

Method and Historiography:

Aiming for Jesus

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Outline

Thesis: A meaningful historical reconstruction concerning Jesus of Nazareth must produce a compelling renarration of his aims.

Introduction.....	1
I. Critical Realism and Historiography.....	4
II. Interpretation and Explanation: Getting at the “Inside”.....	10
III. Narrating the Story.....	13
IV. Hypothesis Verification.....	16
V. The Tools of Jesus History.....	20
VI. The Aims of Jesus.....	26
Conclusion.....	3

Method and Historiography: Aiming for Jesus

Historiography is never done in a vacuum. A history about anything or anyone is never written without presupposition or investment, a history concerning Jesus of Nazareth perhaps least of all.¹ To make a historical² statement about Jesus is to make a historical statement about the most significant figure in the history of the world.³ Some have argued that nothing or very little can be known about Jesus historically, even going so far as to say, “No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus.”⁴ While others have argued, “We can in fact know as much about Jesus as we can about any figure in the ancient world.”⁵ It is not the intention of this work to make a claim for *all* that can or cannot be known about the historical Jesus.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God. Vol. 2. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 7. William O. Walker, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: a Discussion of Methodology,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 51.1 (1969): 38-39. Walker rightly attributes the impossibility of presuppositionless historiography to be one of the primary reasons for the death of the “old quest.” Cf. Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 17. (San Jose: Pickwick Publications, 1989) 153.

² Especially when one understands “historical” to mean “what really happened” as it is often popularly used. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 81; N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God. Vol. 1., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 81. More on this below.

³ Consider Meier’s words, “In view of Jesus’ impact on all of Western civilization, no person of any religious persuasion can be considered truly educated today if he or she has not investigated to some degree what historical research can tell us about this enigmatic figure who unleashed one of the major religious and cultural forces of the world.” John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1. The Anchor Bible Reference Library, (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 4.

⁴ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) 13. cf. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, (London: A. & C. Black., 1954) 401; Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, (New York: Scribner’s, 1958) 8; Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, Trans. Carl E. Braaten, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) 46-57; and others in N.T. Wright *JVG* 3.

⁵ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987) 18. See also the remarkable works by Wright, *JVG*; E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985); Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series. 48, (San Jose: Pickwick Publications, [1979] 2002); John Dominic Crossan, *The*

The question of this essay is whether or not one can know the aims of Jesus. It will be argued below that to know the aims of a historical agent is to know their history. Thus to make a claim for the aims of Jesus is to make a claim for what can be known about him historically. It is the intention of this essay to prove that *a meaningful historical reconstruction concerning Jesus of Nazareth must produce a compelling renarration of his aims*. After defining some terms it will be pertinent to examine how to do historiography. Asking, what are the nature and aims of historiography itself? As well as, what kind of knowledge is historical knowledge? Moving then to the tools of history that have been employed in the quests for Jesus, discovering what tools have been proved helpful to produce good history and what ought to be abandoned or augmented to do better history. Finally, a brief argument will be set forth for Jesus' aims specifically concerning his death in order to put these tools to the task.

By aims I mean, "The fundamental direction of a person's life, or some fairly settled subset of that fundamental direction."⁶ Before even questing after the aims of a person of history it might be of some significance to inquire whether or not we can determine the aims of someone in our own context of time and space.⁷ For example, one might question whether or not I can know the aims of my wife. I myself often do. However, while I may not be able to know the aims of my wife at all times and in every situation, I must have a meaningful conception of her aims in at least a general sense. I say "must" because in order to for me to understand her, I must have some interpretive framework within which to place her actions and words. This interpretive

Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); and others.

⁶ Wright, *NTPG* 110.

⁷ The objection that a person having a consistent aim is anachronistic is simply false. See Wright *JVG* 99; Sanders 19f. Both in response to H.J. Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, (New York: Scribner's, 1962).

framework would in turn inform me as to what her aims in a specific situation could perhaps be. To understand her aims in a general sense I must understand her aims in specific situations. This is particularly true of situations which she performs to reveal her aims.

Rarely, however, does someone perform an action with the intention to reveal herself. It is because of this that questions must be asked, events must be selected (and of course discarded), and stories told. The importance of some events may not seem very significant until after they have happened, and even at the time of their occurrence some events may seem very insignificant. It is because of this that in some ways the historian can know his subject better than the subject herself. He is able to ask some questions with more insight than she can. Now of course in order for these questions to actually get at her aims they must not only make sense of events but also of her. "History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing."⁸ The same is true of Jesus. Although it may be that Jesus' aims in a specific historical event are unknown, this does not mean first that his *Aims* or fundamental direction(s) are unknown or unknowable; nor that his aim in that specific situation is unknowable, but that it is yet unknown. As it will be argued below, the aims of historical agents is the stuff of history.

My conception of my wife's aims is intelligible based on the stories that I tell about her. A renarration is a story, or rather a retelling of a story.⁹ A renarration of someone's aims is a retelling of their aims in such a way that it is intelligible to the intended audience. To reconstruct the life of Jesus one must renarrate, or retell, his aims. This is rooted in the assumption that lives are enacted narratives. As MacIntyre writes, "It is because we all live out narratives in our lives

⁸ E.H. Carr , *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 27.

⁹ See: Robert W. Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988) 2-3 for the various uses of the term "narrative."

and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others.”¹⁰ Stories are what people tell with their lives, some better than others, some more memorable, some more clear, and some (most) are forgotten but all tell stories. Jesus of Nazareth told a story with his life, so the Jesus quester asks, “What is Jesus’ story?”

Critical Realism and Historiography

Before discovering Jesus’ story the historian must first understand how to go about answering his question. He must develop a method of discovering history— historiography. Unfortunately, historiography has been hijacked from the believer. The fact that, “From the beginning Christian faith has been a confession of events in human history”¹¹ has forced Christians to write histories.¹² History is crucial for Christian theology but has also been regarded as perilous to faith.¹³ The controversial popularity of the “Jesus Seminar” has been the latest manifestation of the growing distrust of “history” (or rather historians) among Christians.¹⁴ This

¹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 212.

¹¹ Meyer, *Aims*, 95 cf. 60-69; Wright, *JVG* 11; Acts 1.21; 2.22; 10.37-39; 13.23-25; Phil 2.6-11; 1 Cor 11.23-25; 15.3-5; Gal 1.4; Rom 1.3-4; 3.25-26; 4.25; 8.34; 10.9; 1 Jn 1.1. Also see N.T. Wright, “Knowing Jesus: Faith and History,” *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) for an excellent explanation of how history and faith are not mutually exclusive categories but clarify and complement each other. Indeed, Wright *NTPG* 95 points out, “Theology does not rule out history; in several theologies, not only some Christian varieties, it actually requires it.”

¹² I find it self defeating that Luke Timothy Johnson offers such a scathing critique of “history” (*Real Jesus*) and yet writes commentaries dependent upon historical reconstruction for intended sense of the text. I put history in quotes because Johnson is not speaking of history in the same way I mean it. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina. Ed. Daniel J. Harrington S.J. Vol. 5. (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992). This seems to be characteristic of theologians who do not want anything to do with history but insist on exegesis.

¹³ Kähler; Johnson, *Real Jesus*; cf. Meyer, *Aims* 49.

¹⁴ For one of many devastating critiques of the Jesus Seminar see *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids:

curious conundrum has been caused by the Enlightenment's distrust of tradition¹⁵ and the resulting positivist myth of "objective" history.¹⁶ History has thus been distorted into something that it is not, indeed, something that it cannot be, namely history without a past.

For the historian to take seriously his past as well as discover the events of the past he must work with a critical realist epistemology.¹⁷ Critical realism "acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism')," while also recognizing that the thing known is always mediated through "*appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical')." ¹⁸ Thus, while reality can be known, this reality is never "objective" but always dependent upon the tradition, history and experience of the knower. When approaching history from a critical realist epistemology, history can be done only by

Zondervan, 1995); Johnson, *Real Jesus* ch. 1. See also N.T. Wright, "Quest for the Historical Jesus," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. Vol. 3. (New York: Double Day, 1992) 796-802 for a brief overview of the 'quests' for the historical Jesus. He also has a much more detailed overview in *JVG* ch. 2. I put history in quotes because one of the implicit arguments of this paper is that the "history" of the Jesus Seminar is very poor history if it can even be called that.

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. ed. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, [1975] 2004) 268-278; cf. Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 17, (San Jose: Pickwick Publications, 1989) 23 (Thesis 2.4.1); also Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper Torchbook, [1957] 1962) 6.

¹⁶ For a critique of "objective" history see R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev.ed. (New York: Oxford University Press: [1946] 1994); Carr, chp. 2. Consider Meyer, *Critical Realism* 117-118, "To understand a lecture on color, it is no advantage to be free of prejudices by having been born blind. On the contrary, the blind man finds discussion of color obscure precisely because he lacks independent access to the referent, i.e., color."

¹⁷ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan. Vol. 3. eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran. (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1971] 2003); Meyer, *Critical Realism*; Meyer, *Aims*; Wright, *NTPG*.

¹⁸ Wright, *NTPG* 35. *Emphasis* in original.

recognizing that good history depends on good historians.¹⁹ The real difficulty of writing a history of Jesus is not lack of data, but rather the lack of historians to live up to the task.

History has become a rather slippery word. It has been used in the subversive sense of “what really happened” as opposed to what is traditionally thought. Especially concerning Jesus, this use of the word has created a dichotomy between “history” and “faith.”²⁰ Much of the connotation here derives again from the Enlightenment project to find some ahistorical history, which has been abandoned here. To the task, “There is history (1) that is written about, and there is history (2) that is written. History (2) aims at expressing knowledge of history (1).”²¹ This work is an attempt to explain how to do history (2) better in order that history (1) might be known.²²

“Throughout the course of European civilization people have in some degree thought historically; but we seldom reflect on the activities which we perform quite easily.”²³ Historians are known for being unreflective about their discipline²⁴ so it is easy to see why much historiography about Jesus has been done without reflection on the nature and purposes of

¹⁹ Meyer, *Critical Realism* 41; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 442, “Gadamer rightly stresses the role of experience, tradition, and prejudice in hermeneutics.”

²⁰ Johnson, *Real Jesus* 81.

²¹ Lonergan, *Method* 175.

²² It would be laborious to continue adding ones and twos after every use of the word history, so when history (2) is meant it will be historiography, when history (1) is meant it will simply be history.

²³ Collingwood 4.

²⁴ David Hackett Fischer, *Historian’s Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) ix-xiii; cf. Herbert Butterfield, *Man On His Past*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969) chp. 1; Lonergan, *Method* 175.

historiography. Collingwood defines history (historiography) as “a kind of research or inquiry,”²⁵ and in this sense he categorizes it as a science. Whether or not this is a helpful categorization is open for debate.²⁶ Certainly historiography is scientific in its use of hypothesis and verification,²⁷ but it is by nature not empirical. Science persistently seeks to eliminate variables and find reproducible results. As Meyer observes, “Science sets its sights on invariant correlations.”²⁸ These correlations are abstract²⁹ in that they ought to occur regardless of context. This means that for the scientist, particulars such as time and place are irrelevant. “The discoveries of physics, chemistry, biology are expressed in universal systems and are refuted if they are found to be incompatible with a relevant particular instance.”³⁰ In contrast, for the historian these particulars form the context which makes historical events intelligible, and are thus profoundly relevant. Also, there is no way for the historian to “test” his historical hypothesis against an experiment. History is not reproducible for observation and thus not empirical. So while science is concerned with a reproducible result by eliminating particular variables, historiography is concerned with the particular variables which make the historical event intelligible.

²⁵ Collingwood 9. His purpose for making this argument is to distinguish, “scissors and paste” historiography from critical historiography, more on this below.

²⁶ Carr 78 argues it is “misleading to call history—and perhaps also the other so-called social sciences—by the name of science.” He does so for some of the same reasons I argue here.

²⁷ By categorizing history (historiography) as a science Collingwood means it is a form of thought whereby one asks questions and tries to answer them (*Idea 9*). Collingwood has no illusion that historiography ought to discover the concrete truth in the abstract context. Science ignores context hoping to find truths that are true in every context, historiography is concerned with particulars. Collingwood knows this and vehemently argues against trying to find universal laws to do history (*Idea 59-85; 126-133*). Collingwood addresses this by differentiating between “scientific facts and historical facts” (*Idea 133*).

²⁸ *Aims* 79.

²⁹ Lonergan, *Insight* 101.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Method* 180.

Historiography may be “scientific” in its method of hypothesis verification, but it is not a natural science. The nature of historiography is inquiry into the aims and intentions of those involved in a past event, or knowledge of the event. Historiography then provides knowledge about the past. The aim of historiography is making historical events known in their actuality and in their meaning. Events must be known in their actuality, whether or not they actually happened, and also in their meaning, what it meant for those events to have happened. As Wright argues, “History [historiography] . . . is neither ‘bare facts’ nor ‘subjective interpretations’, but is rather *the meaningful narrative of events and intentions*.”³¹ In order for the historian’s questions to be answered a historical event must be interpreted and explained.

Before moving to interpretation and explanation, let it not be forgotten that even the historian’s questions are his own. “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.”³² To ask historical questions, to engage in historiography, is to come to potential data looking to answer questions the data may or may not have any interest in answering.³³ Now of course, data cannot have interest, but the producers of that data certainly do. The people who write documents (ancient or otherwise) are telling a story (or making an argument, or saying something), a story that includes the information and facts which they determine to be relevant as well as the omission of information and facts which they determine to be irrelevant or otherwise not useful to their story. This is not deceit but purposeful selection. Certain details are always omitted for the sake of a

³¹ *NTPG* 82.

³² Carr 9. cf. Meyer, *Aims* 91.

³³ By “potential data” I mean anything that could potentially provide insight into the subject of the historian’s history. For the Jesus quester the potential data includes information that could potentially provide information about Jesus.

coherent story.³⁴ Consider the gospel writers, each has certain emphases and plots in their work. These emphases and plots determine what facts and information they decide to include, reorder and omit (Lk 1.1-4; Jn 20.30-31).³⁵ They are writing a story which is theirs, a story that answers their questions, not the historian's. But again, the historian is not asking neutral questions either, he is asking his questions. "The historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history."³⁶

Before the despair of solipsism slips in and history (which must be known through the practice of historiography) and faith are separated, it must be recognized that the historically produced historian is not a bad thing; he is both inevitable and helpful.³⁷ The historically produced historian, or more simply "the historian," in fact does the best historiography when he seriously considers his own historical imagination and allows it to provide both questions and hypotheses. For instance, to answer the question "why was Rome so interested in the Middle East?" N.T. Wright keenly observes "that the [Roman] capital needed a constant supply of corn; that one of the prime sources of corn was Egypt; and that anything which threatened that supply, such as disturbances in neighbouring countries, might result in serious difficulties at home [sic]."³⁸ This is a plausible hypothesis that Wright himself points out comes from the

³⁴ More on this below.

³⁵ Meyer, *Aims* 60-69 points out the nature of the gospels as confessional traditions.

³⁶ Carr 48.

³⁷ "Great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present," Carr 44. cf. Collingwood 108-109.

³⁸ *NTPG* 113.

contemporary analogy of certain nations' interest in the Middle East.³⁹ Thus Wright has used his own horizon to gain access into the historical situation surrounding Jesus' death.

Interpretation and Explanation: Getting at the "Inside"

Historical interpretation is "the discovery of what historical agents really intended and the effective mediation of this discovery to a given audience."⁴⁰ The "historical agent" is the person involved in the historical event. Their intentions are their aims, their purposes, what they were trying to do, or thought they were trying to do. The "effective mediation" is a meaningful reconstruction of these aims and intentions, i.e. what those involved intended renarrated.

Historical explanation is the discovery of what happened as a result of the confluence of the intentions of historical agents involved. Meyer uses the illustration of a revolution. A revolution is caused by a variety of intentions, but it may fail to correspond exactly to any of these intentions. The revolution is surely not what the former government intended and it may or may not be what the revolutionaries intended. "Historians inquire not only into the intentions of all concerned but into the unpredictable interaction of these intentions and so into 'the meaning of the revolution'."⁴¹ "The meaning of the revolution" is the explanation of the historical event. "At its basic level, the 'meaning' of history may be held to lie in the intentionalities of the characters concerned (whether or not they realize their ambitions and achieve their aims)."⁴²

Rudolf Bultmann uses the same illustration of a revolution, but he specifically refers to the French Revolution. He writes, "It intended a liberal constitution and a federation of free nations, and it led to a military dictatorship and to imperialism; it intended peace, and it led to

³⁹ Substitute oil for corn and America for Rome.

⁴⁰ Meyer, *Aims* 77.

⁴¹ Meyer, *Aims* 77.

⁴² Wright, *NTPG* 95

war.”⁴³ Now of course, a revolution cannot have intentions only those involved can. Bultmann, unfortunately, relies upon “fate or destiny” to explain the confluence of aims and intentions behind the historical event.⁴⁴ While it is potentially accurate to make the historical judgment that some of those involved in the French revolution “intended a liberal constitution” those who did, for some reason or another, did not end up achieving their intentions. This does not mean that fate determined the historical event, but it does mean that they did not. What is needed is not reliance upon fate but inquiry as to the meaning of the event.

To adopt interpretation and explanation as the aim of history makes three related points.⁴⁵ (1) History is focused on human actions which are original and unpredictable; (2) human intention is usually the determinant of human actions; (3) what occurs in time does so through the interaction of aims through a variety of instruments.⁴⁶ “Historical interpretation is accordingly functional to explanation; but the converse is likewise true, for actions and interactions reveal intentions by putting them to the test.”⁴⁷ Thus, historical events reveal the aims of historical agents, and at the same time, the aims give meaning to those historical events.

The real stuff of history (interpretation and explanation) is not found in the historical event in itself, but in meaning of the event. We have said that history by nature is inquiry, so then how does the historian inquire? To get at the meaning of an event the historian must begin to ask not only “what?” questions but also “why?” questions. R.G. Collingwood, in his seminal work

⁴³ Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 2.

⁴⁵ Meyer, *Aims* 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 276. Two boxers fighting each other both aim to win the match, but the instruments which those aims inform are height, weight, reach, etc.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 79.

The Idea of History, critiques history practiced by the historian that compiles testimonies, evaluates their value as sources, extracts excerpts from these sources and then pastes them together in his own history. Collingwood calls this “scissors-and-paste history. . . that is not really history at all.”⁴⁸ He goes on, “It consists merely in the adoption of a technique for dividing witnesses into sheep and goats.”⁴⁹ This type of history is nothing more than ready-made acceptance of someone else’s history. Much of the history done concerning Jesus has been this scissors and paste kind.⁵⁰

The problem with scissors and paste history is that it can only ask “what?” questions. This is history that only tries to tell “what happened.”⁵¹ The difficulty with this is of course too much happened to tell.⁵² At any given moment a human can have hundreds of different sense-impressions, but out of these sense impressions there are only a few to which that that person narrows the focus of his attention. In addition, so much happens at any given moment that it is impossible to record “what happened” because selection is always involved. Luke Timothy Johnson observes, “Our *selection* and *naming* of something as ‘event’ is itself constitutive of the ‘event.’”⁵³ Any account that attempts to write just “what happened” leaves out so much information that it simply fails to achieve its intention or it includes so much information (still not all the information) that it ceases to be coherent.

⁴⁸ *Idea* 257; cf. xli, xlvi, 33, 36, 125-126; 257-266; 269-270; 274-282; 319.

⁴⁹ *Idea* 269.

⁵⁰ This is seen most explicitly in the tools that have been used in questing after the historical Jesus, which will be addressed below.

⁵¹ Consider the dictum which dominated nineteenth century historiography from Leopold von Ranke, “simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)” quoted in Carr 5.

⁵² Much of this paragraph is drawn from Wright, *NTPG* 83.

⁵³ *Real Jesus* 82. cf. Wright, *NTPG* 84.

Good history is history that asks “what” and “why?” questions. “Why?” questions are crucial to history because they get at the “inside” of an event. The outside of an event is “everything belonging to it in which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements.”⁵⁴ The inside of an event, however, is why those bodies made their movements. The outside of Jesus’ crucifixion event is that a man named Jesus was nailed to a cross. The inside of this event is found in “why?” questions. Why was he nailed to a cross? To answer this question one must answer, what confluence of intentions brought about this man’s rather violent death? When these questions are known the historian has done his work. “After the historian has ascertained the facts, there is no further process of inquiring into their causes. When he knows what happened, he already knows why it happened.”⁵⁵

Narrating the Story

Once the historian has understood the “inside” of the historical event, he must renarrate that event interpreting and explaining it. In order to do this he must, tell a story.⁵⁶ A good history can never be a string of events because those events are unintelligible outside of the context of a story. As MacIntyre has observed,

Just as a history is not a sequence of actions, but the concept of an action is that of a moment in an actual or possible history abstracted for some purpose from that history, so

⁵⁴ Collingwood 213.

⁵⁵ Collingwood 214. Fischer wrongly criticizes Collingwood here for something that he has not said. Fischer interprets Collingwood to neglect events in favor of thoughts (196). Collingwood, however, would say that an event is constituted of the thoughts which make it up. Collingwood certainly cares about “what happened,” as does any good historian, but to truly know what happened, one must understand the thoughts of the agents involved.

⁵⁶ Contra Fischer 131. Though the historian may use some other “organizing scheme” than a text to explain, these organizing schemes are always placed within some narrative in order for them to be intelligible.

the characters in a history are not a collection of persons, but the concept of a person is that of a character abstracted from a history.⁵⁷

History must be written as a story, for story provides the context which gives meaning to an event. For example, to say, “Jesus was crucified.” Does not mean anything apart from a story that explains what has happened.⁵⁸ Who is this Jesus? What does it mean to be crucified? And then, who cares? These words only find their meaning in sentences which in turn find their meaning in stories.

Just as words are defined by their use in a sentence, and sentences by their use in a narrative, the meaning of a story is determined by its use in its context. The context of a story is its worldview or tradition.⁵⁹ Thus a story is only intelligible by gaining access to the worldview(s) and tradition(s) of the author.⁶⁰ It is Jesus’ story that is being questioned, thus to understand the aims of the historical Jesus (which is to understand the historical Jesus) one must understand the worldview which he held, the tradition from which he came, the context in which he lived. To understand what it might mean for Jesus to be crucified between two λησταί (Mt 27.38; Mk 15.27) one must understand what the words, symbols and actions being performed meant. This meaning is found in the stories which give these words, symbols and actions a context.

As it has been argued, the historian must get at the inside of the historical event. In order for the historian to elucidate the “inside” he must show the interconnectedness of a series of

⁵⁷ *After Virtue* 217.

⁵⁸ Wright, *NTPG* 38-44, 113-115. Rowan. Williams, *Why Study the Past?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) ch. 1; Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983) 24-34.

⁵⁹ Wright, *NTPG* 116; 38-46.

⁶⁰ Gadamer and Thiselton use the language of “horizons” to describe worldviews and traditions; cf. Meyer, *Critical Realism* 69.

events. This can only be done through story. It has been argued that in order to get at the inside “Why” questions must be posed and answered. Furthermore, the historian must use his disciplined imagination to explain why it is that Jesus being crucified between two λησται might be significant to understanding the confluence of aims and intentions that brought about his death. The historian must not only understand what it means to be titled a λησται but he must also understand and explain *in story* why that it is significant for his history. The historian cannot then be satisfied with the compilation of data, but he must move beyond the data to the writing of the narrative of a historical event. This movement beyond the data must answer the why questions, which reveal the inside of the historical event. Because of this his history will be focused on answering questions⁶¹ not just explaining texts. He must, as has already been mentioned, select, omit and reorder his narrative in order to make it coherent and to answer the questions he has posed.

The story does not end here however. In order for the narrative of the event to be intelligible for more than the just historian who has labored to understand it, the narrative must be renarrated in a meaningful way. A history must be narrated by the historian who wishes to do history because his history will only be meaningful in the context of a story. This renarration is a story told by the historian using the stories available to him. As it has already been recognized, any history is dependent on its historian, just as the quality of a narrative is dependent upon its author. The historian must use his own tradition, experience, and presuppositions to access that

⁶¹ N.T. Wright *JVG* 89-121 purposes six questions that must be answered in a historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus. (1) How does Jesus relate to Judaism? (2) What were his Aims? (3) Why did he die? (4) How and why did the Early Church begin? (5) Why are the Gospels what they are? (6) How do the answers to these five questions fit together?

of his subject.⁶² Indeed, “Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity.”⁶³ In the words of Martin Luther, “*Qui non intelligit res non potest ex verbis sensum elicere* (He who does not understand the things cannot draw the sense from the words).”⁶⁴

Hypothesis Verification

How does this happen? How does the historian get at the inside of an event? How does the historian move from potential data to knowledge? By doing history, that is, by asking questions, forming hypotheses and verifying those hypotheses. This requires the disciplined imagination of the historian⁶⁵ to pose plausible answers to his questions and then verify or falsify those answers based on the evidence at his disposal. It must also be recognized that this “evidence” is only evidence in the historian’s hands.⁶⁶ Just as the questions the historian asks are his questions, so evidence only becomes “evidence” when potential data is deemed data by the historian. Then this data is criticized by the historian and becomes evidence in his history.

To develop a good hypothesis requires a thorough engagement with the horizon of the authors or creators of the data in order to understand how to go about asking questions which the data can answer and when to simply leave some questions as unknowns. It also requires a thorough engagement with the historian’s own horizon. The historian must engage in seeking to understand the past, but he must draw from his own past in order to do so.

⁶² Gadamer 278-306.

⁶³ Gadamer 299. Also, consider Lonergan, *Method* 181, Lonergan uses the illustration of a man who suffers total amnesia, “if he is to live, either the amnesia has to be cured, or else he must start all over. For our pasts have made us whatever we are and on that capital we live or else we must begin afresh.”

⁶⁴ Quoted in Meyer, *Aims* 96.

⁶⁵ Wright, *NTPG* 113.

⁶⁶ Georges Florovsky, “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” *God, History, and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 413.

The recognition that history is always done by a historian does not make history an exercise in relativity. There are at least two reasons for this. First, the writing of history is not a private act but a public one. When a historian writes his history, it is open to criticism and the merits of his hypothesis are weighed and debated by other historians. Through this process certain new questions and hypotheses are posed, old questions and hypotheses are recognized to be blind alleys while others are opened for further investigation. Sometimes old blind alleys are returned to and found fruitful others are returned to and once again found to be blind alleys. History is rewritten by succeeding generations as an engagement with the past in an ongoing conversation.⁶⁷ Second, historiography is concerned with past events that actually happened. The historian is not concerned with events that may or may not have happened but with events that actually occurred. Indeed, it is his job to determine what did and did not occur and why (which is the same thing). This does not mean that every historian will agree because each historian's experience, tradition, and presupposition will color their questions, their hypothesis and what counts as verification.⁶⁸ But again they cannot all be right all of the time and thus the ongoing task of historiography continues.

A good hypothesis will include as much data as possible, construct a basically simple and coherent story and must make more sense than rival hypotheses.⁶⁹ The first and second criteria of a good hypothesis are to some degree held in tension. A hypothesis can include all the available

⁶⁷ Carr 35 in answering the question "what is history" he writes, "It is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past." Each generation using the history of the previous generations asks its own questions adding to the living tradition of "history."

⁶⁸ Consider the dialogue between Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

⁶⁹ Wright, *NTPG* 99-104; Meyer, *Aims* 90-92; Sanders 18-22; Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 33-39.

evidence if it becomes ridiculously complicated. At the same time a simple hypothesis may cut out more evidence than it includes in the attempt to remain simple. A hypothesis that makes the most sense will help explain other related issues not within the immediate scope of the question.⁷⁰ Ultimately a hypothesis is proven “good” if it is verified.

One might wonder, “Is this truly verification?” This is surely not the same kind of thing as verifying whether or not one holds a book or a log in his hand.⁷¹ This verification is not the same as natural science because while the method is hypothesis verification, there is not agreed upon criteria for verification. Who or what determines when a hypothesis has included enough data yet remained simple? And who or what determines when a hypothesis has explained enough or more than other hypothesis do of other related questions? The answer, of course, is the historian, or the tradition, experience and presuppositions of the historian. However, it must be recognized that all questions, hypotheses and verified knowledge (historical or otherwise) is mediated by the tradition, experience and presupposition of the knower. If a hypothesis has been verified and thus become knowledge it is just that, knowledge. Certainly empirical knowledge is different from historical knowledge, but this does not mean it is a lesser knowledge. Historical knowledge will require more reflection and work, partly because people require more training to be historians than to be readers or lumberjacks. Once again the knowledge of history requires a historian properly trained.

To make this kind of claim for historical knowledge is bold. However it needs to be recognized that because historical knowledge is knowledge there will be some events that are

⁷⁰ Wright, *NTPG* 108.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 34.

historically unknowable.⁷² This does not mean that hypotheses about these events cannot be formed or even that they should not. It does mean, however, that judgment of their verification must be in some cases suspended. Indeed there must be times when the historian simply does not know. This may seem a convenient way to say that we cannot know anything about Jesus, but that is simply not the case.⁷³

It has been argued that critical realism is an epistemology that takes into account the mediation of knowledge through a knower as well as the existence of reality, and thus is most conducive to historiography. Historiography is inquiry into the events of the past through an ongoing dialogue between the narratives of the past and the traditions, experiences and presuppositions of the present historian. The historian does historiography by asking questions that make historical events known in their actuality and meaning (interpreting and explaining), getting at the inside of an event by accessing the traditions, experiences and presuppositions of his historical agents. The historical event is then renarrated by a hypothesis that explains the aims of the historical agents as well as the events that occurred.

Throughout this argument it has been emphasized that a historian must be properly trained to do historiography. To write a history concerning Jesus raises questions concerning God, religion and faith. In fact, to write a history of Jesus is to do theology. Whether one argues that Jesus was divine (or thought of himself as divine) or that Jesus was not divine, the fact that the early Christians worshiped Jesus is firmly established.⁷⁴ A historical reconstruction must

⁷² Meyer, *Aims* 84. cf. M.D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570-581; M.D. Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971): 480-487.

⁷³ Here I side with those mentioned above who argue that we can know quite a lot about Jesus. See page 1 footnote 5.

⁷⁴ Richard Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. Vol. 3, (New York: Double Day, 1992) 812-819; cf. consider even the "hymn" like passages

answer why this is the case.⁷⁵ What is more, it has been argued that the historian must use his tradition to write history. This means that the properly trained Christian may be able to write the best history of Jesus. As Meyer has said, “It is above all in the tradition generated by Jesus that we discover what made him operate in the way he did, what made him epitomize his life in the single act of going to his death.”⁷⁶ Christian history must use the tools of history while remaining firmly established in its tradition. Perhaps the best historians of Jesus are those who worship him.

The Tools of Jesus History

The main section of this work has already addressed a methodology for questing after the historical Jesus. However, it will be helpful now to do a brief examination of some of the tools that have been put to use in the Quests to date. This will address specifically the “so-called criteria of historicity,”⁷⁷ namely form criticism, multiple attestation, dissimilarity, double dissimilarity, double similarity and embarrassment. The goal of this section is to separate the wheat from the chaff, discover what methods can be helpful for historical inquiry and to what degree, as well as critique the abuses of these methods to make historical judgments.

New Testament scholarship has been confused about where the burden of proof lies concerning historical judgment on sayings and actions attributed to Jesus. Thus Jesus questing

ascribing divinity or salvation being found in Jesus scattered throughout the NT (1 Tim 3.16; 2 Tim 2.10-13; Tit 3.4-7; Phil 2.6-11; Col 1.15-20; Rev. 1.4-8; 4.8, 11; 5.9-10, 12; 11.15; 11.17-18; 15.3-4; 22.17 cf. Pliny, *Letters* X.96 [ca. A.D. 107-115]; M. Pol. 9.1ff. [ca. A.D. 155]).

⁷⁵ William R. Teleford, “Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus,” *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans. (Boston: Brill, 1998) 63.

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Aims* 252; cf. Wright, *JVG* 118. In the words of Thom Stark, “You can’t have the aims of Jesus without the mind of Christ.”

⁷⁷ Meyer, *Critical Realism* 130, prefers to abandon the word “criteria” in favor of “indices” on the grounds that, “None of the so-called criteria of historicity are in the strict sense norms or standards invariably relevant and requisite to the inference of historicity.” This seems helpful and will be adopted here.

has been hindered by the confusion. The methodological skeptic who argues that history must be denied until proven otherwise⁷⁸ is equally as dogmatic as those who argue that history must be granted until proven otherwise. It must be recognized that the burden of proof lies on anyone who makes a claim for either.⁷⁹ Again as noted above there will be some events where evidence is lacking and judgment must be suspended. However, in the Quests for Jesus some “evidence” has been put forward that is nothing more than supposition. “New Testament scholars must beware of their own rhetoric. Nothing new has been discovered. The evidence is exactly the same as it always was.”⁸⁰

After reflecting on Rudolf Bultmann’s influential conclusions concerning Jesus and history as a result of the form critical movement⁸¹ Ernst Käsemann rightly judges, “But this in turn means that Christian faith is here being understood as faith in the exalted Lord for which the Jesus of History as such is no longer considered of decisive importance.”⁸² It has been argued above that the Jesus of first century Palestine is of decisive importance for the Christian and further that the Christian is decisively important for doing history of the Jesus of first century Palestine. Bultmann’s conclusions then are wrong. One of the primary reasons he ended up where he did is that he put too much faith in the form critic and not enough in the historian. C.S.

⁷⁸ See Meyer, *Critical Realism* 143 footnote 2.

⁷⁹ Hooker, “Wrong Tool” and “Christology and Methodology”; Meyer, *Aims* 83; Meyer, *Critical Realism* 135.

⁸⁰ A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982) 3; cf. chp. 1.

⁸¹ Bultmann, *Jesus*; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Peabody: Hendrickson, [1963] 1998); Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956).

⁸² Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W.J. Montague. Philadelphia: Fortress, [1964] 1982) 16.

Lewis in a brilliant article written as an “outsider” laments the use of form critical reconstructions of “the whole *Sitz im Leben* of the text.”⁸³ He writes,

I have watched with some care similar imaginary histories both of my own books and of books by friends whose real history I knew. Reviewers, both friendly and hostile, will dash you off such histories with great confidence; will tell you what public events had directed the author’s mind to this or that, what other authors had influenced him, what his over-all intention was, what sort of audience he principally addressed, why—and when—he did everything. . . My impression is that in the whole of my experience *not one of these guesses has on any point been right: that the method shows a record of 100 per cent. failure.*⁸⁴

Lewis goes on to note the profound advantage of these reviewers speaking the same historical context, the same language, with similar educations, as well as being in the same “mental and spiritual climate.”⁸⁵ These striking critiques certainly have devastating implications for the use of Form Criticism, but they also pertain to the quest for the historical Jesus.

The aim of form criticism is to reconstruct a document based on the original “form” of the individual units of story that were compiled into the gospel traditions.⁸⁶ But as Käsemann points out, “The work of the Form Critics was designed to show that the message of Jesus as given to us by the Synoptists is, for the most part, not authentic but was minted by the faith of the primitive Christian community in its various stages.”⁸⁷ As Lewis has criticized this aim is dubious, but all the more so when this method is applied to gospels in order to reconstruct a life of Jesus. Form criticism is aimed at discovering the communities that produced the gospels as

⁸³ C.S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1967] 1994) 158. cf. N.T. Wright “Doing Justice to Jesus: A response to J.D. Crossan: ‘What Victory? What God?’” *SJT* 50.3 (1997): 363.

⁸⁴ Lewis 159-160. *Emphasis added.*

⁸⁵ Lewis 161.

⁸⁶ Hooker, “Wrong Tool” 573; see Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) chp. 8 for a good introduction to form criticism.

⁸⁷ Käsemann 15.

opposed to discovering Jesus.⁸⁸ At its most basic level form criticism is anti-historical at least for finding out about Jesus.⁸⁹

Multiple attestation⁹⁰ too is a weak index of historical authenticity.⁹¹ Multiple attestation works under the assumption that multiply attested material points to “early” and “early” leads to “historical.” But this is quite the leap. Even if a multiplied attested saying or action could be proven to be early, which multiple attestation does not prove, this does not necessitate historicity. The fact that the most authoritative witnesses to the life and career of Jesus did not disappear from the continuing life of the Church (Acts 1.21f.; Acts 15.1-21) it seems extremely likely that later traditions could arise to correct or clarify earlier ones⁹² and just because multiple sources say the same thing does not mean that it is what happened. Multiple attestation is simply not a solid index of authenticity, especially when used independently of other indices. As with all of these indices for authenticity, multiple attestation functions *in sensu aiente* and not *in sensu neganti* “their presence positively tell in favor of historicity, but their absence does not positively tell against historicity.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Wright, *NTPG* 418.

⁸⁹ Again see Morna Hooker’s devastating critiques of form criticism M.D. Hooker in “Wrong Tool” and “Christology.”

⁹⁰ Multiform attestation is subject to many of the same critiques as multiple attestation.

⁹¹ Allison 20-27 critiques John Dominic Crossan’s use of multiple attestation. While I disagree with the use of his hypothetical “case study” (7-10) his critiques are quite valid. As to why his hypothetical situation seems unfounded see Meyer, *Aims* chp. 3.

⁹² Meyer, *Critical Realism* 134.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 131.

Also uncertain is the use of multiple attestation in relation to the various source theories. The existence of Q in any form has never been documented only supposed.⁹⁴ Indeed, “Not one scrap of manuscript evidence has turned up which can plausibly be thought of a part of this document, in any of its recensions.”⁹⁵ It is quite possible that no form of Q ever existed, and that it is just a modern fiction (or hypothesis) initially created to get to the historical Jesus but lacking any verification to historicity. All of this to say, the difficulties surrounding the hypothesis of synoptic borrowing are far from settled⁹⁶ and it is difficult to say what might constitute a multiply attested saying or action anyway. In addition to the fact that dating of the Gospels (including John and Thomas) is dependent in upon one’s particular view of Jesus. If one goes searching for a cynic sage then the Q hypothesis will become more appealing, Thomas dated earlier and the Synoptics will become secondary.⁹⁷

The indices of dissimilarity, double dissimilarity and double similarity are quite helpful but require careful thought to be used properly. That an action or word is attributed to Jesus that is dissimilar from early Christianity or 1st century Palestinian Judaism (prior to A.D. 70) could potentially provide an index to historicity. However, if Jesus is neither similar to his tradition nor

⁹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, “Questions about Q” *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*, eds. David Alan Black and David R. Beck. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 41-64; *contra* Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); J.S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

⁹⁵ Wright, *NTPG* 438.

⁹⁶ Eta Linneman *Is there a Synoptic Problem: Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992); William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

⁹⁷ Wright, *JVG* 41-43. cf. Collingwood 244-245, “Suetonius tells me that Nero at one time intended to evacuate Britain. I reject this statement, not because any better authority flatly contradicts it, for of course none does; but because my reconstruction of Nero’s policy based on Tacitus will not allow me to think that Suetonius is right. And if I am told that this is merely to say I prefer Tacitus to Suetonius, I confess that I do: but I do so just because I find myself able to incorporate what Tacitus tells me into a coherent and continuous picture of my own, and cannot do this for Suetonius.”

the tradition that followed him then how can he be intelligible at all? Also, because something is dissimilar from Judaism or early Christianity does not mean that it would provide insight into Jesus' aims. Hooker uses the illustration of political speeches. If we might take three speeches from three different political leaders during election time and eliminate what was common between them, not only would very little remain, but what would be left would only result in what was distinctive to that party "but it would certainly not be representative of the policy of the party."⁹⁸ Not to mention the fact that if the synoptic Gospels and John are not considered to be accurate concerning 1st century Palestinian Judaism prior to the destruction of the temple then instead just Questioning for the historical Jesus we must also be questioning for the historical Church and the historical 1st century Judaism. There would not be one unknown but three "that our knowledge of the other two is quite tenuous and indirect as our knowledge of Jesus himself. But one can solve $x + y = z$ only if one knows the value of two of the three 'unknowns.'"⁹⁹ Dissimilarity is then is quite suspect to getting at Jesus, and especially suspect at attempting to get at the aims of Jesus.

Double dissimilarity is subject to the same critiques of dissimilarity, but seems more precise and less agenda driven to discover how the historical Jesus has nothing to do with the Church. Double similarity obviously has some of the same weaknesses of double dissimilarity, however, it can be helpful for placing Jesus in continuity with his tradition and the tradition that followed him. In addition, double similarity seriously takes into account the need to recognize Jesus as a Jew who started a movement within Judaism that eventually became Christianity. Yet again, however the tools seem only to be viable in conjunction with a hypothesis concerning

⁹⁸ Hooker, "Wrong Tool" 574.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 575.

Jesus, specifically a hypothesis that gets at his aims. “There is no such thing as a Jesus-neutral analysis of synoptic traditions. You cannot first solve the synoptic problem and only then ask questions.”¹⁰⁰ Thus it seems the best way to proceed is work toward a hypothesis of Jesus’ aims using the tools to support the hypothesis but not allow the tools to dictate *a priori* the task.

The Aims of Jesus

“For the man with ‘aims’, the non-drifter, aims are the man. They throw a flood of light on his history and they are the key to his historic selfhood.”¹⁰¹ It has been argued that to discover the aims of a historical agent is to discover “what happened.” The intention of this final section is to briefly offer a description of Jesus’ aims specifically in relation to his own death and messianic self-understanding. It will be argued that Jesus’ aim was to usher in the reign of God which climaxed in his death on the cross. Due to lack of space here, I will rely heavily on the reconstructions of N.T. Wright in *Jesus and the Victory of God* as well as Ben Meyer’s *The Aims of Jesus*.

There are two initially significant questions to be answered in relation to narrating Jesus’ aims. (1) Did Jesus remain true to his aims throughout his life or did he change his mind? (2) What, if anything, did Jesus intend by his own death? Schweitzer declared that one could catalogue the Lives of Jesus by his intention in going to Jerusalem. Did he go to work or die?¹⁰² Schweitzer’s answer was both, Jesus went to Jerusalem expecting to prepare the way for the glorious “son of man” but after failing his mission he took it upon himself to force the coming

¹⁰⁰ N.T. Wright, “Doing Justice to Jesus: A response to J.D. Crossan: ‘What Victory? What God?’” *SJT* 50.3 (1997): 363.

¹⁰¹ Meyer, *Aims* 111.

¹⁰² Wright, *JVG* 102.

through his own death.¹⁰³ It seems that Jesus' aims were in some way wrapped up in his death (cf. Jn 13.1; Gal 2.20; Eph 5.2; 1 Cor 15.3; Rev 1.5). E.P. Sanders considers the possibility "that Jesus determined in his own mind to be killed and to have his death understood as sacrificial for others [. . .] makes him strange in any century."¹⁰⁴ This however does not do justice to the worldview of the first century Palestine Jew and especially not Jesus. In an attempt to answer whether or not Jesus remained consistent with his aims throughout his life and what he intended in his death it will be pertinent to give a brief sketch of what led to the socio-political climate of the first century as well as the messianic attempts of the that period. Finally a brief look at the evidence from the Gospel material that Jesus intended his death sacrificially on behalf of the true Israel (those committed to following him) throughout his ministry.

In the first century A.D. Jewish Palestine was "clearly a peasant society."¹⁰⁵ This society formed frequent tensions between the peasant and ruling classes for the *memory* of peasant class were paradigmatically formed by the Hebrew traditions of Exodus and freedom from an oppressive ruling class (Ex 1.9-12; 2.23-25; 3.7-9; 20.2; Josh 10.24-25; cf. Isa 14.3; Jer 34.9). Through years of socio-political turmoil, from the split of the Northern and Southern Kingdom (1 Ki 12-15) on including: Assyrian exile (701 B.C.), followed by Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.), Nehemiah as a glimmer of hope (445 B.C.), until the Seleucid Empire and Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ca 170 B.C. cf. 2 Macc. 4.9-10; 1 Macc 1.13; 2 Macc. 5.11-23; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.5.3 §§ 246-247), another glimmer of hope in the Maccabean Revolt (167-170 B.C.) until the institution of the Hasmonean ruling priestly class not sanctioned by levitical law (152 B.C.),

¹⁰³ Schweitzer 368f.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders 333.

¹⁰⁵ Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus*, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, [1985] 1999) 2. cf. Josephus *Against Ap.* 1.60.

then Pompey and Roman control (63 B.C.) which included such tyrant rulers as Herod the Great (37- 4 B.C.) followed by his incompetent sons and a slew of anti-Semitic Roman governors until the Jewish war (66-70 A.D.)¹⁰⁶ All that to say that the economic burden of the constant power struggle had crippled the majority lower class, in such a way that even if they didn't know the scriptures as well as the ruling elite, they knew they were not living in the Promised Land as God intended it.

All that to say that N.T. Wright is correct in *Jesus and the Victory of God* to say the Jew's considered themselves to be in exile, or at least not living in Israel as God had intended. In addition the ant-gentile (or more specifically anti-Roman) attitudes that pervaded the Jewish social strata were manifested in a number violent actions.¹⁰⁷ In typical Roman fashion these revolts and rebellious acts were met with deadly force until the violence culminated in the war in A.D. 66-70. It is in this situation of socio-political tension that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁸ As mentioned above, Jesus was crucified between two λησταιί. The word ληστής has commonly been translated “robber.”¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately this “robber” usually carries the connotation of a “thief” being one who steals in secret.¹¹⁰ However, as Horsley has shown, ληστής was a title used to describe the participant in the phenomenon of social banditry in 1st

¹⁰⁶ Horsley and Hanson chp 1.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea : The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome, A.D. 66-70*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 108; Horsley and Hanson chp 2; cf. Wright, “Doing Justice to Jesus” 370-373.

¹⁰⁸ See Wright *JVG* Appendix for the Kingdom of God in early Christian Literature 663-670.

¹⁰⁹ The NIV translates ληστής as “robber” nine out of its fifteen occurrences (Mt 21.13; 27.38, 44; Mk 11.17; 15.27; Lk 10.30, 36; 19.46; Jn 10.1, 8).

¹¹⁰ The word used throughout the NT for this kind of thief is κλέπτης (Mt 6.19, 20; 24.43; Lk 12.33; 12.39; Jn 10.1, 8, 10; 12.6; 1 Cor 6.10; 1 Thess 5.2, 4; 1 Pet 4.15; 2 Pet 3.10; Rev 3.3; 16.15).

century Palestine.¹¹¹ In addition Jesus was crucified as under the charge of sedition (Mt 27.37; Mk 15.26; Lk 23.38; Jn 19.19). He also performed actions indicating the reconstitution of Israel,¹¹² specifically his calling of twelve disciples (Mt 10.1-5; Mk 3.14; 6.7; Lk 6.13; 9.1), preaching and offering repentance (Mt 4.17; Mk 1.15; Lk 13.3, 5), his actions in the temple (Mt 21.1-17; Mk 11.1-19; Lk 19.28-48; Jn 12.12-17),¹¹³ his exorcisms (Lk 11.14-36; Mt 12.22-25; Mk 3.20-30), and I think even his own death (Mt 20.28; Mk 10.45). All of this indicates that Jesus thought of himself as *Messiah*.¹¹⁴

In the Jewish revolt of 66 A.D. there were certainly differing factions, but Simon bar Giora became the dominate leader and his capture signified the end of the revolt.¹¹⁵ “Simon’s ceremonial surrender and his ritual execution at the climax of the imperial triumphal procession, reveal both that Simon understood himself as the messiah and that the conquering Romans recognized him as the leader of the nation.”¹¹⁶ In addition, Simon’s appearance in the place where the temple once stood clothed as a king (*J.W.* 7.29-31) could have considered himself as a sacrifice on behalf of his starving people. Thus it is quite conceivable that Jesus performing messianic actions also thought of himself as a sacrifice on behalf of his people. This possibility in conjunction with Jesus’ consistent display of messianic actions in a non-violent way makes it

¹¹¹ Horsley and Hanson chp. 2. cf. Josephus *J.W.* 1.204-211; 1.304; 2.228, 238, 253; *Ant.* 14.15-30, 159-174; 20.124, 215. As Horsley and Hanson argue so well, the line between social banditry and armed rebellion were blurry and often crossed.

¹¹² Sanders chp 1-3; Wright, *JVG* 489-539.

¹¹³ Wright, *JVG* 490, “Jesus’ action in the temple constitutes the most obvious act of messianic praxis within the gospel narratives.”

¹¹⁴ For more on this see Wright *JVG* chp. 11.

¹¹⁵ Josephus *J.W.* 2.652-53; 4.503-4, 507-513, 529-34; 5.309; 7.29-31, 36; 153-155.

¹¹⁶ Horsley and Hanson 126-126.

extremely feasible that he from the beginning say himself as the λύτρον offered on behalf Israel to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

“Many students of biblical literature and some of the very best have been content to do their own thing without having to make philosophic sense of it. But we do not choose our obsessions.”¹¹⁷ This has been an attempt to make philosophic sense of Questing after Jesus. It has been the work of this essay to prove that a meaningful historical reconstruction concerning Jesus of Nazareth must produce a compelling renarration of his aims. In seeking to prove this it has been put forth that in order to do historiography that takes seriously the mediation of knowledge Critical realism has provided the best epistemology to understand of man as a historical being. Man as a historical being has the opportunity to engage in historiography, but Christians as believers in history *must* engage in historiography. To do this well we must get at the aims of the historical agents and how those aims came together to make the historical event, for to do so is to get at history. Once history has been uncovered it must be put into a narrative. This narrative will form a hypothesis concerning the life of Jesus, which will require verification by remaining simply yet explaining most of the data, and hopefully better than rival hypotheses. For tools in the Questers box it has tried to show that aims are the goal. The form critic and his tools are only helpful after a narrative hypothesis has been put forth. These tools can then go to work helping to further clarify but not dictate historiography. Lastly in an all too brief manner we have tried to explain Jesus’ aims as the restoration of Israel, ushering in the Kingdom of God through his death.

¹¹⁷ Meyer, *Critical Realism* x.

There are certainly more arguments to be made and questions to be answered. It is the work of every questing community to return to the questions, ask new ones and throw old ones out. This work has tried to reassess old questions and engage some new ones in attempt to find some solid philosophic ground to stand on when seeking after Jesus. The clarification of methodology is like the street performer clearing his throat. He can and must do that so that he can get to his work, but he can only do it for so long before he ceases to have his audience. Well this has been thirty pages of throat clearing hopefully to get to the real task at hand, discovering the figure that so captivates us and moves us to vigorous study, to history, to theology and to worship. In the end the philosophic ground we have to stand on is that stone which the builders rejected, but to whom we return again and again.

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