

Evidence-Based Analysis of English Texts Written on Jesus' Resurrection

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Abstract: *Since 2004, Gary Habermas has referenced his resurrection bibliography. Frequently, Habermas and Christian apologists assert that the scholarly consensus is that writers support the resurrection: a solid majority (about 75%) of scholars who have published books or articles on Jesus' resurrection accept the historicity of the empty tomb. However, Habermas has not presented supporting evidence for the past twenty years. This article collects and presents factual data and information about the authors of nonjuvenile, English-language texts, at least forty-eight pages written during the past 500 years on Jesus' resurrection. Significant categories of data investigated include (1) degree(s) earned and level of education, (2) occupation and interests, and (3) religion or denomination. Approximately 775 books (including six double-counted debates) were surveyed, with 713 pros and 62 contras. Pro authors were 610 and forty-six contras. The data substantiates and expands the earlier report by Alter and Slade. This article provides evidence that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries and those having a professional and personal interest in the subject matter.*

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

Introduction

In the past five centuries, over 700 English texts (non-juvenile), at least forty-eight pages, have been published about the resurrection of Jesus. Frequently, Christian apologists, commentators, and theologians present a common reframe that the *scholarly consensus* is that writers support the resurrection. Most notably, Gary R. Habermas claimed that a solid majority (about 75%) of *scholars* who have published books or articles on Jesus' resurrection accept the historicity of the empty tomb.¹ They cite a landmark 2005 article by Habermas as their evidentiary proof. In addition, afterward, Christian apologists, commentators, and theologians note a jointly published

¹ Habermas, "Resurrection from 1975 to the Present," 135–53.

text by Habermas and Michael Licona: *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.² In 2010, resurrection scholar Michael R. Licona published the highly acclaimed, modified version of his Ph.D. dissertation, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. In Licona's introduction, he wrote, "Habermas has compiled a massive bibliography consisting of approximately 3,400 scholarly journal articles and books."³ Two years later, Habermas published a widely influential article, particularly its allusion to a bibliography of 3400 sources.⁴ Citations that mention Habermas's 3,400 references have appeared in various texts, journals, online articles, and podcasts.⁵ Textual references include the works of Andrew Ter Ern Loke, Brian K. Morley, William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona, Benjamin C. Shaw, and Robert B. Stewart.⁶

Surprisingly, an article by Michael Alter and Darren Slade reveals that if readers examine the authors who have published books in English on the topic of Jesus' resurrection, the seventy-five percent figure is, if anything, an underestimate.⁷ Therefore, at first sight, this finding may seem to support the Christian apologist's claim of a solid scholarly consensus in favor of the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection.

In 2021, Alter and Slade co-published "Dataset Analysis of English Texts Written on the Topic of Jesus' Resurrection: A Statistical Critique of Minimal Facts Apologetics." They confirmed, digging deeper; however, a different picture emerged. Their article "reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries. The data means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus' resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter."⁸ Moreover, the data confirmed that "*Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of*

² Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 70

³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 19.

⁴ Habermas, "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus," 18.

⁵ Readers must note that Habermas's forthcoming text expands his working bibliography to about 4,500.

⁶ See Loke, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1*; Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 339n30; Dembski and Licona, eds., *Evidence for God*, 177; Shaw, "Philosophy of History, Historical Jesus Studies, and Miracles," 61–80; and Stewart, "On Habermas's Minimal Facts Argument," 1–14. In contrast, Michael J. Alter's forthcoming text, *The Resurrection and Its Apologetics Vol. 1* strongly challenges the Minimal Facts approach to Jesus' resurrection.

⁷ Alter and Slade, "Dataset Analysis," 367.

⁸ Alter and Slade, "Dataset Analysis," 368.

about twelve-to-one. (Italics added for emphasis) However, their article did not provide evidentiary proof substantiating its findings.

In other words, most books on the resurrection are by committed Christians. “We may legitimately presume that most of them already accepted the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection long before they became scholars.”⁹ Indeed, apologist Gregory Koukl admits that most apologists first came to faith through personal experiences, not evidence.¹⁰

Frequently and sensibly, detractors and skeptics criticize Habermas because, during the past twenty years or so, he does *not* provide data supporting his claims. Alter’s future text, *The Resurrection and Its Apologetics Volume 2*, devotes a section on that topic disputing the claim. A notable critic voicing equal concern is Richard Carrier.¹¹ Noteworthy, they and others seek to know who these people are who have written about the resurrection. More precisely, several questions include missing *minimal facts* about the authors: (1) level of education and degree of expertise (profession or layperson), (2) experience and professional service, and (3) religion or denomination.

Alter, in 2020 published, *A Thematic Access Oriented Bibliography on the Resurrection of Jesus’s Resurrection*. That essential reference text organized more than 7,000 English sources into twelve main categories and subcategories, designed to help researchers find the most relevant literature quickly and efficiently. Returning to Alter and Slade, their abstract reads:

This article collects and examines data relating to the authors of English-language texts written and published during the past 500 years on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection and then compares this data to Gary R. Habermas’ 2005 and 2012 publication on the subject. To date, there has been no such inquiry. This present article identifies 735 texts spanning five centuries (from approximately 1500 to 2020). The data reveals 680 Pro-Resurrection books by 601 authors (204 by ministers, 146 by priests, 249

⁹ This is, in fact, the case with apologist Gary Habermas, who regularly shares stories with his students about being a committed Christian in his youth long before obtaining a college degree. As fellow apologist John Frame once observed, “Habermas in the end presupposes a Christian view of evidence and probability” (Frame, “*A Presuppositionalist’s Response*,” 137). Quote from Alter and Slade, “Dataset Analysis,” 368 n2.

¹⁰ Koukl, *Tactics*, 55. Tony Campolo also confesses, “My apologetic, I explained, was determined by an a priori commitment. I believed first, then constructed arguments to support what I believed....In the end, isn’t what we believe more highly contingent upon decisions we make rather than on empirical evidence?” (McLaren and Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point*, 108).

¹¹ Carrier, “Innumeracy: A Fault to Fix.”

by people associated with seminaries, 70 by laypersons, and 22 by women). This article also reveals that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus' resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus' resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. Pro-Resurrection authors outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one. In contrast, the 55 Contra-Resurrection books, representing 7.48% of the total 735 books, were by 42 authors (28 having no relevant degrees at the time of publication). The 42 contra authors represent only 6.99% of all authors writing on the subject.¹²

Although the Alter-Slade article presented first-time data about the authors of 735 English texts on the resurrection, it lacked crucial information that researchers require. Like Habermas, it did not present supporting information about the 601 pro-resurrection and 42 con-resurrection authors. Those deficiencies require acknowledging and engaging. For example, in the abstract, they write that of the 680 Pro-Resurrection books by 601 authors, 204 were written by ministers, 146 by priests, and 249 by people associated with seminaries.¹³

Importantly, this article provides information about the authors' credibility and potential biases from both sides of the religious aisle, exposing the likelihood of a confirmation bias among credentialed *true believers* who conclude something they already believed: God raised Jesus from the dead.¹⁴ This article engages and interacts with Habermas's claims and the deficiencies in the Alter-Slade article. Furthermore, it provides missing facts demanded by biblical scholars, detractors, and skeptics.

Aim of This Article

This article aims to collect and present factual data and information about the authors of English-language texts written and published during the past 500 years on Jesus' resurrection. Categories of data investigated include (1) degree(s) and level of education, (2) experience and occupation, (3) and religion

¹² Alter and Slade, "Dataset Analysis," 367.

¹³ Alter and Slade, "Dataset Analysis," 367.

¹⁴ Habermas discusses this topic in his forthcoming text (chapter 1, pages 15–27, "A Concept of History.")

or denomination. The text must be English, nonjuvenile, and at least forty-eight pages.¹⁵

This article employs several variables. They are visible in the seven-column spreadsheet seen in Table 1, 3, and 4.

1. The text number (first number) and author or editor book number (seen in parenthesis).¹⁶
2. Author or editor’s name.
3. Name of the text.¹⁷
4. The year the text was published.
5. Identification of (a) the degree(s) earned by the author, (b) the specific discipline(s) that the degree(s) related to (e.g., apologetics, history, ministry, philosophy, religious studies, theology), (c) the institution obtained from, and (d) whether the author was a layperson.¹⁸
6. A brief overview of the author’s (a) nationality, (b) occupation (e.g., bishop, evangelist, minister, priest, professor), (c) experience, professional service, and (d) interest are visible to inspect.
7. The author’s denomination or religion. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Sample Spreadsheet Heading

Book (Author) #	Author Name	Text	Year	Degree(s)	Occupation	Religion
147 (133)	Craig, William Lane, and Gerd Lüdemann.	<i>Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Figment?</i>	2000	Ph.D. in philosophy; Ph.D. in theology	Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology	Christian

¹⁵ Readers must be mindful that the number of pages in a published text is misleading. Publishers employ varying fonts, the gutter (The gutter of a book is the blank space where the left and right pages meet), and the top and bottom margins (Margins are the blank spaces found between the content and the edge of the page.), and the size of the text (e.g., 8 X 11, 8 X 12, 5 X 8, 6 X 9).

¹⁶ Craig’s first identified text is the 147th text in Table 3 and he is the 133rd author.

¹⁷ The texts are listed chronologically from current to oldest.

¹⁸ Frequently, when information was lacking, column 5 provides only a general description or listing about where the author obtained an education (Seminary/College/University).

62 (46)	Yusef, Abdulbasset	<i>Jesus: From India to Japan</i>	2017	M.D.	Intemist	Muslim
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Conclusion

Actress Clara Pelle asked the famous question, “Where’s the beef?” In theology, the question that requires answering is where is the beef supporting Habermas’s claims? It requires remembering that Gary Habermas’s publications report that he has identified roughly 3,400 resurrection sources. Moreover, he elaborated that they were (1) published from 1975 to 2010; (2) books and journal articles; and (3) in English, French, and German. His research found that a 3:1 ratio (75%) of scholars accepted the empty tomb, and an even higher percentage endorsed other minimal facts about the resurrection. Looking at the data another way, Habermas is saying that at least 25 percent of authors or scholars reject the empty tomb as a fact. In contrast, research by Alter differs from that of Habermas in several ways. His investigation incorporated (1) exclusively nonjuvenile English-language materials; (2) texts at least forty-eight pages; and (3) books written in the past five centuries.

This investigation analyzed approximately 775 texts (including six double-counted debates), with 713 pros and 62 contras. Pro authors were 610 and forty-six contras. The data substantiates and expands the earlier report by Alter and Slade. This article provides evidence that a remarkably high proportion of the English-language books written about Jesus’ resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries and those having a professional and personal interest in the subject matter.

Material from the Alter and Slade article bears repeating:

A remarkably high proportion of the books written about Jesus’ resurrection were by members of the clergy or people linked to seminaries, which means any so-called scholarly consensus on the subject of Jesus’ resurrection is wildly inflated due to a biased sample of authors who have a professional and personal interest in the subject matter. No doubt that the same holds true for journal article publications, as well. *Pro-Resurrection authors*

outnumber Contra-Resurrection authors by a factor of about twelve-to-one.
(Italics for emphasis)

This investigation substantiates assertions that Christians of various denominations write the vast majority of texts published on Jesus' resurrection. This review determined that virtually all of the Pro-Resurrection Christian authors are, in fact, "true believers" with pre-critical and occupational biases in favor of orthodox Christian dogma. A literature review of the source confirms that many of the authors are apologists, evangelists, ministers, priests, or administrators and professors in theological seminaries and universities. Consequently, the vast majority likely have a vested interest in the outcome of their research, something Habermas himself warns against.

By now, the flaw in the second criterion listed in Habermas's 2005 and 2012 articles should be apparent to the reader. Habermas's numbers merely expose the likelihood of a confirmation bias among credentialed "true believers" who conclude something that they already believed to begin with: Jesus raised from the dead. The data that Habermas has amassed is not proportionately pulled from all relevant subclasses of critical scholarship and is, therefore, unrepresentative of the actual historio-theological landscape. The data Habermas has gathered is not only tainted by virtue of his own professional biases (data gathered by advocacy groups like Christian apologetic institutions).

The data in this article provides evidentiary proof that most authors of pro-resurrection texts have a vested interest in the outcome. Returning to Alter and Slade,

That said, this article does not wish to assert that a Christian scholar cannot write an objective and critical text on the topic of Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, a literature review found that several detractors were once Christians, and some were former "believers" who later deconverted. Conversely, a review of the literature shows that some non-Christians and marginal Christians alike have converted or become stronger believers ("more mature in their faith") in Christianity after a deeper inquiry into the subject.³³

³³ Alter and Slade, "Dataset Analysis," 385.

Clara Pelle was correct to inquire angrily, “Where’s the beef?” Biblical scholars, theologians, and detractors are equally spot-on when they indigently ask Habermas to provide his evidence. For almost twenty years, they have made requests to examine the data. This article provides beef and kosher at that.

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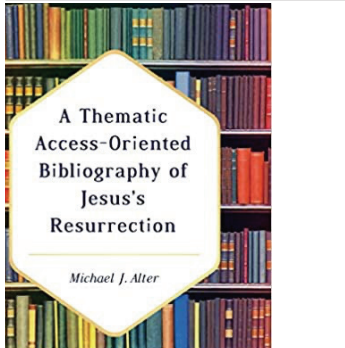
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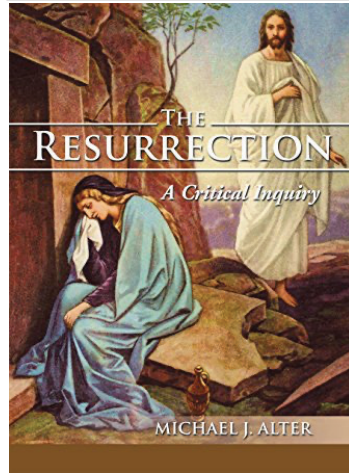
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael J. Alter taught in the Miami-Dade County Public School System for over forty years. He published *The Name Israel* (2023) and *A Thematic Access-Oriented Bibliography of Jesus's Resurrection* with Resource Publications (2020). His 602-page text identified approximately 7,000 English-language sources from books on that subject. Five years earlier, he penned *The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry* (2015) and has assisted in editing several other texts. Alter has also published with Jason Aronson, *Why the Torah Begins with the Letter Beit* (1998) and *What Is The Purpose Of Creation? A Jewish Anthology* (1991). Both books were the main selection of "The Jewish Book Club." Forthcoming is *The Resurrection and Its Apologetics: Jesus' Death and Burial*.

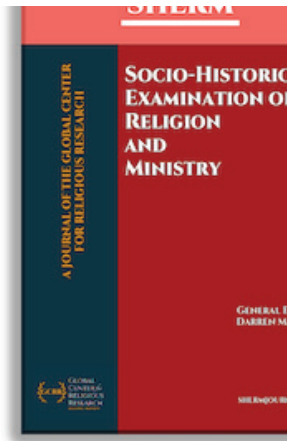
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