not insist upon factual integrity, has embellishment, has invention, and uses liberty to their commitment to accuracy in favor of narrative persuasion (Licona 2012: 202-204); (4) Passion predictions of Christ are possibly poetic devices invented for honoring Jesus, but not probably because of the fact that the Evangelists included embarrassing material (Licona 2012: 299); (5) Footnotes 114 says the Gospel of John allows for embellishment in the Biblical text (Licona 2012: 306); (6) Greco-Roman *bioi* allows for embellishments in the narratives of the text (Licona 2012: 338-339); (7) The raising of the saints in Matthew 27:52-53 (Licona 2012: 548-553). This is a 'strange' text (Licona 2012: 548), Greco-Roman literature allows for 'embellishments' (Licona 2012: 549), biblical writers used this strange embel-

prove our hypothesis. Therefore, this approach seems impossible to calculate and renders it as an insufficient approach.

Since all people lack omniscience, this leaves the apologist with no choice but to retreat to probabilism; having disqualified rival hypotheses he might claim that either the resurrection or Christianity is more probably true.<sup>10</sup> Yet, because the evidentialist does not know all the alternatives and their relative strengths (i.e., we are unaware of the depth of our ignorance), there is no way for him to *grade* or *standardize* probability—in which case his appeal to ‘probability’ is worthless. Moreover, appeals to probability is a confession of some epistemological skepticism as to the complete truthfulness of the resurrection; yet the resurrection has been offered as an alternative to skepticism (or agnosticism, or any other *ism*). Hence, in reality, skepticism has engulfed historiographical approaches (the NHA included) and won the day after all. The ineffectiveness of non-presuppositional apologetics is the inevitable outcome of not challenging unbelief at its very foundation.

The notion of probability is ubiquitous throughout Licona’s theological and apologetic method. We see the probability of the resurrection, which allows for the historical probability of other events. But Henry would warn us that Scripture’s outlook is *not* the same as Licona’s probabilism. Instead, we can overcome probabilism by allowing Scripture as divine revelation to be our source-criterion for all truth, including the resurrection (Henry 1990: 58-60, 82-83).

Third, there also seem to be some significant issues related to Licona’s historical criteria for weighing hypotheses. This entire approach attempts to look at the facts, specifically the Minimal Facts accepted by both evangelical and critical scholars. This raises a serious question about the notion of

lishment literature in their writings (Licona 2012: 550), appeals to Robert Gundry to argue for the saints resurrection as an OT eschatological event (Licona 2012: 551), the reference if historical was a reference to the resurrections in his earthly ministry not a post-resurrection saints resurrection (Licona 2012: 552), the resurrection is a poetic device to show that the Son of God had died and judgment awaits Israel (Licona 2012: 553), he asks how do we know that the resurrection of Christ is not more of the same (Licona 2012: 553); (8) Genre of the gospels could be historical containing mythical or created inventions on the part of the writers, nevertheless, they still contain the kernel of truth—such as the healing of the blind person (Licona 2012: 570); (9) Angels at the tombs were possibly only a literary device (Licona 2012: 597) and that discrepancies between the Gospels do not mean they are all mistaken (Licona 2012: 597).

10 Henry claims, ‘To shift attestation of Christian core doctrines to empirical considerations, as the evidentialists do, carries high risks. One makes an unfulfillable claim for empirical and historical science, moreover, if in a question for demonstrable certainty one expects from its methodology more than a high probability. Is the Christian view of God and the world really well served by a methodology, that, at best, can affirm with 95 percent probability that Jesus died for sinners or 90 percent probability that He arose bodily from the grave’ (Henry 1990: 48, 50).

common ground and point of contact with unbelievers. In other words, the NHA is looking for a method that can be universally shared and applied between the believer and the unbeliever. Henry addressed the notion of common ground, claiming, 'It seems plausible enough that without some contact or connection, no communication or conversation can occur with those who are addressed. The <common ground> controversy does not take place at this elementary level, however' (Henry 1976: 1:395). Instead, the common ground controversy takes place at the level of fundamental axioms and presuppositions. Henry makes a keen observation about common ground and the nature of facts. It is worth quoting him at length. Henry claims:

The Christian system of doctrine is an integral whole that differs completely from non-Christian affirmations based on secular theory. The two approaches have no common epistemological axiom. The Christian axioms and theorems derive from divine disclosure, and not from cosmological, anthropological or historical considerations based on empirical investigation. Every proposition gains its meaning from the thought system or universe of disclosure in which it stands. Therefore, anyone who knows revelational truth will mean something quite different from what others intend by such terms as *God*, *revelation*, and *redemption*—indeed, even by such terms as *nature* and *history*, and propositions concerning reality and life. This fact obtains even when both use the very same terminology. The linguistically identical proposition 'God is Spirit,' for example, connotes logically distinct predications when affirmed by Plato and by Jesus. Belief and unbelief have no common axioms, and their entire system of thought, if consistently developed from their differing axioms, will manifest no common propositions. The system of doctrine derived from divine revelation as its basic epistemological axiom yields conclusions concerning God, man and the world that are strikingly dissimilar from secular explanations that stem from some nonrevelational axiom. Because derived from differing and contrasting principles, revelational and secular schematizations of reality and life can affirm no propositions of identical logical content and have no truth in common (Henry 1976: 1:396).

From this quote, a few observations can be derived. First of all, Henry is claiming there is no epistemological common ground between the believer and unbeliever. Henry still maintains there is an ontological common ground found in the image of God in all humanity (Henry 1976: 1:396). Second, it seems like one of the fundamental problems of any Minimal Facts approach, is it fails to see that believing and unbelieving historians not only disagree over the resurrection, but over the basic features of reality. There is a disagreement over ultimate principles and axioms, over what truly constitutes a fact, and whether or not the propositions (or Minimal Facts) are interpreted in the same fashion or manner. In brief, they disagree over both subjective and objective presuppositions about reality (Frame 2013:

697-770). Third, Minimal Facts approaches seem to assume that belief and unbelief manifest similar properties because of some neutral epistemological ground. However, this runs contrary to the biblical data, which speaks of the great hostility between believing and unbelieving thought. Consequently, Henry would contend Minimal Facts approaches have no ultimate bearing, because they wrongly assume a view of common ground foreign to the text of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Henrician Response to Historical Approaches and the NHA***

One of the strengths of Licona's NHA is it attempts to deal straightforwardly with the epistemological and hermeneutical problems facing the resurrection. This final section, therefore, will compare and contrast Henry and Licona's epistemology and methodology. Specifically, it will compare and contrast the role of divine revelation and inspiration.

One of the primary differences between Henry and Licona is the functional role of divine special revelation in their apologetic efforts. Specifically, they differ over the role Scripture as an inspired document should play in validating historical events. For example, Henry claims, 'Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole' (Henry 1976: 1:215). So then, we see for Henry, that revelation is considered the axiom of all knowledge. Henry's presuppositional perspective argues that the apologist should allow the Scriptures to be their primary guide for determining the historicity of the resurrection, not modern historiographical approaches. It is important to compare Licona with Henry on this matter. Licona parts ways with this type of approach, affirming methodological neutrality, which, 'Accordingly neither claims of divine inspiration nor general trustworthiness will play any part in our investigation' (Licona 2012: 207-208). Therefore, we see the essential difference between the two approaches centers around the notion of verification. What criterion ought we use to verify the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Henry claims divine revelation.<sup>12</sup> Licona claims the NHA.

In order to ward off an immediate rejection of Henry's approach, we must note the following: Henry did not discount the usefulness of historical

11 Henry and other presuppositionalists take this as a fundamental axiom of their system. For further exegetical argumentation on this point, see Bahnsen (2008:1-80).

12 Henry claims, 'Christian faith, moreover, is not without evidential confirmation. Evidentialists point hurriedly to the world and man as evidence for God. But rational presuppositionalism points instead to Scripture' (Henry 1990: 112).

approaches from facts and history. In fact, it is incorrect to claim presuppositionalists' discredit historical evidences. Rather, they find historical evidences *alone* to be insufficient.<sup>13</sup> For example, Henry asked,

But can an appeal to the 'data' of the nature or history, apart from any invocation of divine revelation, provide a logical demonstration of the existence of the Christian God or of the factuality of Jesus' bodily resurrection? Historical reasoning might conclude that Jesus of Nazareth showed Himself to be indubitably alive after His Crucifixion. But without further appeal to an authoritative Scripture or to God in His revelation, could historical reasoning show that the transcendent Deity had raised Jesus from death never to die again, and raised Him moreover as the firstfruits of an end-time general resurrection?... observational scientists have frequently discovered that empirical validation prediction is not per se validation of a particular interpretation (Henry 1990: 83).

From this quote, we can see Henry questions the sufficiency of historical approaches to provide an account of the resurrection consistent with the Church's preaching about the resurrection. The fundamental flaw Henry finds in historical approaches (like that of observational scientific approaches) is its empirical epistemology, which insists that truth is arrived at inductively and open to new interpretations, rather than being deduced from already substantiated axioms. In brief, by allowing Scripture to *function* as a divinely inspired account of the resurrection, we are able to overcome the tentativeness of empirical epistemology (Henry 1948).

Second, for presuppositionalists like Henry, we must first and foremost view Scripture as divine revelation. Therefore, when we evaluate Scripture's primary author, we must not conclude that it is the human author alone; rather, we recognize that God is the primary cause/author (and the human authors as the secondary cause/writer of Scripture—both are truly causes/authors) (Sproul and Geisler 2013: 41).<sup>14</sup> This affects significantly the way we measure and weigh manuscripts, specifically when we judge the validity of a historical document based upon the reliability of its author. This creates the real dilemma for historiographical approaches: Either we consistently evaluate the reliability of a document based upon its author, or we do not. If we consistently evaluate the reliability of the Bible based upon its author, then we must view Scripture as a divinely inspired account. However, this is precisely what methodological neutrality denies! Consequently, Licona's

13 Henry notes, 'By no means do all presuppositionalists consider evidence irrelevant to faith claims, any more than all presuppositionalists consider faith hostile to reason. Presuppositionalists insist that relevant objective evidence exists externally to the basic Christian axioms and their implications' (Henry 1990: 54-55, 83). See also Van Til (2016); Bahnsen (1998); Frame (2015); Oliphint (2013).

14 See Article IX.

NHA is inconsistent at this point. On the one hand, Licona desires to weigh documents based upon the trustworthiness of its *author*. However, from the onset, Licona affirms a method that will not allow Scripture to be weighed based upon its *author* (i.e., God Himself), because divine inspiration plays no part in his investigation. Clearly, it is inconsistent to weigh the trustworthiness of non-Christian sources based upon the reliability of their authors, and to not grant this same privilege to the Scriptures. In order to correct this error, Henry would encourage Licona to affirm methodological credulity and presuppose the inspiration of Scriptures (Henry 1976: 1:263).<sup>15</sup>

Third, beyond insisting upon presupposing the inspiration of the Bible and God as its author, Henry would also criticize the inductive and/or abductive method of historiographical approaches. In this final point, we will investigate Henry's criticisms of previous historical methods, and attempt to apply those same principles to Licona's NHA.<sup>16</sup>

In *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Henry interacted with Robert Lyon, who utilized an inductive and historical approach, maintaining that a historical fact, '... is to speak of something the knowledge of which has been established by historical research' (Henry 1976: 4:397). Underlying all historiographical approaches is the belief that the evidentialist premise must be substantiated through historical criticism and/or some version of the historical method. Henry claims, 'This definition [or approach] confuses external events with empirically tested knowledge of them; moreover, it seems to ignore the possibility that the researcher may revise and reverse his conclusions, and the fact that historical investigation can never in any event get beyond probability' (Henry 1976: 4:397). Second, evidential and historical approaches do not provide the proper worldview context to assess properly the notion of probability, specifically miraculous probability, since methodologically they do not evaluate the data from a Christian theistic worldview (Henry 1990: 40, 55-56, 58, 67, 77-78).

For Henry, the presuppositional method is better than the evidential and historical method(s) (like scientific theories), because the 'facts' of the resurrection and the 'conclusions' derived from evidential approaches are

15 Henry states, 'either divine revelation is a source of intelligible knowledge or it is not, and if it is—as the inspired writers insist—then its content cannot be codeduced from secondary sources, and we are limited to what God has revealed of the intricacies of his plan' (Henry 1976: 1:263). From a Christian perspective, we should only grant this prerogative to the Bible. We should not grant this same status to the Quran or any other religious book.

16 The base level, this method seems appropriate when weighing historical figures with present-day figures. It goes without saying, we cannot know exactly what an individual would say about a contemporary person. However, this does not mean we are left with pure suspicion. We can generate principles from a person's writings and deduce logically their position on other matters.

at best—the most probable hypothesis. He claims, ‘Historical investigation in no case leads beyond a very high degree of probability, although this no more disadvantages biblical history than any other. Do not theories of historiography, moreover, change from century to century? Why should the present method be thought superior to past views or irreplaceable in the future?’ (Henry 1976: 4:397). The reality of the situation is no one actually knows if our present historical method is correct or not. Hence, if we merely use historical approaches, we are left to some degree, in a version of skepticism. In *GRA*, Henry asks,

The prime question is, which perspective is true? The true perspective will most consistently embrace all the data without arbitrarily abridging this in deference to restrictive prejudices. The Christian interpretation is rationally consistent and provides a comprehensively true understanding of history and experience. The final meaning of history cannot be distilled from historical phenomena, but must be derived from supernatural revelation (Henry 1976: 1:260).

Henry suggests more is required to justify a proper interpretation of the resurrection event than investigating facts through a historical method. Historical methods are always incomplete, partial, and never comprehensive. Like all presuppositionalists, Henry believes we can go beyond mere facts, and partial philosophy of facts, by presupposing the Christian worldview, which provides the only epistemological vantage point that allows God, through revelational epistemology, to offer a comprehensive and exhaustive interpretation of the resurrection.

Henry does not believe historians relying solely upon empirical evidence can arrive at a comprehensive view of the resurrection. Individuals always approach the data with presuppositions (both subjective and objective), which influence their interpretation of the data. Bob Patterson summarized Henry’s reply to the historical method and his criticisms of John Warwick Montgomery’s approach, noting:

Henry says that Montgomery’s ‘evidence’ would needlessly invalidate Christianity for the person who was unimpressed with empirical data. Empirical data means nothing without presuppositions. The basic question remains: which presupposition is true? The final meaning of Christ is derived from supernatural revelation, not distilled from historical phenomena. Henry’s position is that empirical evidence should be presented in correlation with the Christian revelation-presupposition, and not independently of it... The Christian, armed with reason, never evades the question of verifiability. For public verification and validation the evangelical apologist such as Henry turns to the authoritative witness of scriptural revelation... Scripture is the Christian’s ultimate principle of verification, and the logical consistency of revelational data the test of Christian truth (Patterson 1983: 82-83).



Undoubtedly, both Licona and Henry as apologists recognize the important role presuppositions play when interpreting the historical facts of the resurrection. The primary difference between the two views is: By what ultimate criterion do we adjudicate competing claims for the resurrection? For Licona, one must use the NHA. For Henry, it is divine revelation. He believes historical approaches are unable to sufficiently verify historical events. He claims, 'Insofar as a miracle is a historical event, historical method is not irrelevant to it, though in fact that method itself cannot <verify> any event, miraculous or non-miraculous' (Henry 1976: 4:339). Licona and Henry both admit the chief reason people do not accept the resurrection is because of presuppositions and epistemology.<sup>17</sup> However, they differ significantly in their epistemologies and the necessity of presupposing a comprehensive Trinitarian worldview and role Scripture plays as a verifying principle.<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

From the onset, it should be noted there are a myriad of foundational *methodological* problems which affect the evidential argument for the resurrection. We must note that inductive historical arguments rest for their validity on the premise of the uniformity of the past in nature; this makes possible a consideration of an analogy of circumstances. Yet the very point that the evidentialist is attempting to prove is a miracle; hence, discontinuity. Therefore, the evidentialist is in a mess attempting to establish the truth of discontinuity while all the time maintaining a principle of continuity. Furthermore, probability arguments are predicated on a series in which an event occurs and reoccurs on a regularly basis; that is, general probability might be proven for a reoccurring event, but the resurrection is a one-time event.

- 17 For Henry, 'The transcendent revelation of God's sovereign purpose as it is scripturally attested gives to historiography the one referent that keeps history from becoming assimilated to an almost infinite variety of interpretative reconstructions. Finite human beings have no <purely> objective history that can elaborate the detailed significance of events. Nor does the Bible present us with a detailed exposition of the interconnections between all historical development. What it offers, rather, is a comprehensive framework within which the purpose, survival and destiny of men and nations are decisively related to the Lord of history. Christianity resists narrating the past simply in correlations of events that are shaped by a selective principle postulated by the secular historian; no less does it refuse to surrender the future to palmists, stargazers and horoscopes' (Henry 1976: 1:163).
- 18 Timothy J. McGrew agrees with this assessment when he said, 'The difficulty, of course, is that everyone seems to come to the study with a significant set of assumptions in place. It is difficult to see how it could be otherwise. Theist? Atheist? Agnostic but open to possibility of something beyond naturalism? One's worldview will inevitably affect the assessment of the evidence. And it should. Does this leave us at an impasse?' (McGrew 2012: 29).

Can probability be predicated of a particular occurrence? No, that seems contrary to the principle. Finally, if Christ only probably arose, then it is possible that the evidence amassed for the resurrection has a completely different interpretation; hence, even if certain facts seem to point to the probable resurrection of Jesus, it has to be admitted that other evidence points to the disconfirmation of the revealed Scriptures. But this is not a Christian position, for according to the Christian worldview, there is *no possibility* that Christ did not rise from the dead; this is a foundational, incorrigible fact revealed in God's authoritative Word.

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