

## **Is There Still Life in Those Old Bones, and Should We Care?** **A discussion on the study of the historical Jesus**

### **Thesis**

Our identity as historical beings informed the original impulse and method of the historical approach to Jesus. Now that our identity is as *psychological* beings we need a new *psychological* approach to the figure of Jesus. The problem is that we do not yet assume Soul in the same way that we already assume History. Our new identity based in Soul/Psyche is the issue, but it has not yet become our assumed form of consciousness. Therefore, we live in the reign of confusion.

### **The idea of historical method**

“Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt.” This was Walter Wink’s provocative declaration at the beginning of his 1973 book, *The Bible In Human Transformation*. Thirty-seven years later, in the spring of 2010, Fortress Press re-issued this book at Walter’s request. Walter’s effort is to present a new paradigm of biblical engagement that takes seriously the transforming power of the biblical text and the transformation of the individual reading the text. With this book Walter is actually trying to transform “historical consciousness.”

In the 1970’s Walter was not the only one disenchanted with the method of historical research. Hayden White, a professional historian, published critiques of both historical research and historical writing, showing that the attempt to scientifically exclude the historian from the object of study (the past) was just plain impossible. This was Walter’s chief complaint as well. Historical biblical criticism had achieved such a critical distance on the biblical text that it had been reduced to a lifeless object that could not touch the student of the text. The student of the text had also become a lifeless intellect without a body. The point of scientific historical study was to avoid contaminating the results of research with subjectivity. We now know this ideal of scientific research is untenable and impossible to attain. The psyche (and body) is everywhere involved with every observation. What Walter did not realize, and could not have realized at the time, is that historical consciousness was undergoing a transformation by way of an emerging psychological consciousness. But because “psychology” was still in the grip of scientific reductionism, Walter was somewhat defensive about the role of psychology in biblical exploration. A psychology based in Soul was not yet available.

Walter wrote his book after experiencing the Guild’s seminar on the life and teachings of Jesus, and then taking his sabbatical studying with Elizabeth Howes and the Guild for Psychological Studies for several months. His life was deeply changed by his encounter with what is called “Basic Records.” (From Henry Sharman’s gospel parallels, *The Records of the Life and Teachings of Jesus*.)

If, however, the aim of historical biblical criticism is to achieve knowledge of an historical person known as Jesus then the charge of bankruptcy is still valid. As Walter himself noted,

It just may be, however that the critical *procedure* is more important than its results.

In other words, the results of historical critical research with regard to a historical figure Jesus will always be ambiguous. Jesus as an historical figure is ultimately unreachable. But, what is the value of the critical *procedure* for us? Walter goes on to say,

By means of it we have achieved distance. It has undermined residual or manifest views of plenary inspiration, literalism, and bibliolatry, and has set the conditions for a pre-Christological and non-sanctimonious reading of the life of Jesus. In doing so we have brought to the fore the literary problems. (p.53)

The real value of the critical *procedure* is not its historical results but its effect on consciousness. We fail to fully appreciate the historical significance of the achievement of historical/scientific consciousness in the history of ideas. The idea that one has the freedom to think critically and independently about the biblical text is truly an astonishing achievement in the context of over a thousand years of mythological consciousness that kept the mind bound in fealty to the sacrosanct reality of the biblical text. We take this freedom for granted.

Walter's dense little academic paragraph characterizes the orientation of historical consciousness that is already assumed by most people who come to a Records seminar. In general, people who come to a Records seminar do not view the biblical text as a divinely inspired absolute word of a god, they do not take mythological and miracle stories literally, and they do not view the bible as somehow untouchable by criticism and questions. They are also already open to viewing Jesus as a Jewish man who had a life before he was declared the Christian Messiah and they are unlikely to presume a moral superiority with regard to themselves and Jesus. Most people who come to Basic Records hold these historically conditioned assumptions unconsciously, and have probably not thought about them consciously. They take historical consciousness for granted and so have no objections to the historical critical method when it is applied to the text. The modern idea of history is assumed as a cultural norm by most of us.

My view today is that the historical critical procedure needs to become psychologically critical as an aspect of our new consciousness in relation to Soul.

### **Two tracks: history and psychology**

The Basic Records experience moves along on two tracks. One track is the historical approach to Jesus and the other track is the psychological experience of the participant. By and large it is the psychological experience of the participant that far outweighs in prominence and intensity the historical approach to Jesus. I do not know that we have ever heard anyone, at the end of a Basic Records seminar, go on about how deeply his or her image of Jesus has been transformed. They are preoccupied with the personal transformation they have experienced in their own life. I would even venture to say that the image of Jesus is unimportant or irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is possible to assume that the image of Jesus is significantly changed and that this occurs at a subliminal level.

## **Unconscious Christianity**

There is often some aspect of the Christ or Jesus that we do not want touched or changed. We go deaf and blind to the historical critical orientation at these points. Invariably, what we do not want touched or contaminated by secular humanism, what we don't want reduced and made small by scientific materialism, is some aspect of the text that holds secure the objective reality of God, or the reality of the transcendent. Within this resistance is a deep fear that our connection with an ultimate reality will be destroyed.

We have to remember that Walter's quotation above states that the critical method sets the conditions for a pre-Christological reading of the life of Jesus, but it does not erase all the Christological assumptions we are all unconsciously infected with. Even if we have moved from seeing Jesus as divine, there is usually a strong tendency to idealize some aspect of an historical Jesus, which in effect is to dehumanize him. I will go further and say that even the desire to see literal history in these texts is the refusal to allow the full realization of historical consciousness to be fully conscious. In other words, the need for a *historical-Jesus* is a denial of the true historical nature and context of these texts as mythological, and not historical, texts.

## **From history to *psychology***

My main point here today is that there has been an unresolved tension in the assumptions guiding the Basic Records study between the historical approach to Jesus and the psychological approach to the participant. We have assumed that the historical approach to Jesus stands on its own scientific merits and that by way of it a valid and reliable historical person of Jesus is retrieved. We have also assumed that the psychological experience of the participant is a personal and private affair. We have assumed that history and psychology stand side by side as two different methods of investigation or approach, and that the individual, the ego, is separated from what it investigates. In the classical or traditional modern worldview, in the world of the sciences, this subject-object separation is the ruling fantasy (paradigm). But in, for lack of a better term at the moment, a post-modern worldview, history has become *psychological*. In other words, the methods of history, and the idea of history itself, have become self-critical and self-conscious. As I said above, 'The psyche (and body) is everywhere involved with every observation.'

## **The Cosmos is *psychological***

It is not just history that has become psychological; the whole cosmos has become psychological. The accumulation of scientific knowledge now brings us to say, as a fact: I am the cosmos becoming conscious of myself. Parallel to this assertion we can also say, I am the Soul/Psyche becoming conscious of myself. These assertions press me to also assert that the Cosmos and the Soul are one reality and that the Cosmos is the body of the Soul. There is no mind-body dualism or dichotomy in this formulation because we now know that the universe itself is one unified reality through Einstein's famous equation  $E=mc^2$ . This means that energy and mass (matter) are

two expressions of One Thing. It is not that Soul is prior to Cosmos, or Cosmos prior to Soul: Soul = Cosmos, and Cosmos = Soul.

### **Identity is the issue**

The crucial and central issue that is at stake in these observations is: What is our identity, and how is this identity related to what is ultimate? If we remain in the modern scientific worldview, and view history and psychology as sciences, then we are random and isolated bits of protoplasm related to other random and isolated objects, and the cosmos is inherently meaningless. But, if my identity is now the Cosmos itself, and I know that the Cosmos is the Soul, and that the purpose of this awesome identity is consciousness, then things have changed significantly. In the modern worldview I am an accidental product of that separate entity, the cosmos. In the *psychological* (post-modern) worldview there is no separation between the human object and what is ultimate, the Cosmos/Soul. The human is the Cosmos/Soul self-evolving, self-creating, becoming conscious. I am the Cosmos, I am what is ultimate, and consciousness is what makes the difference. This next sentence will be hard to follow. It is consciousness itself that is conscious that it is the consciousness of the cosmos becoming conscious of itself that provides the ultimate unity and difference that is the cosmos' basic structure. Consciousness is actually the essence of matter itself. Consciousness is not a property of matter, but rather matter itself becoming something new. Consciousness, like gravity, has something to do with the relationship of the cosmos to itself.

The problem for history and science, in the modern classical form (we can call it Newtonian physics), is that matter is the final ground and cause (materialism). Once we understand the forces at work in the physical universe we understand everything there is to know. In the mythological form of consciousness the gods and goddesses were the final ground and cause of everything, they made everything happen. Within history and science the gods and goddesses have been eliminated, they are not the ground or cause of anything; they are fictions and figments of the human mind; from the point of view of science they are fictions that have been overcome. We take it for granted that the mythological assumptions are no longer adequate for our study of Jesus, but we do not yet really know that the scientific/historical assumptions that underlie our modern Records study are no longer adequate, and actually lead us astray. Our *psychological* (post-modern) situation, and our contemporary identity that we are the Cosmos/Soul becoming conscious of our self, requires a new approach.

### **Case study: Resurrection**

Feel into this sequence of assertions (note your emotional response to each):

1. The crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The crucifixion of the historical Jesus and the proclamation of the resurrection.
3. The fiction of the crucifixion and resurrection of a man named Jesus.

4. The Soul crucifies and resurrects itself over and over.  
The Cosmos crucifies and resurrects itself over and over.
5. I am daily crucifixion-resurrection.

In the Records study itself the limitations of the historical method and its materialistic assumptions, is nowhere more in evidence than in the approach to the resurrection stories. The hardest thing to do is to stop thinking humanistically and historically about Jesus and the origins of Christianity. I am not saying here that Jesus never existed nor that the disciples never existed, but we must remember that the “Jesus” and the “disciples” of the gospel stories are fictions giving expression to a new emergent mythos. The mythos of the dying and rising incarnated god is the prior reality that emerges historically and culturally, and the works of some historical Jesus or the experience of some few disciples does not cause this new mythos.

The Passion narratives in the gospels are fictions and we really know nothing about their content from an historical point of view. Yet, in the Records study we treat them as history and ask questions about them as if they were history, seeking the cause of the resurrection stories in the discrete experience of a few persons. These gospel stories were written long after this new emergent mythos was already wide spread. The Soul had already propagated the Christ mythos in many extravagant forms – there were hundreds of “gospels” being written; the new myth was in the air and people were giving it expression. The word, or name, “Jesus” was simply what crystallized or catalyzed Soul’s new form that was expressing itself as this mythos, just as today the name “Darwin” or “Freud” crystallizes a whole new form of thinking about the world and human nature.

Historical thinking sees a chronological sequence of events in which first Jesus is crucified and then second there is a resurrection. The traditional Records questions continue thinking in terms of materialistic cause and effect by asking about the post-crucifixion experience of the disciples. The assumption is that a personal psychological experience is projected on Jesus and that this could explain the resurrection stories. To reinforce this view we employ a quotation from J. Wellhausen, “Christianity was the result of enthusiasm, but it was the enthusiasm of the disciples, not the enthusiasm of Jesus.” This is the historical point of view. This still locates the enthusiasm in individuals. What needs to change? Our identity needs to change.

We need to think of Soul/Psyche as an objective cosmic force that is at work as culture-history itself. If we locate the enthusiasm in Soul and see that this is a collective, historical and cultural phenomenon, then we shift from history to *psychology*, a psychology with Soul. It is the enthusiasm of Soul that transforms itself into a new form of consciousness and expresses itself as a new mythos emerging out of an existing mythos (the Jewish myth). The transformations of Soul/Psyche take place as history and culture but Soul cannot be reduced to sociology, politics, economics, or any other humanistic and materialistic thought form. Soul, or *psychology*, is its own reality, and it is not a disembodied metaphysical “Platonic” form. It is not a reality *behind*, or *within*, history, it is history itself: Soul = history, history = Soul ( $E=mc^2$ ).

Last year in leading the crucifixion and resurrection material we treated them as a unity in Soul's experience, and not as history. (Throughout the Records study it is still important to ask some "as if" historical questions with the self-conscious intention of bringing both critical thinking and feeling to the figure of Jesus in order to create a new historical fiction of Jesus that is more sophisticated historically and psychologically.)

The *psychological* move in relation to crucifixion-resurrection is to realize that Soul crucifies itself over and over. Soul is self-contradiction. And we experience Soul's self-contradiction as ourselves. We are a self-contradiction that is crucifixion. When this opposition, our conflicted thoughts, feelings, drives, urges, desires, come to consciousness, this consciousness is "resurrection," or what we psychologically call the Self. The new psychological meaning of resurrection could be the consciousness of the Self as the conscious embodiment of opposites.

Resurrection cannot be separated from crucifixion. They are inextricably linked just as death and rebirth are unified in Soul's experience of itself. Soul is the universal and eternal self-transformations of libido, or energy, and we are the conscious medium of these transformations.

The *psychological* shift is to a new identity within the terms of the Christian mythos:  
 "I am crucifixion – resurrection." This is your true secret name.

Our identity shifts from object to process; from object-in-a-cosmos to process-of-a-cosmos. This is a new logical status. The old longing to know, or unite with, God is now a fact: I am the cosmos becoming conscious of myself (I am God).

### **Case Study: 38U (Matt 7:21) Doing the will of God**

Feel into these two assertions (note your emotional response to each):

1. Do the will of God to enter the kingdom of God
2. Who I am I must become

The traditional Records approach to this passage is to amplify the words "will" and "God" and then put your own words together in a phrase you can act on now. We share these phrases as a group and this is often a numinous experience. And, we still keep using the phrase "the will of God." No matter how much we might seek the psychological meaning of these words, as long as we use this sort of mythological language we keep the will, the god, and the kingdom of God external to ourselves, and we remain in a world of separated objects, either mythological objects (gods and humans) or historical objects (humans and some fuzzy theological ideas). Here the theological world and the historical world collide and do not really resolve their inherent conflict. It is not a matter of science and religion getting along, or of these two fields agreeing that they are partners in exploring the same mystery. The problem is that historical consciousness has not realized that mythological consciousness is obsolete. The problem is that the historical

form of consciousness has not realized that it itself is the new sublated form of the mythological form of consciousness.

Another problem is the whole discussion about discerning the “will of God.” This bogs down in great confusion because of the language and our identity as objects. We cannot shake the expectation that we should “know” some thing that cannot be “known.”

Last summer we began with the traditional approach with the amplification of the words “do,” “will,” and “God” and listened to the many variations.

Then we wrote two statements, Do / the will of God, (with a slash between “do” and “will of God”), and Who I Am I Must Become, and we asked where does the slash go in this statement?

And asked, are there two separate “I’s” in the statement, Who I Am I Must Become?

I suggested that the mythological statement, Do the will of God and enter the kingdom of God, was equivalent to the psychological statement, Who I Am I Must Become. Then I asked where has all the power, the numinosity, the otherness, the reality of the god gone in the psychological statement? I am suggesting that the psychological form, Who I Am I Must Become is the exact equivalent, psychologically, of the mythological form, Do the will of God and enter the kingdom of God. The psychological form is the sublation of the mythological form.

The next thing we did in this seminar was to work with a specific emotion we had expressed in art. We took the emotion as an expression of an “I Am” that must become itself. We asked it to tell us what we did not know about it.

In other words, the “will of God” is not some mysterious, arcane knowledge that is going to tell you what to do. The “will of God” is the “self” of your immediate experience, your emotions, your thoughts, your urges, your complexes, and your problems. Your truth is expressing its “intention” (will) all the time at every moment.

The title of Basic Records in 2009 was Who I Am I Must Become. This was a genius inspiration of Patricia Stenger’s. I take this simple phrase as the sublation of the entire Basic Records. It is all there in this *psychological* form.

There are other questions that can be asked about this psychological phrase, such as,

- What is the relationship between “I am” and “become”?
- What does “must” mean in this statement?
- What happens if you don’t become “who I am”? If you refuse the “must”?

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(to be continued)