

Review of: "After-Death Communications and the Resurrection of Jesus: An Engagement with Ken Vincent and Gary Habermas"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

There Is More Than One Truth

A review of the article by Stephen Smith entitled "After-Death Communication and the Resurrection of Jesus: An Engagement with Ken Vincent and Gary Habermas"

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The author of the article reviewed, Stephen Smith, is an independent Religious Studies scholar. The article reviewed deals with Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, and contributes to the debate on this issue between psychologist and researcher in religious experience Ken Vincent and Evangelical New Testament scholar Gary Habermas.

Vincent claims that Christ's appearance after resurrection is a collective psycho-religious experience of a large group of believers. Specifically, Vincent states that psychology research has established a phenomenon whereby people who have lost a loved one grieve so profoundly that they refuse to acknowledge the finality of death and call on the deceased to return to them. The mourners' desire to see the deceased is so intense that they conjure up a hallucination in which they see their loved one appear in flesh and blood.

Habermas contends, on the other hand, that Jesus rose from the dead in the literal sense, and appeared to his followers as a living person, as is evidenced by his sharing a meal with the believers in the Galilee after resurrection.

Both researchers support their respective claims with testimonies provided at the time of the event by reliable and credible witnesses. Witnesses cited by Vincent testify to a mystical experience of observing a vision in which Christ appeared to them after resurrection, while those cited by Habermas testify that, after his death and full resurrection, Jesus appeared to them as a flesh and blood human being.

The author of the article supports Vincent's opinion, according to which Jesus' post-resurrection appearance was a collective vision emanating from a subjective spiritual experience on the part of a large group of believers.

In his article, Smith calls on the readers to assess the evidence adduced by both scholars, and to judge which of them is right: Vincent or Habermas.

In my opinion, both are right. Vincent is right as an academic who relies on the state-of-the-art research methods, while Habermas is right as a theologian, Evangelical Christian apologist, and cleric scholar.

Most of the scholars who reviewed Smith's article side with Vincent, but this is because, like Vincent, they come from the world of academia. As one educated in the modern academic tradition, I am also inclined to share Vincent's interpretation. Yet, for the sake of objectivity, we must try to understand Habermas's point of view as well. Habermas is an American New Testament scholar, but his perspective on the issue is also religious, not only academic.

Habermas has his own take on reality. In his opinion, Jesus was truly and fully resurrected, and incarnated in flesh and blood. If the editors of *Qeios* had sent Smith's article for a review to adherents of the Evangelical faith, rather than to academic scholars, then the majority of the reviewers would have sided with Habermas rather than with Vincent.

In a reality conceived by an academic trained in advanced research methods, such as are currently used in psychology, the vision of the resurrected Christ was a hallucination experienced by the grieving believers. In a reality as seen by a dedicated Evangelical scholar, on the other hand, Jesus was truly resurrected and incarnated in flesh and blood. The Evangelical perspective is rooted in religious faith, which need not be based on historical, archaeological, psychological or any other objective scientific findings; it is subjective, individualistic, and emotional *par excellence*. Such a belief cannot be either proved or disproved.

Furthermore, the witness testimonies cited by the two scholars were obtained approximately two thousand years ago. It goes without saying that, at that time, methods of collecting and preserving evidence were not as developed and as rigorous as they are today. It would be anachronistic to expect that evidence regarding Jesus' resurrection dating back two millennia should be as accurate, reliable, realistic or objective as evidence obtained in modern times. But even nowadays, in giving testimonies, witnesses oftentimes skew facts according to their beliefs.

The question thus arises: which reality, Vincent's or Habermas's, is the objective one? This question pertains to the study of philosophy rather than theology. And another, related, question comes to mind: Is there such a thing as "objective reality"?

Human history shows that people have always believed in the authenticity and rightness of their own reality. At the same time, history shows that there are many, many kinds of reality. Human beings invariably wish to reduce all these multiple kinds of reality to a single binding and exclusive reality – and this propensity has time and again given rise to disagreements, wars, and tragedies in the history of the human race.

All in all, Stephen Smith has made a methodological mistake in comparing a scientific, academic approach to an individualistic one that is based on faith. These two approaches are not comparable, and it is impossible to decide which is the better one. The upshot is that Vincent and Habermas are both right. There Is More Than One Truth

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