

THE PASSOVER PLOT: VERDICT, NOT GUILTY

A Critical Analysis of the Best Selling Book,
The Passover Plot by Hugh Schonfield

GARY G. COHEN
Professor of New Testament
Biblical School of Theology

The Passover Plot by Hugh Schonfield (1965) had eight printings in 1966-67 alone. Today copies of this influential book can be found in bookstores throughout America and Europe. We can partially see the reason for such a massive circulation when we read the sensational cover on the Bantam Book paper edition: "Did Jesus really Die on the Cross? The Stormy Bestseller, by Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield, Author of Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls." Further on the inside of the cover we read:

A few centuries ago the Passover Plot would have brought the author death at the stake if not worse. (Baltimore News American)

Why has this book created so fierce a storm of controversy? Why has it become a coast-to-coast sensation? The answer is not hard to find:

The Passover Plot asserts--and presents detailed evidence from the Bible and from the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls to prove--that Jesus planned his own arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection; that he arranged to be drugged on the cross, simulating death so that he could later be safely removed and thus bear out the Messianic prophecies.

Never before has so eminent an authority presented so challenging a thesis--or backed it up with such irrefutable evidence. Never before has a single book caused so many to question deeply the very roots of their belief

Startling . . . The author reveals himself as a more careful student of the New Testament than many Christians who read it devotionally. (Dr. Daniel A. Poling, The Christian Herald)

Let the following be noted concerning this book:

I. First of all, Schonfield must be seen to be attacking the very citadel of Biblical Christianity. It is at once apparent that the above sayings on the inside cover of the book are sensational claims. If indeed Schonfield has proven that Jesus "arranged to be drugged on the cross, simulating death so that he could later be safely removed," then what Schonfield has actually proven is that the Historic Christian Faith is false and that Jesus was really not our sinless Saviour. Christ over and over affirmed the absolute necessity of his dying as the Messiah for men's sins, and he labelled the suggestion of his avoiding making this atoning sacrifice as a Satanic suggestion (Matthew 16:21-23). Indeed the Old Testament prophets demand a Messiah without any "deceit in his mouth," who dies, and who rises again (Isaiah 53:8-12). If then, while Christ is affirming that he must die, he is at the same time plotting on the side not to die, he becomes a deceiver and a sinner. And his deception is of the very worst type; a deception which would make him by his own admission a false messiah worthy of a blasphemer's death. This is so because he himself pointed out, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). If it was necessary that the Messiah die and rise again--and it was--then if he offered himself as the Messiah having only pretended to die, he was a false Messiah, a deceiver, a liar, a blasphemer, and no Messiah by any means. With this we apprehend the seriousness of Schonfield's assault on the historic Christian Faith. In fact, if Schonfield is correct, look at the stupendous hypocrisy in Christ's words in John 15:13 when before the crucifixion he said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Thus Schonfield's Christ is Antichrist; and Schonfield is aiming his axe at this tap root of Christendom.

II. Second, we must not allow massive quotation to be equated with logical proof. Fortunately, Christ and the Bible here again stand solid as a rock through this modern attack on the New Testament, on Christ's divinity, and on the atonement. To put it simply, Schonfield by no means--scholarly or unscholarly--makes good any proof of his thesis that Christ attempted to come as the Messiah and yet through a master plan of deceit he at the same time plotted to pretend to die as the prophesied suffering Saviour (Isaiah 53:3-10) while all the while sneaking out of the tomb at midnight.

Many do not realize that true scholarship does not manifest itself merely by the quotation of multiplied men and manuscripts little known to the average person. Often I have seen attempts to prove this or that by way of the marshalling forth of massive amounts of quotations and arguments with the final result still being that the conclusions drawn simply were not justified by the facts presented.

What is the point here to be made in application to the present book under discussion? Answer: Schonfield fails to prove his thesis despite his great number of allusions to so-called supporting material. True, the Bible, the writings of Josephus, and the extra-Biblical Qumran writings are of great value, but as he used them here, they do not prove his point.

For example, a physicist may write a paper for one reason or another to attempt to prove that aerodynamically Santa's sleigh is capable of sustained atmospheric flight if empowered by sufficient forward thrust such as might be supplied by eight reindeer or some other type of power plant (and I have heard just such a paper). In this paper, by reason of the physicist's training he may allude to various complex aerodynamic principles and he may cite sundry thrust, lift, and drag equations in addition to long discussions with specific figures on air-foil shapes, wind turbulence, laminar flow, ideal angle of attack, temperature-pressure effects, et cetera. Someone reading such a paper, especially a non-engineer impressed with the trappings of the writer's obvious training and knowledge of the topic, may be so moved that he tends to agree with the conclusions brought forward (for who is he to disagree with such an expert?). Yet, still and all, Santa's sleigh remains an aerodynamic failure! So it is here. The Passover Plot quotes Gospels and sources galore, but it does not make good its case. The points to follow will review some of the reasons for this.

III. Third, the writer of The Passover Plot begins with the biased assumption, and builds his case upon it, that the Bible accounts which tell of the supernatural cannot actually be true. This is called "Antisupernaturalism;" and it is the foundation stone of all of today's modernistic attacks upon the Bible. Schonfield's book is just another of these anti-Bible books, and though a "new entity" to laymen by reason of its popular distribution, it parrots essentially the same basic line of argument brought forth by Paulus, Strauss, and others who composed the rationalistic (severely antisupernatural) lives of Jesus a century ago. Hear Schonfield confess his bias on page 2 of his Introduction:

The God-man of Christianity is increasingly incredible, yet it is not easy to break with centuries of authoritative instruction and devout faith, and there remains

embedded deep in the subconscious a strong sense of the supernatural inherited from remote ages.

On page 6 he adds,

When the Gospels were composed, legend, special pleading, the new environment of Christianity after the war (of A.D. 66-70), and a changed view of the nature of Jesus gave them a flavor of which we have to be fully conscious when we enlist their essential aid in the quest for the historical Jesus.

What is he advancing here at the start of his case? He is telling the reader quite openly that to him the "God-man of Christianity is increasingly incredible" and that the four accounts of Christ which we have, the four Gospels, therefore are filled with "legend" to fit a "changed view of the nature of Jesus." That is, the supposed legends are placed in the Gospel accounts of the New Testament in order to buttress a belief that Jesus was a God-man and that he could perform miracles. Thus Schonfield announces at the start of his legal presentation that he will reject any and all of the New Testament which tells of a supernatural Jesus. With this bias his conclusion is a foregone certainty. He who refuses to accept any evidence for a divine Christ can only conclude that Christ was not divine!

Of course, all genuine Christians believe that Schonfield is absolutely wrong. The claims of the New Testament accounts themselves go out of their way to explicitly deny that they are fabricated tales told by over-zealous bards. Let the interested reader examine on this such passages as the following and see for himself the great and clear claim of the New Testament to historic accuracy on what it reports. Let the reader see that it claims to have been written by eyewitnesses and that the most searching examinations bear this out. See Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 2 Peter 1:1-21; I John 1:1-5. The New Testament rings true when studied in detail as to its origins.

Additional examples of Schonfield's denial of Christ's performing the supernatural, and of his denial of the reliability of the New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are so legion that it is superfluous here to multiply additional quotations to prove this.

IV. Fourth, the writer of The Passover Plot accepts and rejects evidence in an utterly arbitrary manner. What is the significance of his coming into this study of the life of Christ with his opinion that "The God-man of Christianity is increasingly incredible" (p.2)? Does not everyone enter every investigation with one bias or another? Answer:

Here in this case Schonfield's bias is fatal. Why? Because the primary documentation out of which he constructs his case is the New Testament Gospel account which he confessedly regards as largely fabrication. He attempts to assert that Christ was thus and so while affirming that the only evidence which tells of Christ is entirely untrustworthy. At best his conclusion should be an agnostic one; yet he speculates of a plotting Christ.

But doesn't he also utilize Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls? Answer: Not really. The Josephean and Qumran material would be today a sine qua non in the reconstruction of a full history of the first century B.C. or the first century A.D.; but in any reconstruction of the Life of Christ everyone familiar with the subject knows that they provide only historic atmosphere. Both of these sources often quoted by Schonfield contain no references to Christ whatsoever except for possibly one or two much debated sentences.

Here then is the point. If the only written documentation from the time of Christ about Christ's life is contained in the New Testament documents (and this is so, except for a few innocuous sentences in extra-Biblical literature): and if Schonfield openly despises them as filled and mixed hopelessly with legend; then how can he on the basis of these error-filled accounts so sift truth from non-truth to prove his thesis which involves an entire new detailed reconstruction of the life of Christ? Answer: He cannot do it.

His entire case is not in fact a proof. What he does is to offer his theory which involves a Jesus who condemns the Pharisees for hypocrisy, and at the same time plays the part of the world's greatest hypocrite--pretending to die willingly as the sinless messianic redeemer, while at the same time maneuvering by deceptions and lies to sneak away alive. He, Schonfield, to make his plot thesis work must arbitrarily say: "Jesus did not do this--he did not say that--the gospel writers made it up; but here Jesus must have done this and that" The fallacy of it all is that he himself becomes the judge and arbiter of all of the evidence, and he keeps whatever New Testament word or deed which fits his theory and he arbitrarily dismisses as untrue all that would disprove his thesis. Whenever something is mentioned in the Gospels showing Jesus' supernatural powers, his deity, or his absolute integrity Schonfield pushes it aside because he utterly rejects such concepts as being even possibly true (so on pp. 109-10 he peremptorily rejects the John 11 account of the raising of Lazarus from the grave). Naturally with such a rigged judge who accepts only the factors which would permit his theory--just as a polarized sunglass accepts only light rays oriented in one plane--he makes his theory sound almost plausible. Yet it is all of his own imagination.

His test for reliable evidence becomes the question as to whether or not it fits his theories about Christ's true nature and motives. He, along with all modernists, arbitrarily carves out his own Jesus by picking and choosing what he wants to retain from the Gospel accounts. Then he offers it to us as his conception of the real Jesus. But let us see it for what it is--not scholarship but imaginative art, idol making. Let us have done with pious reviews of Schonfield's book which act surprised that one who begins by viewing the Jesus of the Gospels as "incredible" should conclude that he cannot believe in a Christ who rose from the dead.

V. Fifth, Schonfield's constant assertion of errors and conflicts in the Gospel accounts are not the proven results of scholarship but rather his continual opinionated attacks based upon biases and superficialities.

For example, his assertion (p. 264) that Christ did not still the storm as the Gospel of Matthew 8:24-27 reports is based on his assumption that Jesus was not a God-man; therefore he could not have stilled the storm; therefore He did not do it; therefore it was a coincidental happening into which the disciples misread the power of God.

He asserts (p.209) that the parable of Luke 16 on the Rich Man and Lazarus and the account of the raising of Lazarus given in John 11 both come from the same legend based upon a sick man making a surprising recovery. Yet this suggestion is utterly without proof whatsoever beyond the superficial observation of the same name used in two different places. These two Lazaruses were different men. The one of Luke 16:19-31 was a poor beggar who had no caretakers and who was starving; the Lazarus of John 11 was the brother of two sisters with whom he lived in Bethany who were sufficiently well to do so as to entertain Jesus together with his disciples on more than one occasion (Luke 10:40; John 12:2). Where is the evidence to relate these two items? Where is the evidence to deny that Christ raised Lazarus from the dead as this scene is meticulously reported in lengthy detail in John 11? Answer: None. These narratives are purely Biblical events; there is no historical data outside the Bible to refute them; and there is no internal evidence from the Biblical narratives themselves to suggest that the two are related, that the two are legends from a common cistern, or that the two are untrue--except it be the conviction of unbelief that even God cannot raise the dead.

Schonfield's treatment of Christ's walking on the water (p. 265) is another example of his type of attack on the trustworthiness of the Gospels (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52). He first brings out the fact that Mark tells us only of Christ walking upon the water while he says that Matthew "elaborated" to include Peter's attempt to follow Christ in

doing this. This is true; but there is the implication that either Matthew added or that Mark subtracted from the story (though Schonfield credits neither Christ nor Peter with such a miraculous feat). Here we must note an axiom of Gospel interpretation. The omission of a fact in one Gospel in no way denies the actuality of this fact when it is reported in another Gospel. In other words, no one writer includes everything; and Mark's omission of Peter's attempt to follow Jesus upon the water in no way denies Matthew's assertion of it. Compare: "Mark says that he saw Mother coming from the store yesterday with "Matthew says that he saw Mother and Peter coming from the store yesterday." Here both are true, but one adds a detail that the other omits. Neither errs.

Further on this same incident, the English doctor (p. 265) ascribes the entire account of Christ walking on the water to a later confusion with regard to the Hebrew word al. He advances the idea that it was first said Jesus walked al ("by") the water; but later this was taken to mean that Jesus walked al ("on") the water. But here, despite the impressive allusion to the Hebrew, there is absolutely no evidence for such a case. Matthew and Mark are both written in Greek and in both Matthew 14:25 and Mark 6:48 the word is clearly "upon" (epi) and not "beside" or "by" (para). Even if Matthew had composed an earlier Logia (collection of Christ's sayings) there is no evidence that this narrative portion would be in it; quite the contrary, the Hebrew Logia is usually thought to contain the Non-Markian discourse material. Evidence for the confusion of Hebrew words? None.

Do you see? Such assertions are founded not on any solid evidence-proof basis, but upon the presupposition that because men today cannot normally walk upon water therefore even a messianic Son of God could not do it. This is so despite the fact that the only accounts which we have on the subject assert in detail and at length that He did do it. Matthew who reported this incident of the walking upon the water (Matthew 14:22-23) was one of the twelve apostles who travelled with Jesus. He was in the boat when this incident happened. Mark, the other reporter of the event (Mark 6:45-52), was the interpreter and travelling companion of the Apostle Peter (so Papias, early second century), and Mark's account would thus record Peter's testimony. On such things Peter well said in 2 Peter 1:16,

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

That is,

For we (the apostles and Gospel writers) have not followed cunningly devised fables (muthois in the Greek--

"myths"), when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., "when we testified to you of the miracles, signs, deeds, and gracious words of the Messiah Jesus who has appeared"), but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (i.e., we did not make up these accounts, but we personally saw first-hand these things happen).

Peter tells us that he was there when these things happened and that these events recorded in the Gospels are true. Matthew was there and he too declares that Christ walked out upon the waters of Galilee's Lake manifesting his miraculous powers as the true Son of God. Schonfield says that it was an embellished story based probably on Jesus "wading into the shallows" (p.265). Where is his evidence for this? Nowhere. He simply rejects the account and all like accounts not on the basis of new scholarly manuscript finds or any such evidence, but rather simply because he cannot believe that such things could occur. He thus on the basis of his bias dismisses the only available evidence which we have on the incident, which evidence points only to Jesus actually having walked on the water.

The internal evidence of the cohesiveness of the Biblical account, its rationality, and its internal self-consistency makes it highly credible. Put this with the prophecies telling of the miraculous signs to be performed in the Messianic Kingdom (e.g., Isaiah 35:5-6) and with the unique to all of world literature and biography Gospel accounts of Jesus' perfect life and words, and the probability no longer leans against this man Jesus doing a miracle; it leans in favor of it. Again and again we must declare that Christ himself (the Living Word of God) and the Gospel narratives of Christ's life (the written Word of God) are self-authenticating.

Schonfield's explaining away of the miracles with often the identical explanations given by the European School of rationalistic theologians of the former century (and they too advocated their "plot theories") is not proof against their reality; it is merely his own personal manifesto of unbelief in Jesus as the Christ. And what unbeliever does credit Jesus with doing miracles?

Now we do not deny him his liberty to reject Jesus as the Messiah-Christ; even God in this present age grants him this. But we do say that all believing Christians disagree with his conclusions, regard his unbelief as sin, and reject any proposition by sympathetic book reviewers that he has made good his case.

VI. Sixth, and finally, Schonfield's theory of a Passover Plot simply is not justified by the evidence. The plot theory itself can be put in synopsis form by the following quotes from the book itself:

On the hill of Golgotha three bodies are suspended on crosses. Two--the thieves--are dead. The third appears so. This is the drugged body of Jesus of Nazareth, the man who planned his own crucifixion, who contrived to be given a soporific potion to put him into a deathlike trance. Now Joseph of Arimathea, bearing clean linen and spices, approaches and recovers the still form of Jesus. All seems to be proceeding according to plan . . . (p. i--of the Introductory pages).

. . . Moves and situations had to be anticipated, rulers and associates had to perform their functions without realizing that they were being used. A conspiracy had to be organized of which the victim was himself the deliberate secret instigator. It was a nightmarish conception and undertaking, the outcome of the frightening logic of a sick mind, or of a genius. And it worked out (p. 125).

Thus the theory runs through chapters 9-13 of Schonfield's book. The claim is that the people were looking for a messiah, Jesus knew the prophecies concerning the messiah's suffering. Jesus decided that he would be that messiah and that he would so plot and manipulate circumstances and people that in the end after crucifixion he could sneak away from the tomb alive--thus permitting a belief in his resurrection to be kindled and spread abroad.

This theory is entirely imaginary and entirely against all of the available evidence. One could just as well advance countless similar theories which would be just as credible--only they, too, would have two fatal faults, viz., (1) They are built entirely on imagination; and (2) the available evidence points the other way.

To understand this, note the following example: It could be theorized that Lincoln did not die either, but that he was the brains behind the Theater Plot. It could be shown that he had great motives to desire to appear to be shot--he wished to go into the halls of American fame which assassination would insure. Also, he was wearied of the long trials of the war and he thought that another who had not gained so many personal enemies as himself could lead the nation more effectively in the reconstruction period. Yet he knew that he was so popular with the masses that he would easily be drafted as the Presidential candidate

and the Northern votes would make his election certain. What to do? Answer: He had an actor hired who could carry off his part well. It was only a blank fired, and a catsup bag provided the blood. Only a few would be allowed near him and the secret would be safe with just a handful of plotters. When his death was announced the empty coffin was sealed and at night the newly shaven and beardless ex-president rode off to the west into oblivion. Later his fellow plotters cleverly re-released stories of how the dead body was seen by many. Booth, the assassin, had his lips permanently sealed by death as had been, of course, planned in advance by the plotters.

Who can deny that the above is not what really happend? Answer: No one. However, the evidence simply does not point this way in a credible fashion; and none see it so except those who desire to do so. In the same say, Schonfield's plot invents people doing secretive deeds at the right times without the least bit of evidence.

On page 127 he says that the one who prepared the donkey for Christ's Triumpha! Entry into Jerusalem at the start of the Passion Week was Lazarus, i.e., ". . . Jesus had privately arranged, no doubt with Lazarus" The naming of this person as "Lazarus" and the startling and superbly unscholarly assuring words, "no doubt," is pure imagination. There is no New Testament indication or extra-Biblical record anywhere that shows that Lazarus did this. Oh yes, Matthew 21:2-3 shows that Christ did indeed previously take care of this, but the assertion that it was "Lazarus . . . no doubt" is a typical example of dogmatic assetions being continually made without evidence to fit the theory.

On page 127 Schonfield creates an unnamed disciple called "John the Priest" to provide an additional plotter. There is no evidence for even so much as the existence of such a person in the New Testament, let alone to assign him the role as a plotter. Someone, however, may reply to me with the question, "But can you prove that such a person did not exist? Or perhaps he existed under the title of "John the Prophet" or maybe, "Jim the Priest?" Answer: No, I cannot prove that there was no one such as John the Priest, living at Christ's time, neither can I assert that there is no three-eyed frog somewhere in Jamaica-- it is difficult and sometimes impossible to assert a categorical negative. The point is, however, that Schonfield has no true proof for asserting that such a one ever lived except it be that the plot theory needs him.

On pages 127-28 Schonfield asserts that "we are able to detect a private arrangement by Jesus with Mary. . ." made in order that Mary would anoint Christ in advance for his death and so force the hand of the emotional Judas into the now-needed betrayal. If this were so

Jesus becomes the arch-moral-hypocrite of the ages, because he forces a weak man, Judas, to betray him, which betrayal is consummated in Judas' hanging of himself. Then, you see, Jesus murdered Judas by manipulating him to perform a deed which resulted in Judas' committing suicide. Then it is Christ and not Judas who is the betrayer of friendship and the murderer!

Fortunately, here again, there is utterly no proof anywhere to show a Jesus-Mary plot to force Judas' hand. This is utterly imagination and it would be summarily rejected by every court in this land. No evidence--only guesses unsupported by facts--this is the continual flaw which mars the entire case of The Passover Plot.

Schonfield's imagination also placed a fourteenth chair at the Last Supper. Christ plus the twelve make thirteen, and Schonfield adds number fourteen (p. 132) in his assertion that another, an arch-plotter called "The Beloved Disciple," was also present. Proof? None. Here only Schonfield's rejection of the Apostle John as the author of the Gospel of John, and his theory's necessity to find a plotter outside of the circle of the Twelve Disciples (for they too had to be fooled into believing that Jesus had really died and had risen from the dead), has necessitated the creation of this fourteenth soul.

John 13:23 says that at the Last Supper there was sitting at Christ's side "leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved." In such a way the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, continually refers to its author; and Irenaeus, the Church Father (170 A.D.) gives us evidence that the writer was no one else than the Apostle John himself. John in modesty does not refer to himself by name anywhere in his Gospel. In fact, only by realizing that John is the author can we explain why the writer of this Fourth Gospel never even once names the disciple John when the other three Gospels show him as one of the most prominent of the disciples, one of the "Inner Three" composed of Peter, James, and John. Only Peter, James, and John were permitted the joy of seeing Christ raise Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37), and only these same three were privileged to see the transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2). Why does the Fourth Gospel never mention by name this prominent disciple of the Twelve? For two thousand years all branches of the Church have come forth with one answer, viz., John himself, one of the Twelve wrote the Fourth Gospel, just as Irenaeus and Polycarp testified. And the simple Greek of this Gospel is in style and vocabulary, with its repeated meta tauta expressions, the same as the Greek of the three Epistles and the Book of Revelation which were also written by John the Apostle.

Yet with all of this, Schonfield asserts that the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had the seat next to Jesus (John 13:23) was not the

Apostle John, one of the Twelve, but another John, the arch-plotter Disciple John, the fourteenth at the Supper. Where, however, is there evidence for such a one at the last supper? Where is there evidence even for his existence? Mark 14:17 speaks only of the Twelve being with Jesus. Matthew speaks of no others. Luke 22:14 says, "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him." Thus nowhere is there evidence for another outside of the twelve being at the Last Supper, except for the fact that Schonfield's theory requires a plotter to be with Christ during his final hours and yet not be one of the twelve. Luke 22:14, "He sat down, and the twelve apostles with him," should settle the matter. He and the twelve alone were there, and Schonfield's fourteenth chair is not only unsupported imagination, but it is also contrary to the only available evidence. Da Vinci and the Church for two millennia have not miscounted the chairs; Schonfield's theory runs against the facts.

On and on this could continue, but it all boils down to the same basic argument. Schonfield (p. 143) blames Jesus for having "deliberately maneuvered" Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus; but the only evidence available, that which is found in the records gathered into what we today call the New Testament, declare that a sinless, innocent, and guileless Jesus Christ was "by wicked hands" condemned, crucified, and slain (Acts 2:23; Matthew chapters 26-27; etc.).

Schonfield asserts that "Imagination has clearly been employed to build up a picture and to lend solemnity and significance to the Crucifixion" (p. 147), but the only evidence available declares that the facts reported are the sober truth as reported by eye witnesses (Luke 1:12-18; John 20:30-31; 2 Peter 1:12-18).

Schonfield suggests that the story of Joseph of Arimathea begging Pilate for the body of Jesus and the story that two thieves were crucified with Jesus are intertwined with later recollections and with Luke's reading in Josephus that he, Josephus, once begged Titus to stop the already-in-progress crucifixion of three of his friends (p. 157). Yet the only available evidence does not indicate in any way that Luke ever even read these passages in Josephus' voluminous writings. Even the alleged similarities in the two accounts are extremely superficial. No, the only available evidence portrays, as prophesied by Isaiah 53:9 seven centuries before Christ, that it was necessary for the Messiah to die with wicked men and to be buried with the rich before his resurrection. The Gospel accounts all report these actions as historic facts, and not recollections of a century later.

Schonfield theorized (p. 165) that the empty tomb can be explained by his scheme that the plotters had removed the body to revive Jesus.

Then, he supposes, developed the belief of the Apostles in their master's resurrection which was an understandable mistake (pp. 172-74). Further he supposes, by the unforeseen jabbing of a lance into Christ's side by an unwarned soldier, the Master may have been killed and his recovery prevented. Yet the only available evidence tells of a sinless, spotless Saviour, who came to the earth as the Lamb of God to die for man's sins, who was crucified by wicked hands, who was dead and buried, and who on the third day rose from the dead demonstrating to all that he truly was the Son of God (John 2:18-22; Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1; I Corinthians 15; I John 1).

The Plotting Christ is a literary fiction figure; there is no factual evidence to support his ever having been seen by anyone. No one ever wrote of having spoken to him. He has not been exhumed by the archeologist's spade or by the scholar's research; he has been drawn only by the paintbrush of the skeptic. He is a nonexistent phantom-shadow whom no one has ever touched.

The Christ of the Bible, the only Christ there is evidence for, is One who was seen alive from the dead by the Apostles. Thus the learned Luke in his precise and erudite Greek records:

To whom [the Apostles] also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

By this verse Luke calls to the jury's mind the true facts of this case, viz., that over and over the risen Christ appeared to those who had followed Him. Their doubts melted away by His oft appearances. He ate fish and invited them to feel His wounds to convince them that He was not a mere spirit or a mirage. They heard His words and saw His ascension. He had been dead--the Romans and His fanatical religious enemies saw to this. The tomb had been sealed and the guards had been posted. Yet He arose. The evidence, says Luke, infallibly points to only this conclusion.

Paul the Apostle further summarized the evidence for the resurrection from the dead of the Bible's Christ in I Corinthians 15. With this testimony given on behalf of the one true Christ this review of Schonfield's mythical plotting Christ closes. No, the Sinless-One was not a fraud; He was holy, pure, and undefiled. He died for our sins and we will be saved if we but trust in Him. He comes to the bar of justice with evidence for His existence. Beside Him there is no other