

- 13 Wright S and Bolton C. Breast milk fatty acids in mothers of children with atopic eczema. *Br J Nutr* 1989;62:693-97.
- 14 Melnik B, Hollmann J, Plewig G. Decreased stratum corneum ceramides in atopic individuals—a pathobiochemical factor in xerosis. *Br J Dermatol* 1988;119:547-8.
- 15 Werner Y, Lindberg M, Forslind B. Membrane-coating granules in 'dry' non-eczematous skin of patients with atopic dermatitis. *Acta Derm Venereol* (Stockh) 1987;67:385.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Resurrection or resuscitation?

The article in the April issue of the *Journal* by Dr and Mrs T. Lloyd Davies elicited a large number of letters to the editor, many from people who had not read the article itself but were offended by what they had heard or seen in the newspapers. We print below a selection of thoughtful and persuasive letters from a number of those who had read the article itself, and cited historical and theological evidence to refute the hypothesis proposed by Dr Lloyd Davies; others made essentially similar comments.

The article and many of the letters were read by the Reverend Professor Gordon Dunstan, with whose comments we conclude the correspondence.

As editor, it was my decision to publish the article as a medical hypothesis which, in Professor Dunstan's words, 'seeks to understand the physiology of the events of Good Friday and Easter Day.'

The very head and front of my offending
hath this extent, no more

(*Othello*)

ROBERT MAHLER
Editor

Resurrection or Resuscitation?

Sir—No-one can disagree with the concluding statement by Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies that 'faith does not require the abandonment of thought or the assent to concepts not scientifically acceptable.' On the other hand, the process of thought is not helped by the adoption of hypotheses based on a selective reading of the available evidence.

The only evidence which is available for details of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus is found in the New Testament documents. There is no room here to discuss the reliability of these records [1, 2] but I intend to take them at their face value as the authors appear to have done. I will, however, give the same credence to all the record and not be selective in my handling of the evidence. I will also resist the urge to speculate on the mechanism of Jesus's death. At a remove of almost 2,000 years any conclusions are of necessity very tentative. I would only emphasise the point made by the authors that all the Gospel writers imply that the death of Jesus was voluntary, in keeping with His statement that 'No-one takes (my life) from

me, but I lay it down of my own accord' [3].

The outline of the events of the crucifixion up to the point of death are accurately set out by the authors. The early death of Jesus occasioned surprise and led Pilate to seek confirmation from the commander of the execution squad that death had occurred. The centurion was clear in his evidence [4] and it was only then that Pilate gave permission for the body to be handed over to Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish council and a secret disciple of Jesus. Contrary to the statement of the authors that we do not know who took the body down, it is clearly stated that Joseph 'took down the body, wrapped it in linen and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock' [5]. The other Gospels all agree that the body was placed in the tomb, not taken away and tended as suggested in the current hypothesis [6]. I can see no reason for rejecting these statements while accepting the details of the crucifixion.

The incident of the spear wound is important. Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies argue that the word used by the author of John's Gospel means 'to prick' rather than 'to pierce'. My lexicon gives the meanings 'to prick, pierce, wound, stab; tear'. More importantly, the author himself obviously thought the word synonymous with the word which the Lloyd Davies accept as undoubtedly meaning 'to pierce' or he would not have inserted the quotation referred to in John 19:37. He clearly had a gaping wound in mind as in John 20 he reports Jesus as instructing Thomas to 'reach out your hand and thrust it into my side.' In interpreting the use of Greek words by the New Testament writers (who did write classical Greek) their use of the word is of more importance than the classical derivation of that word. The significance of the soldier's actions are glossed over by the authors. This was not a soldier standing idly at the foot of the cross and whiling away the time. This was a member of a squad detailed to ensure that the victims were dead so that they could be removed from the cross before the Jewish festival. Having broken the legs of the other victims to hasten their death he found Jesus dead and rather than breaking His legs he stabbed Him to ensure that He was dead. A trained soldier handles his weapons instinctively and would without thinking aim for the heart. Hence the effusion of 'blood and water' although Jesus was dead. This, incidentally, is the only episode in the whole story which is specifically said to be vouched for by an eyewitness [7].

The Lloyd Davies rightly assume that a considerable time must have elapsed between the death (or apparent death) of Jesus and the body being handed over to His followers because of the inevitable delay in obtaining permission from Pilate. They have missed the significance of this fact. We have already seen that Jesus remained on the cross until taken down by Joseph, he was sufficiently unconscious throughout that period to fool the experienced Roman execution squad into thinking that He was dead, then He would in any case

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

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

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

S. J. LEINSTER

Reader in Surgery, University of Liverpool

References

- 1 McDowell J. Evidence that demands a verdict. *Campus Crusade for Christ*. San Bernardino, California. 1972.
- 2 Bruce FF. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Intervarsity Press, Illinois and London. 1960.
- 3 John 10:18 *The Bible: New International Version*. Hodder and Stoughton, London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto. 1987.
- 4 Mark 15:45.
- 5 Luke 24:53.
- 6 Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46, John 19:41.
- 7 John 19:35.
- 8 John 20:14.
- 9 John 21:9.
- 10 Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:7-10.

Resurrection or Resuscitation?

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

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

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

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

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