

Hey Gareth, Thanks for your thought provoking response and insightful thoughts. Like you I need more space than a little box to reply, after all you made a number of points and it would be rude of me not to respond appropriately.

You seem concerned that my thinking offers an, 'outright rejection of the possibility of a historical reconstruction'. This is not the case at all. However before I respond directly to that point let me take a step back from the question of the historical Jesus and begin by claiming that traditional Christianity is fundamentally based upon a response to a revelation of the *Risen Christ*, as testified to by the apostle Paul in his famous conversion. First and foremost this means that believers affirm the *historical truth* of Christ as an incoming in their own history. The beginning of faith and the foundation of Christian commitment thus rests precisely in responding to the Risen Christ discovered in the moment of conversion.

While people may say that their faith is solely, or primarily, based upon the historical reality of Christ's death and resurrection this affirmation is actually of a secondary nature (even if the experience of the Risen Christ is fundamentally based on the concrete fact of the literal resurrection). This would seem to be true even of the Apostle Paul who, most would agree, approaches his faith as first and foremost based upon an experiential encounter with Christ (even though there is little doubt that he fundamentally believed in a literal resurrection).

Once we have established this we can now ask about the historical Jesus. Here, even if we ignore the nineteenth century theologians failure to found faith upon the historical Jesus, we are left with the simple problem that to base faith fundamentally upon empirical information (of whatever nature) is to return to the problems implicit in foundationalism and evidentialism – namely that our beliefs can only be realistically held when the empirical foundation is solid and the evidence we have at our disposal is airtight (the less secure the foundation the less commitment we can have). If faith is not based solely upon revelation but also *requires* an additional historical fact in order to be legitimate (note this is not saying that the historical Jesus is not still important) then we must subscribe to the latest *History Today* and *Archaeology Now* journals in order to ascertain how secure our faith can be.

Yes we can believe in the historical Jesus and yes we can see it as important, but I am wary of a faith that *requires* it, not only does it isolate those who are less convinced (yet who still hold to an historical event occurring in their lives in which Christ is encountered) but it means that our faith requires empirical data that we, 2000 years after the events, cant access with complete certainty. I also wouldn't want to try and show someone that Jesus rose from the dead via some elaborate historical reading in order that they believe but rather pray for them and let the living God impact their life directly (if the historical question is vital then I would need to do both).

If we lived when Paul did this may not be such an issue as the events were all very recent, so the point as I see it isn't so much that Paul believed in the historical Jesus so much as whether he, and we, have to base our faith on it for it to be legitimate: i.e. is faith based upon our commitment to the historical reality, the existential reality or the need for both?

Concerning your claims about the OT and history I absolutely agree with you in so much as the Jews were indeed interested in history, while interpreting that history in theological ways. There is a complex relation between the history of the Jews as it is recorded in the Bible and the theological language through which it is expressed. Without getting into it the bible is not straight history, the *meganarrative* is influenced greatly by history but does not interpret it objectively as this would have been a foreign procedure. My point about truth was that the existential, transformative nature of truth generally *sits well* alongside empirical fact (and thus historical reality) – it is just that there are times when these do not sit well.

Concerning my claim about multiple readings (I am aware this response is getting long) I will simply say that my claim concerning multiple readings is not a claim for infinite readings. Indeed my claims concerning a radical hermeneutics of love and Truth as soteriological event provide certain limits to how we may legitimately interpret (not to mention more standard procedures such as authorial intent, context, etc.).

On the last point I hope that I made it clear that I fundamentally do believe that Christians ought to get their rules for life from the Christian tradition, I was only making the point that our understanding of that tradition (and sometimes the tradition itself – to be more controversial) can be damaging to the concretely existing other and that we must be prepared to revisit and rethink our understanding of our tradition in the midst of concrete existence, singular events and engagement with others (as we did with slavery).

Lastly, my hope is that the emerging church community can be wide enough to welcome people who are unsure, or even reject, the historicity of certain elements of the Christian faith for what I was arguing is that the thing that is refreshing about the emerging church is that people are brought together not because of a shared dogmatics (there are few church communities with people of such independent and deep thinking) but rather that the individuals who participate either believe that they have experienced the Truth of Christ (as a soteriological event) or that they are open to, and searching for, this experience – which, as I hinted at on the day, may be closer to each other than we initially think.

Hope this provides some food for thought, Cheers Pete.