Abstract

THE JESUS MYSTERY
A Biblical, Historical and Christological Study of Jesus

by P L Bacchioni

in fulfilment of the degree of Master of Theology in the subject of Systematic Theology

Supervisor: Professor E. Van Niekerk

Summary

The Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are two different figures. Two centuries of search for the historical Jesus has led to greater awareness and better use of New Testament criticism, had salutary effects on proper historical biblical research and the desire to look beyond the paucity of material about Jesus in the canonical gospels.

Despite proven difficulties the historical Jesus is an endless enterprise eliciting an equally endless fascination.

The solution to the Jesus mystery appears better linked to Paul who has never been subjected to the same degree of historical research as Jesus. The figure, character, preaching, and teaching of Jesus was fashioned by the gospel authors not just to fit in with the primitive church but to provide a natural linkage with Pauline Christianity.

Christian faith is only loosely intertwined with Jesus of Nazareth and has everything to do with the Christ devised by Paul.
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by

Philip Louis Bacchioni

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

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SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR E VAN NIEKERK

Date Submitted: November 1998
Declaration

I declare that The Jesus Mystery - A Biblical, Historical and Christological Study of Jesus - is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Philip Louis Bacchioni
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Key Terms:

Christian Faith; Christology; Christ of Faith; Extra-Biblical Sources; Historical Jesus; Jesus Christ; Jesus Seminar; New Testament Criticism; Paul; Quests for the Historical Jesus
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLEGOMENA 1
INTRODUCTION 13
SEARCHING FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS 23
THE FIRST QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS 33
NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM 59
THE NEW QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS 80
A RENAISSANCE IN JESUS STUDIES 97
THE MODERN AMERICAN QUEST 110
THE JESUS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR 116
WHERE DOES A STUDY OF JESUS START 138
HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION AND CHRISTIAN FAITH 159
CHRISTOLOGY AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS 172
THE PROBLEM OF PAUL 194
THE JESUS MYSTERY SOLVED? 216
BIBLIOGRAPHY 233
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Finally my deep affection and thanks to my wife and family who have borne bravely an absent husband and father deeply involved in his theological quest.
GLOSSARY

**Anachronism:** A chronological error, or something occurring, or represented as occurring, outside of its proper time.

**Aphorism:** A brief sententious statement of a truth or principle.

**BCE:** Before the common era.

**CE:** Common era.

**Deism:** Movement started in the 17th century with a programme for replacing traditional by rational religion. It is popularly regarded as a belief in a remote creator, uninvolved in the world which was created. Broadly deism stands for the abolition of dogma founded on alleged revelation and promulgated by the church so that the principle of rational scrutiny is quashed.

**Dialectical Theology:** A direction in theology that deliberately leaves obvious paradoxes unresolved, holding them to the highest form of truth.

**Docetism:** The belief that, since matter is in itself impure, Jesus did not have a real human body and that therefore he was unable to experience or human needs and that, therefore again, his suffering was only apparent.

**Easter Faith:** The early church’s faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

**Ebionitism:** An acceptance of Christ as a prophet and messiah, but not as the Son of God. Thus Christ’s divinity is rejected.

**Enlightenment:** An 18th century intellectual movement that held human reason to be the ultimate norm of truth, thus tending towards anti-authoritarianism.

**Essenes:** A Jewish sect living in the desert in the vicinity of the Dead Sea from about 200 BCE to about 70 CE.

**Exegesis:** The scholarly explanation of the meaning of a biblical text.

**Exegete:** Someone occupied with exegesis.

**Existentialism:** A philosophical school that denies the existence of an objective world *out there*, holding instead that the only real world is the world subjectively experienced by humanity. Humanity has to create its own future by assuming the responsibility for every decision taken and by accepting the fundamental meaningless of it all. What is important is that the individual exists, conscious of own existence and freedom to decide what the individual’s future should be like.
Ex Nihilo: 'Out of nothing nothing comes.' This is an argument in favour of the existence of a creator. However used in other senses in theological thought.

Fideism: The view that intellect by itself does not understand divine truths adequately or judge them at their true value. There is usually a tendency to overemphasise the role of faith in acquiring knowledge.

Fides Quaeret Intellectum: Faith inquires into intellect.

Gnosticism: A religious and philosophical movement among Jews and especially Christians on the 1st to 6th centuries CE, teaching that humanity is saved only by special knowledge of God and that the world, though created by a malevolent Demiurge (who is a lowly emanation of the supreme Deity) has been or can be saved through the special knowledge of the supreme Deity dispensed by his emissary Jesus Christ.

Kerygma: Proclamation, preaching.

Logia: The collection of sayings believed to be at the disposal of the writers of the gospels, especially the synoptic gospels.

Monophysitism: A 5th century interpretation of christology holding that Christ had not two (equally powerful) natures (human and divine) but a divine nature dominating his human nature.

Myth: A term used in theology to refer to stories that are fictional. Such myths are the products of pre-scientific thinking. A myth may or may not employ historical materials.

Pericope: A self-contained portion of the test of the bible set apart by definite markers.

Primitive Christianity: The early Christian church.

Rationalism: The view that the only source of true knowledge is human reason and not aspects such as experience or observation or revelation.

Tractate: Treatise
Chapter 1

PROLEGOMENA

Internal Prolegomena

This dissertation is a journey. A journey whose end objective is to attempt to resolve and to provide explanation to one of the most elusive of historical and theological mysteries. The mystery of the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, the christology of the Christ of faith that accompanies this fact and the Christian religion that evolved from these beginnings.

With an objective to resolve the Jesus mystery the road on which this dissertation will travel is in itself worth considering before the journey begins. Its beginnings can be traced back for at least two centuries. It began as a meandering path in the German countryside. The path became a road spanning a few countries. The road has now evolved into a major international multi-lane highway. Many people have used or are using this highway. They travel at different speeds, they try different lanes, and the traffic goes in different directions. Many side-roads and junctions have become a feature of the highway. And if its past history is any guide many more side-roads and junctions will be developed in the future.

\[1\] The things that must be said first - Karl Barth
By using a much travelled highway the journey covered in the dissertation will never be completely new. There are features that will be partly familiar. What will be encountered cannot promise to be constantly and startlingly original. This dissertation is part of a grateful and critical dialogue with the experiences of others who have made or are making the journey. It is a joining of a conversation that has existed for a long time. Hopefully the distinctions and directions of fellow-travellers will be illuminating and fascinating. Above all else this dissertation has an overriding ambition to set up its own tiny markers in the great dialogue about Jesus.

But before the journey begins there are some issues that need forethought. It would probably be an easier journey if the end objective could be defined as an explanation of the Jesus secret as opposed to the Jesus mystery. Why? The short answer is that a secret has the capability of being fully revealed.

On the other hand a mystery within the theological context is inviting and likely to be elusive. It has the attraction of a lifetime of theological reflection. The subject of Jesus is very much a theological mystery. It will never deliver final conclusions. The journey towards the Jesus mystery will continue to have disclosures but there will always remain the ultimate mystery. And that above all else is the joy and lure of the journey. Perhaps the journey is itself the destination. The fact that as the journey progresses there might be a modification of views, or even a changing of people, cannot and should not
prevent the journey taking place. On the contrary it makes it all the more inviting.

A seasoned traveller always checks in advance for reports on what conditions are likely to be encountered on the journey. And indeed there are a few roadblocks and other hazards that need to taken into account before the journey begins.

It has been a well known theological fact since it was stressed by George Tyrrell⁷ that a theologian embarking on the quest for Jesus must accept the likelihood that the face seen at the bottom of the well may turn out to be the theologian's own and mistake it for the historical Jesus. Indeed a pothole of some significance.

Another obstacle is the suggestion that the journey in itself is futile. Some travellers assert that if the evangelists of the early church were seriously wrong in their evaluation of Jesus of Nazareth then succeeding generations of Christians have always been and must continue to be condemned by the very nature of Christianity's history in a perpetuation of the errors. Further if the early church's interpretation of the transcendent and supra-historical significance of Christ was mistaken then the Christ who is proclaimed today has practically nothing to do with the Jesus who was crucified yesterday. And in

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these circumstances there are scholars who feel there can be no remedying of the situation. There is in this reasoning the view that Christianity as a religion does not suffer because of this.

The tenor of this dissertation is seriously at odds with such thinking. The fact that earlier travellers have abandoned the journey or questioned its validity merely acknowledges that considerable problems about its declared historical founder and serious questions are posed for Christianity as a religion. This is an important challenge for theology. No theologian serious about the craft of theology should allow this negativity to be a deterrent to undertake a journey of investigation into the Jesus mystery. In fact there is no alternative to this journey in a post-Enlightenment society and an open church which wants to give an account of its own foundations. (Theissen & Metz 1996: vii)

Alister McGrath (1984:50) saw another obstacle on the highway. He determined that there is a chasm between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. In McGrath's estimation a crossing over the chasm requires a bridge between the essential continuity of the person of Jesus and the interpretation placed on the figure of Jesus by his followers. McGrath is of the opinion that this bridge can not be built from humanity's side as the means are simply not available. Nor for McGrath will they ever be. If true a serious deterrent to the intended journey. The result for many theologians was abandonment of their travel plans. Fortunately others have rejected this particular thinking of McGrath on
this subject as can be seen by the many books and articles that have and continue to be published about Jesus. The journey is seen as an acceptable and calculated risk for which theological courage is required. If indeed there is a bridge that requires construction from humanity’s side there is confidence it can be built.

This dissertation firmly supports the need for - and is itself a traveller on - the journey to solve the Jesus mystery despite its risks, its difficulties and the past failures.

Finally to those who expect concrete answers to the Jesus mystery they are reminded of the pertinent fact that a scholar worthy of the name will never say “That’s what it was.” Rather the serious student will opine that “it could have been like that on the basis of the sources.” This dissertation’s journey is to consider the relevant sources about Jesus. And at the end deliver a textual basis for its conclusion and hypothesis concerning the Jesus mystery.

**External Prolegomena**

Christianity’s foundation is a belief that Jesus of Nazareth appeared on the scene of history some two thousand years ago in a land known today as

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5 The things that must be said beforehand. Karl Barth
Palestine. And on the brink of the third millennium Jesus just as he did then continues to be both an object of devotion and controversy. Indeed a mystery!

That Jesus existed, most modern scholars are in no doubt. There have been some scholars in the 20th century who support the denial of the historical existence of Jesus. But the general scholarly opinion is that there is enough evidence attesting to the fact of Jesus of Nazareth. Since the historical Jesus became a subject for examination some 200 years ago there has been movement and determination within New Testament theology to delve into the topic. There is an overall aim within New Testament theology to establish the decisiveness, the constancy and the creativity of the ministry and message of Jesus for Christian faith. (Anderson 1960:119) Conversely at the same time New Testament scholarship has been responsible for the steady erosion of confidence in the historical reliability of the bible and especially the image it paints of Jesus Christ. The New Testament gospels are seen to give accounts of Jesus' life that contradict each other. (Salibi 1992:1) The figure of Jesus they depict is inconsistent; some suggest barely coherent! And the description of Jesus' life is notably incomplete.

Indeed Jesus has proved to be a mystery of deepening proportions over the last 200 years.

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*This includes the canonical gospels and the apocryphal gospels. And not just the Christian texts but also the non-Christian ones.*
It has become conventional to explain the lack of gospel harmony by assuming the aim of the writers was to show Jesus as the expected Israelite messiah rather than write a biography. But this in itself only adds to the mystery!

A further problem in the attempts both past and present to explain the problem of the Jesus of history is that the terminology normally employed is to find the historical Jesus. But what is meant by the term historical as is generally used by scholars in the quest for Jesus? It should not be defined as the Jesus who lived in history; more aptly defined as the real Jesus. The historical Jesus is the Jesus who the historian attempts to discover by scientific methods. This process applies critical methodologies to describe a Jesus as reconstructed by historians. The aim of these methodologies is to produce a purely historical account of Jesus. As with any other personage of the past it cannot nor should it try to convey the human, the creative, the unique, or the purposeful element of Jesus. To do this would be an elimination of the transcendent, the miraculous and the divine in Jesus, since by definition these things cannot be accounted for in a strictly historical manner.

Another facet in the search for Jesus makes it apposite to appreciate that history has two meanings. One describes events that have actually happened. The other speaks of accounts by historians within the narratives about the events. Evans (1996: 9) maintains that the event sense is a simple indication of the event being historical and that it really happened. Narratives can be said to be historically
true to the degree that they accurately represent the events which occurred. Probably the best reason which causes biblical scholars to distinguish between the historical Jesus and the real Jesus is the tension that emanates from the work of the historian and the picture that is affirmed by the ordinary Christian believer. The use of the terms historical and real leave open the possibility that the Christ of faith may also capture part of the real Jesus.

John Meier (1991:25) for his part calls for a clear distinction between the real Jesus and the historical Jesus. For Meier the real Jesus was the person who walked the roads of Palestine during his lifetime while the historical Jesus is a modern abstraction and construct. Meier’s suggestion is that the historical Jesus is more correctly termed the historians’ Jesus.

To underline the difficulties of who is being sought in the historians’ Jesus John Lau° sees history being understood, especially by the liberal, as a closed, unbroken series of historical causes and events. This allows for different interpretations. In the search for the Jesus of history Lau contends that this results in different conclusions each of which has validity. Five of these which Lau’s research has revealed are:

1. Jesus as he actually was, different from all Christian interpretations.

2. Jesus who is incompatible with Christianity.

3. Jesus who is the bulwark of true religion.

4. Jesus as the one bringing his own understanding of human existence.

5. Jesus as the historian is able to uncover him.

Interestingly the personal approach of a scholar can be defined more precisely by which of these directions is taken in the scholar's methodology.

An important point is whether in the theology of the New Testament questions should be asked about the historical Jesus at all. Martin Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann are noted for their theological rejection of the question of the historical Jesus. Yet the honest historian will rightly not allow this question to be ruled out, because something must be known of Jesus if the rise of Christianity is to be understood at all. And whether the faith evoked by Christianity has a valid historical basis.

In this faith, in trying to give an understanding of its nature or - in a better context - to reflect theologically, has a deep interest in whether and to what extent there is or is not an agreement between the picture of Jesus Christ gained on the basis of the apostolic proclamation and the historical actuality of this Jesus to whom faith refers.

Accordingly the thinking Christian who inquires after the message of the New Testament must also inquire after the Jesus who justifies that Christian's faith.
This is a harking back to Anselm's approach of *fides quaren intellectum*. There can be no doubt that the question of the historical Jesus undoubtedly belongs at the beginning of the theology of the New Testament.

A contemporary issue in theology is to determine whether there is the scientific possibility of solving the question of the historical Jesus. It has been accepted in current thinking that a biography of Jesus - namely the *real* Jesus - is unobtainable. The reason is because in the original oral tradition the context and sequence of Jesus' deeds and words were not preserved; it is only in the isolated stories and sayings or groups of sayings that something can be built up of the historical Jesus. Therefore the presentation of Jesus' proclamation within the theology of the New Testament should unhesitatingly draw away from any attempt to glean any conclusions from gospel accounts concerning the development and possible changes in Jesus' thinking.

The scholar inquiring into the person and proclamation of Jesus is better challenged in considering all the tradition material and seeking that which can be demonstrated to be the earliest.

This in itself raises a methodological problem. Analysis of the gospels shows that the individual texts probably represent the original tradition. It has however already been noted that the whole of the traditional material codified...
into the gospels were not undertaken for reasons of biography or history. They were basically to support the evolving Christian community's proclamation and teaching. And more pointedly to support the proclaimed resurrection and heavenly ascension of Jesus Christ.

There seems little scholarly doubt that the entire Jesus tradition found in the gospels comes from early Christianity's believing and proclaiming community. In the circumstances critical examination of the individual bits of tradition is necessary to decide whether and to what extent this tradition goes back into the time before Easter and relates reliably to the historical actuality of Jesus and his teaching.

A further feature of this dissertation will be an examination of the methodological aids that have been used in searching for the historical Jesus. To mind comes the literary comparison of the parallel accounts of the gospels, the analytical delimitation of individual pieces of tradition, the form-critical consideration and distinctions of narrative and discourse as well as deciding the circumstances and timing of their appearance, the comparison of the gospel material with the contemporary Jewish and Hellenistic thought world and so on.

It is to theology's credit that in the use of these methodological processes a confidence has evolved that the search will be fruitful in outlining a historically comprehensible and unitary picture of Jesus and his proclamation. Further that
understanding can be gained about the further development of primitive Christianity.

Finally it must be accepted that in such a complex search there will be many arguments which can be ambiguous. There is also the danger of researchers being bound to ecclesiastical, scientific-historical, or personal prejudices. It is also unavoidable that the diverse opinions will occur about the antiquity of individual pieces of tradition and even of entire groups of traditions. But it is the firm opinion within this dissertation that the uncertainty and need of correction of all such judgements must not deter the necessity and importance of the continuing search for the historical person and proclamation of Jesus in the context of New Testament theology.

And it is that necessity that has given impetus to solving the Jesus mystery.
Chapter 2

INTRODUCTION

A modern historian Ed Parish Sanders (1985: 43) set out as virtually certain the following eight facts in the career of Jesus:

1. Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist
2. Jesus was a Galilean who preached and healed.
3. Jesus called disciples and spoke of there being twelve.
4. Jesus confined his activity to Israel.
5. Jesus was engaged in a controversy about the Temple.
6. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities.
7. After his death, Jesus' followers continued as an identifiable movement.
8. At least some Jews persecuted at least parts of the new movement.

It is apposite to remember that historical scholarship does not relate what really happened. It rather reflects on sources, levels of research, methods and problems. History ultimately deals with events that can be narrated - even if narration curtails them. (Theissen & Metz 1996: 569)

Thus historians can make a number of important, indeed critical, assertions.

Sanders' book represents a far more historically sceptical approach. But at the same time Sanders' thinking is in direct opposition to earlier existentialist thought by giving priority to historical fact, however hard it may be to obtain. (McGrath 1993:265)
about Jesus' ministry but the evidence provided by the ancient sources about Jesus do not enable a satisfying reconstruction of this ministry and Jesus' earthly life. More importantly the best historical reconstruction is unable to supply the real Jesus. When John Dominic Crossan (1991: 423) refers disparagingly to the many Jesuses of New Testament writings he overlooks the many Jesuses resulting from attempts by scholars of which he is one to reconstruct the historical Jesus.

The relationship of the gospels to historical inquiry is one of the most important and at the same time has proven to be the most difficult of problems confronting modern theology - and indeed Christian faith.

Christian faith in itself is one of the problems facing the search for the historical Jesus. This is because millions of people over the centuries and in the world today believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the saviour of the world. Jesus as the object of belief is seen as the incarnation of God, coming from heaven into a virgin womb. The birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem was the initiation of God's intention to save the world from its sins.

Jesus the saviour revealed his identity only to a small band of followers and was intent upon teaching the human race how to live. This teaching, however, needed an added dimension to save people from the consequences of sin. It necessitated a price being paid. The price was the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus in dying a painful and humiliating death on a cross on a hill called Calvary.
Three days later Jesus in rising from the dead accomplished triumph over sin and death. Jesus revealed himself to his disciples and then ascended back to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God.

At the end of the world Jesus will return and judge which members of humanity will enjoy perpetual happiness with God; the rest being sent to everlasting punishment in hell.

This in a capsule is Christian faith!

To those outside Christianity it is difficult to see how such beliefs can be extended to a historical person. For those inside the faith the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth has over recent times confronted the believer in more and more questions about the accuracy of the historical personage. The challenge being faced in modern times is to avoid the classical attempts at setting out a Jesus that was massively anachronistic. In other words a Jesus who is out of harmony with present thinking.

It has already been mentioned that in 1909 George Tyrrell highlighted aptly the problem in searching for Jesus by comparing the efforts of Adolf von Harnack, a representative of liberal theology at the time, to that of a person peering into a deep well but seeing only that person's own face staring back at

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* See footnote 2
him. Albert Schweitzer, in his epochal book, expressed similar sentiments about the general attempt on the part of his contemporaries to discover the historical Jesus. To Schweitzer if a discovery of the real historical Jesus was possible the result would not be the Jesus Christ to whom Christianity, according to its long-cherished custom, relates to, has its own thoughts, and has its own ideas.

It would accordingly be wrong to ignore the assertion that those who follow the traditional view of Christianity have been victims of a great misconception. Such a claim is based on the reasoning that every generation seems to re-invent Jesus in an image which supports the values of that generation. This is seen in the works of a multitude of scholars who have been able to portray radically different pictures of the founder of Christianity. And in these circumstances critics have claimed with good reason that this suggests there is no historical person to be discovered.

The idea that Christianity may have begun without a historical Jesus was first postulated near the end of the 18th century by some philosophers of the French revolution. And a few decades later David Friedrich Strauss and Bruno Bauer theorised that much of the story of Jesus was mythology and the gospels were literary inventions.

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1. The Quest for the Historical Jesus - See Bibliography
During the 20th century scholars like James McConkey Robinson in the United States, Arthur Drews in Germany and Paul-Louis Couchoud in France supported the denial of any historical existence for the gospel Jesus. More recently GA Wells, Professor of German Language at the University of London, has published four books on the subject of Jesus in which he points to the elusiveness of the historical basis behind the story of Jesus of Nazareth. While these works are few in relation to the many publications pointing to a confidence about the historical Jesus, account must be taken of these views.

What is patently clear are the tremendous differences in the degree to which various attempts to write a life of Jesus take critical historical concerns seriously. An example of this tendency where a serious concern for historical evidence is lacking is a publication by Joseph Ernest Renan 10 which caused a scandal for its denial of Jesus' divinity. Renan's portrait was an imaginative picture of a pale and genial Galilean whose early preachings were received enthusiastically amidst the beautiful streams and fields of Galilee, but who finally met a tragic end when he expected too much of his followers.

Surprisingly even the pictures of Jesus offered by scholars who energetically and conscientiously attempt to employ the most scrupulous historical methods often produce a Jesus who offers to the author and the contemporary world exactly what is being looked for. An example is a recent work of John Dominic

Crossan\textsuperscript{11} who commands much respect in contemporary times for his Jesus studies. Crossan's portrait of Jesus is supported by an elaborate critical methodology, involving anthropological, historical, and documentary backing. Yet the Jesus offered by Crossan seems to be very much in line with 20\textsuperscript{th} century political correctness. Crossan's Jesus has about him the radical who came of age in the 1960s and who prefers to party with the poor in a most egalitarian manner. There is also a great deal of the feminist in Crossan's Jesus. And this Jesus with a great suspicion of civil and ecclesiastical authority proclaimed a \textit{kingdom of God}. Unlike some approaches to the historical Jesus that rationalistically down-played the miraculous, Crossan emphasises that Jesus was an exorcist and magician of sorts. Interestingly Crossan is careful not to claim that Jesus actually possessed genuine supernatural powers. This whole enterprise by Crossan is a good example of the greater openness of modern culture towards \textit{New Age} religious practices and the \textit{paranormal}. (Evans 1996: 39-41)

It would be fair to comment that whether supported by elaborate historical methodology or not, recent truncated lives of Jesus have moved little beyond the criticisms of Tyrrell and Schweitzer in that they tell more about the authors than about the historical Jesus. To underline this criticism it can be seen how surprisingly easy liberation theologians have confidently portrayed Jesus as a political revolutionary; feminist theologians see Jesus as proto-feminist while various other academic portraits depict a Jesus who is well in line with current

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{The Historical Jesus: the Life of a Mediterranean Peasant}. JD Crossan. 1991 San Francisco. Harper Collins
political and social correctness. Probably the only thing that can be considered worthwhile in such portraits is that they usually highlight an aspect of the story of Jesus that has been neglected. But even then these aspects are invariably one-sided.

Despite this well-known outcome in Jesus studies it has still not deterred scholars and non-scholars from continuing to produce personal versions of what is claimed to be the real historical Jesus.

Perhaps the most succinct criticism on this point comes from John P. Meier12 before embarking on his own quest for the historical Jesus:

"I never cease to be amazed at how present-day writers will first censure past critics for not being sufficiently self-critical and then proceed to engage in an uncritical projection of their own ideas and agendas onto a portrait of the historical Jesus, hardly suppressing a gasp how relevant he turns out to be."

Another trend in modern interpretations of Jesus is that the authors tend to leave no room for imagination or reflection. And in these instances the picture produced is usually boring in the extreme.

To their credit scholars in the early to middle of the 20th century showed some caution in attempts to seek the picture of Jesus. Wright (1996:3) calls it the via negatissima and cites the following examples:

• He comes to us as one unknown....

• I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus....

• Jesus Christ in fact is .......historically so difficult to get information about....

• The form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us....we trace in [the gospels] but the outskirts of his ways.

• No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus.

Wright correctly opines that in no way should these comments be seen as products of cynical unbelief. Rather they appear to possess the proper, indeed reverent, caution of the angel as opposed to the blundering fool; the latter being equitable to the heavy-handed historian of whom the latter part of the 20th century has seen more than a few.

Another notable and welcome feature of 20th century scholarship into the quest for the historical Jesus has been the realisation that any understanding of Jesus must be in the context of his Jewish heritage. This is a vital distinction to the images found in the 19th century quest. The basis of research at that time implied that the Jews had the wrong religion and Jesus came to bring the right kind. The thrust of the 19th century quest was to remove from the picture of

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13 Albert Schweitzer
14 Rudolf Bultmann
15 Karl Barth
16 Robert Henry Lightfoot
17 Günther Bonkann
Jesus those aspects of Jesus that seemed too Jewish or too ethnically restricted. What was left was the idea of the founder of a great universal spiritual religion which had been recaptured by Protestantism. Both Albert Schweitzer and William Wrede who were so much the death knell of the 19th century quest were correct on the point of stressing that any search for the historical Jesus must portray him as a credible and recognisable 1st century Jew. Contrary to the traditional self-understanding of Christianity, historically and theologically Jesus belongs to Judaism. Christianity can remain true to itself only if it remains true to its Jewish roots.

Probably one of the most striking happenings within the theological climate on the brink of the third millennium from the time history divided itself before and after the averred birth of Jesus is the growing passion to get close to the historical figure of Jesus. The plethora of books, articles, the Internet debate, and other publications devoted to the subject of the historical Jesus is evidence of this fact.

Elsewhere in this dissertation18 mention is made of the work of Luke Timothy Johnson. It is apposite to mention here that Johnson who has a considerable following in the United States belongs to that school that holds that theology and history should be kept apart. In fact the whole thesis of Johnson (1996: 69) is that there is a fateful link between history and theology. In other words there is

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18 In chapters 8 and 9
in Johnson's mind an opposition between the *historical* and the *real*. The problem with Johnson's thinking on this point is that he understands *history* and its cognates to *that which people write about the past*. This is a clear misunderstanding of what the quests for the historical Jesus have aimed for which has been *that which happened in the past*.

Christianity has always claimed that it is a *historical* and not a *philosophical* religion. It was Paul who appealed at his trial to Caesar and Porcius Festus responded that it was to Caesar Paul would go. Metaphorically Christianity's appeal to history means that to history it must go.

It is to this history - or as traditionally known as the quests for the historical Jesus - that attention is now turned.

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19 Acts 25: 10-12
SEARCHING FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Of what value or importance for Christian faith is knowledge about the historical Jesus? This is one of the most important questions that has emerged from the development of historical-critical methods beginning in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and which has continued to the present day. (Cook 1978: 679)

But even before that time the search for the historical Jesus has been a focal point for foundational theology for it impacts upon the relationship between faith and history. This search can even be found in primitive Christianity. In some New Testament pericopes like 2 Timothy 2:18; 1 Corinthians 15; and 1 John 2:22 the authors set out doubts concerning the life of Jesus. Also during the early Christian period there were some who held to a position that Jesus had not really lived but that his existence was only an illusion. This was defined as docetism. Or there was a view that Jesus Christ was really two separate persons and that Christ was dominant over Jesus. This was because Hellenism could not picture a divine human nor could Judaism conceive of a person being divine. On the other hand adherents of Ebionitism claimed that Jesus was totally human and somehow swallowed up the Christ.
The major problem in the search for the historical Jesus has been clearly the paucity of material on which to base research. Barring a small amount of information from extra-biblical sources the search has been dependant almost entirely on the canonical gospels - none of which were likely to have been written by authors who could claim to have been eye-witnesses to the accounts - and occasional references in the Pauline epistles. And down the centuries the great christological controversies have been geared to discovering exactly how Jesus is related to the Christ and what the gospel accounts mean.

It is of fundamental importance to keep in mind that Christianity is deeply rooted in history. And it has been the held position that any attempt to cut Christianity from its historical roots would be the destruction of Christianity itself. So the search for the historical Jesus has an underlying urgency, a validity, and is of significance to theology. This has had the result that over the last 200 years there have been various searches for the historical Jesus which depict periods of research about Jesus.

These searches for the historical Jesus have become known in theology as quests. McGrath (1998: 271) sees the term quest having strongly romantic overtones. It has affinity with the Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail. In fact the term was introduced into the English language discussion of the historical Jesus question by the translator of the Albert Schweitzer publication was "From Reimarus to Wrede: On the history of the question of the historical Jesus."
The translator was concerned that the sales potential of a title featuring two unknown German scholars would be affected detrimentally and decided to transfer their names to a sub-title. Thus the new title "The Quest of the historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede."20 The term *quest* was never used by Schweitzer; nevertheless it has passed into general theological use and continues to be used to the present day.

These *quests* for the historical Jesus have a dynamic all of their own. A whole culture has evolved which directs all its thoughts to a single figure. The searches for the historical Jesus and of the portraits of Jesus that have evolved are a history of constantly new approaches to Jesus and distancings from him. (Thiessen & Merz 1996: 2)

It is important to avoid the idea that there are rigid and specific periods in the history of scholarship into the historical Jesus. The concept of using the term *quests* is basically a heuristic aid to understand currents of thoughts during a particular period of Jesus research. It is not as though all scholars suddenly gave up one set of thinking and took up another. To make the point even more pertinent is the mistaken impression given of gospel scholarship in the 20th century to the idea that suddenly all scholars were working with a methodology of *form-criticism* or *redaction-criticism* or *source-criticism* or *historical-relativism* or whatever. Actually there is usually a considerable overlap in the use of methodologies although one is usually in vogue in a given time-frame.

20 See Bibliography
The traditional self-understanding of Christian faith had taken shape in an age which accepted the Bible unproblematically as the true story of the origin and destiny of the human race. This is still a position held in orthodox circles to the present day. Pre-critical studies of the gospels assumed that they presented a straight-forward *historical* account of the life and teaching of Jesus. (McGrath 1993: 260) Prior to this period discrepancies between the accounts given in the four gospels had been noticed but dismissed. There was a general assumption that such differences could be *harmonised*; though it was acknowledged that this was not always easy to do. (Evans 1996: 17) It was the encounter with modernity, founded on historical consciousness and the newly emergent empirical natural sciences, that resulted in the cultural plausibility of the Bible being shaken. (Komonchak 1987: 538) This was to give impetus to modern biblical scholarship.

Borg (1994: 184) sees modern biblical scholarship being the child of two parents: the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the Enlightenment which began about a century later. The Reformation emphasised the authority of the bible in contrast to church tradition. It gave to biblical study an importance that it had not had for over a thousand years. The Reformation also saw the Bible translated into popular languages, thereby making it widely accessible which in itself permitted a wider critical reading of the Old and New Testaments.

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2: Often referred to by the German term *Aufklärung* - Also see Glossary
The Enlightenment, with its emphasis upon reason and scientific ways of knowing, purported to have mastered the scientific method through a completely rational spirit of enquiry. It engendered a revolution in knowledge. No longer could something be accepted as true simply on the basis of authority and tradition. Investigation and reason became the new basis for knowledge.

Applied initially in the natural world of the sciences, the new way of knowing was soon applied in the human world of history and culture. In this biblical material did not escape such investigation and reasoning. Within the worldview of the Enlightenment, both sacred authority and the supernatural were rejected. Instead the effort was made to understand everything within a natural system of cause and effect. By this, for example, reason felt able to set out the attributes of God.

In the sphere of religion and theology the Enlightenment laid the foundation for 19th century liberalism. A few of the characteristics of religious and theological liberalism were:

- There is no supernatural.
- The canonical gospels are neither history or biography.
- The bible contains only noble ideas.
- Theological and practical interests dictated editorial policy which assembled unrelated stories, sayings and small individual collections for devotional purposes.
Revelation through the bible is impossible.

Reason and empiricism are supreme.

Philosophy is based on the Hegelian evolution of ideas.

Consequently since liberalism was humanistically oriented, there was a strong emphasis on the humanity of Jesus.

The early bearers of the Enlightenment within the theological discipline were the Deists. Like their counterparts in the sciences, they consistently sought reasonable and natural explanations of religious and theological matters. Though the Deists still affirmed the existence of God, they rejected the notions of supernatural intervention and special revelation. With these characteristics removed, the privileged status of the bible and of Christian doctrine all but disappeared. Scripture and doctrine alike were seen as human products and not as the result of special divine revelation.

Accompanying these developments was the rise of a new historical consciousness. The task of the historian was no longer seen as simply chronicling events reported in authoritative documents. Rather, the historian now became the judge of historical documents, seeking to make discriminating judgements about their origin, character, and ultimately about what really happened.

Biblical scholarship within this period of modernity flourished in the areas where the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment were most influential: Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent
France. Most of the early work was concentrated on the Old Testament. In 1644, Hugo Grotius of Holland argued that the Old Testament was to be understood in relation to its original historical circumstances, and not primarily in relationship to the New Testament. A third of a century later, the noted philosopher Benedict Spinoza argued that the author of the Pentateuch was not Moses, but Ezra, who lived about nine hundred years after Moses. In 1678, Richard Simon, a French Roman Catholic, argued that much of the Old Testament had been compiled by scribal schools rather than written by inspired individuals.

In all this a reductionism of biblical authority was clearly evident.

Early in the 18th century English deists and free thinkers such as Anthony Collins, Thomas Woolston, Peter Annet, Thomas Chubb, and Matthew Tindal critically attacked orthodox defences of the reliability of the gospels, focusing on the difficulties with alleged miracles, supposedly fulfilled prophecies, and general discrepancies and historical implausibilities in the narrative. 22

The initial impact of this new approach to the bible was controversial - to put it mildly - and world-threatening - to put it more accurately. Biblical criticism was seen as a threat to society: it seemed to call into question the truth of Christianity and therefore the underpinnings of Western culture itself. What

22 A comprehensive outline of this period of research is to be found in the work of Robert Morgan with John Burton, Biblical Interpretation. 1988. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
seemed to be at stake for many was the sacred foundation of the world. This showed clearly that historical claims regarding the origin of the bible and of Christianity mattered a great deal at the time.

In 1697 an eighteen-year-old Scottish student named Thomas Aikenhead was hanged in Edinburgh for claiming (as Spinoza had some twenty years earlier) that Ezra and not Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. Some thirty years later in England Thomas Woolston, a professor at Cambridge University, claimed that the miracles of Jesus did not happen. His fate was considerably milder: he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Near the end of the 1700s, Thomas Paine, prominent in the American Revolutionary War denied the truthfulness of both the Old and New Testaments. His publishers in England were heavily fined and the owners of the publishing house were sent to prison.

Despite these apologetics of those of orthodox persuasion it can be seen in retrospect that biblical authority was being irrevocably undermined.

One of the final effects of the Enlightenment during the 18th century was the beginnings in Europe of the historical-critical approach to studying the gospels. The historical-critical methodology was beginning to be regarded as the only legitimate approach to investigate New Testament literature. In the hands of conservatives, it yielded a picture of Christian development comfortable to

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23 In Age of Reason
tradition. In the hands of liberals, it exposed a history that called into question traditional positions.

From the end of the 18th century onwards, universal history became a blueprint for finding one's way in time. History, not metaphysics, was now the universal science. Thus Karl Marx could say "we know only a single science, the science of history."

In retrospect it can be seen that the quest for the historical Jesus is, for the most part, a modern question that has developed and flourished largely during the 19th and 20th centuries. (Cook 1986: 15) Theissen & Merz (1996: 12) delineate five phases of the quest for the historical Jesus. They are:

1. Critical stimuli to research into Jesus.

2. The liberal quest of the historical Jesus.

3. Collapse of the quest of the historical Jesus.

4. The new quest of the historical Jesus.

5. The third quest of the historical Jesus.

Traditionally theology has referred to the first two phases as the first quest for the historical Jesus. It was almost exclusively European and Protestant, more
specifically German and Lutheran. And it is to this first quest that attention is now given.
Chapter 4

THE FIRST QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Both Deism and the German Enlightenment developed the idea of a serious difference between the real Jesus of history and the New Testament interpretation of his significance. There was a thesis that beneath the New Testament portrait of a supernatural redeemer of humanity there was a shadowy figure of a human person who taught common sense. Enlightenment rationalism was also unable to accept a supernatural redeemer but agreed with the concept of Jesus as an enlightened moral teacher. Out of these influences the New Testament was subjected to critical study.

Most scholars accept Albert Schweitzer's view that the higher critical study of the New Testament - the first quest - is ascribed to an anonymous (and posthumous) work entitled On the purpose of Jesus and his disciples. The work was published under the influence of the German Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold E Lessing between 1774 and 1778 as the last of what is generally known as the seven Fragments of the Unknown of Wolfenbüttel who used a ruse to get it past state censorship, which forbade the publication of works injurious to religion. The identity of the author was not disclosed for several decades because of fear of bringing harm to his family. (Borg 1994: 185-186) It was later revealed to be the work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, a deist free-thinker and
a professor of oriental languages in Hamburg, Germany. During his lifetime Reimarus was a literary champion of the religion of reason as it had been proposed by English deism.

Reimarus made the historical-critical foundation of his ideas24 available to close friends. Not wanting to publish the complete papers himself, Reimarus left them in the library at Wolfenbüttel. Lessing discovered them 10 years after the death of Reimarus.

To be factual quite some time before Reimarus the work and theological thrust of the 16th century Reformers must have a place in the overall history of the beginnings of the quest for the historical Jesus. The Reformers however found that they were able to focus better not on the Jesus of history for his own sake but on the results of his work. (Wright 1996:15) And this had echoes in the 20th century when Lutherans like Martin Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann claimed to be standing in the Reformation tradition when they put forward the historic biblical Christ over against the so-called historical Jesus. Their views - as were the Reformers - were the hint of the theologian spurning the historian.

But it is accepted generally to be more correct in pointing to the customary beginnings of the preoccupation with the life of Jesus from a purely historical perspective having begun with Reimarus.

24 In a work A Apologia or Defence of the Rational Worshipper of God
Reimarus was increasingly convinced that both Judaism and Christianity rested upon fraudulent foundations.²⁵ Reimarus conceived Jesus to be a traditional Jew. Reimarus asserted that the preaching of Jesus could be understood only from the context of the Jewish religion of his time. In essence Reimarus proposed that by going back to the historical Jesus a more credible version of Christianity would result by the elimination of all unnecessary and inappropriate dogmatic additions. In Reimarus' estimation Jesus was persuaded to believe that he was the long-foretold Jewish messiah. Jesus' sect under his leadership promoted nationalism rather than religion. It was the disciples of Jesus who, wishing to maintain their influence, promoted Jesus as a spiritual redeemer. Reimarus asserted by an objective theory of deception that the disciples stole Jesus' body and proclaimed his resurrection. What was devastating about Reimarus' work was the insistence that the gospel accounts did not present a historical Jesus but a tendentious reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth by the early church and by the self-interested disciples. (McGrath 1996: 261) The thesis of Reimarus has never been considered especially significant and his fraud hypothesis is generally dismissed.

Reimarus' work could not be regarded as historical reconstruction and in Schweitzer's estimation it did not constitute the greatest of the lives of Jesus.

What was important, however, was that Reimarus simply treated the gospels as

²⁵ Reimarus distinguished in the fragment On the Intentions of Jesus and his Disciples the preaching of Jesus from the Apostles' faith in Christ thus: "I find great cause to separate completely what the apostles say in their own writings from that which Jesus himself actually said and taught."
ordinary historical documents with no presupposition of divine inspiration or
even reliability. This methodological separation between the historical Jesus and
the apostles' belief in Christ is still normative in theology today.

Also Reimarus showed the sense that to learn what really happened it is
necessary to, as it were, look through the texts and not take them at face value.
The result is that Reimarus was the first to get the credit for perceiving clearly
that the Jesus of history is not simply the same as the Christ proclaimed in the
gospels and by the church. It is significant that one of Schweitzer's main
objections to Reimarus' reasoning was that Schweitzer considered Jesus' eschatology to be in a purely political sense. To Schweitzer Jesus opposed the
national resistance to Rome.

It was also shown that the rest of Reimarus' writings were preoccupied with the
conflict between reason and Christianity in all its aspects; in this as mentioned
before Reimarus was strongly influenced by English deism which had created a
favourable climate for the questioning advanced by Reimarus. Reimarus can
thus be seen as reacting sharply to the mainline religious tradition of his day.
Reimarus was determined to prove that the traditions of European Christianity
and particularly Protestantism were wrong. It is also well-founded to believe
that Reimarus' aim was to destroy Christianity - as he understood it - by
demonstrating that it rested on historical distortion or fantasy.
The ideas of Reimarus found few, if any, followers at the time. But Reimarus' challenge to the ruling myth was the first objection that had been heard. To its credit the *Fragments* anticipated many later developments in historical criticism of the New Testament. In particular Reimarus' explicit distinction between the legitimate historical Jesus and his assertion of the fictitious Christ of faith has proved to be of considerable significance within theology since the *Fragments* were published.

Wright (1996: 17) offers an interesting and contrary view to the usual estimation of Reimarus by asserting that Reimarus was not a protester against Christianity. In fact despite his intention Reimarus was a true reformer of Christianity. While the Enlightenment thinkers including Reimarus were against orthodoxy the challenge offered was in the long-term to the benefit of Christianity although there must be no doubt that Christianity was threatened by this challenge.

The challenge as formulated in the work of Reimarus and the way it was presented was to have the result, especially in Germany, in a questioning of the person of Jesus in a way that was to dominate theology in the 19th century. Rationalist suspicion was growing that the New Testament portrayal of Christ was a dogmatic invention. (McGrath 1994: 318)

The resulting *quest of the historical Jesus* was a direct result of this growing rationalistic suspicion. This can be seen in similar rationalistic accounts to that
of Reimarus - predominantly from German scholars - beginning to be published. There was in fact no shortage of rationalists who were sceptical of the miraculous and supernatural elements in the gospels. Most had the objective of recovering a Jesus different from the traditional object of Christian piety. A disentangling, as it were, from ecclesiastical dogma to get back to Jesus, the person from Nazareth.

Some writers, however, were attempting to show what historical reality really was. Their purpose was to get people to turn away from orthodox Christianity and discover a new freedom. It was theorised that a correct look at the historical beginnings of Christianity would enable people to look elsewhere to the eternal truths of reason unsullied by the contingent fact of everyday events - even events claimed as extraordinary like those of Jesus.

Another feature of this drive for historical reality was the rise of a multitude of lives of Jesus each one seemingly dependent on the degree of rationalism of each author. These approaches sought to present a coherent picture of Jesus by playing down or rejecting features regarded as inauthentic (the miraculous elements) and inserting material into what was felt to be the many gaps in the gospels. And overriding all this was the sense that the more theological elements of Christian faith were the creativity of Jesus' followers rather than the reality of Jesus' life.
An important point not often recognised is that the 19th century quest's appeal to history against itself failed. History has proved itself to be more than the idealists believed it would. And pointedly is the fact that Reimarus had actually done theology a great favour. In seeking to explore the paucity of Christian origins Reimarus pulled back the veil. And once the invitation was issued to theologians the veil could not nor will it ever be drawn back as before. Thus within the unpromising historical specifics of the story of Jesus found within the first quest there is some 200 years later - if the amount of material published is any indication - a confidence within theology that the historical life of Jesus can be discerned.

Most influential to the first quest was a two-volume fourteen-hundred page publication by David Frederick Strauss; at that time remarkably only 27 years old. Strauss was a pupil of Ferdinand Christian Baur and George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel. Strauss' objective was to bring Christianity into line with Rationalism. Strauss asserted that the gospels expressed only temporary forms of thought which were really religious concepts which he defined as myths. The concept of myth was already current in the Old Testament scholarship of Strauss' time. (Thiessen & Merz 1996: 3) Strauss' publication was a clarion call for unbiased historical research to be carried out on the life of Jesus. A call based on the assumption that the gospels could no longer be read as a straight-forward account about what Jesus actually said and did. (Witherington 1995: 9)
Strauss did not dispute that there were historical features in the gospels but he had little interest in these. The driving force was Strauss' demonstration of the omnipresence of myths in the gospels. Strauss argued the need to recognise the use of myth in the evangelists' re-telling of the story of Jesus.

Strauss saw the mythical approach to the Jesus tradition as a synthesis - in the Hegelian sense - of the inadequate interpretations of supra-naturalism on the one hand and rationalism on the other. To Strauss the universe is a closed, naturalistic system and that miraculous gospel accounts must be legendary or mythical. Trying to apply Hegel's principles of unity between God and humanity as the ideal of human development, Strauss concluded that it was impossible for Jesus to have two natures. Jesus could not be divine in any sense since Hegel had already proved that the Absolute Ideal cannot be realised in any individual.

This conclusion presented no problem for Strauss, as a declared Hegelian, because Strauss saw the inner nucleus of Christian faith unaffected by the mythical approach. In the historical person of Jesus is realised the idea of God-humanity, the highest of all ideals. For Strauss faith in dialectical christology consisted of complete risk. It was a leap in the dark.

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Strauss clearly followed Reimarus in dismissing the notion that the gospels were eye-witness accounts. He saw them containing legendary and mythical accretions that often happen after the death of religious leaders. (Evans 1996: 18) Strauss in his exposition of the genre of myth used positive and negative criteria. In this myths contradict natural, historical and psychological laws and are basically poetic narratives expressing religious concepts deriving from Christian experience, the Old Testament and elsewhere. In examining the gospels by this approach, Strauss was able to contrast the earlier rationalistic approach against the traditional orthodox approach. He found both wanting. Despite his care in explaining myth, close examination of Strauss' theses gives the impression of his using an imprecise concept too loosely and too enthusiastically; it can be employed as a blunt instrument to suppress almost any unwelcome opposition. Strauss' results were overwhelmingly negative. Nevertheless the concept of myth defined by Strauss did show the inadequacies of the past theological thought. (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 307)

Strauss also lacked a historical sense and did not construct a coherent life of Jesus. Strauss was concerned more with criticising individual points of the gospel narratives. It was to prove some time before the contribution by Strauss, like that of his teacher Baur, 27 really made itself felt. Strauss' thinking, nevertheless, reversed the prevailing supposition of the day that the gospel of

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27 Baur is credited as the first theologian seriously to come to an understanding of the beginnings of Christianity in historical terms.
John was the most reliable historical source. Strauss saw the fourth gospel to be composed on theological premises. It was historically less trustworthy than the synoptic gospels. Strauss' work was to prove a decisive break between the 19th century thinking of the historical Jesus and all preceding generations.

Strauss' work resulted in a plethora of historical-critical analysis of the gospels; initially in Germany. There were notable publications by JG Herder in 1796, HEG Paulus in 1828, B Bauer28 in 1841-2 and FDE Schleiermacher in 1864. The only non-German work of note in this period - and mentioned earlier - was written by the French writer Joseph Ernest Renan.29 This work - although much of it can be criticised - represents the high point of the liberal lives of Jesus.

The historical-critical approach was also to be found during this period in England and the United States in studies of Jesus but the results were not seen as important.

The reaction to Strauss' work was negative. He lost his academic position in Tübingen and was in effect banned for life from a university career. One reviewer referred to his book as the Iscariotism of the day while another called it the most pestilential volume ever vomited out of the bowels of hell.

28 Bauer thought that not only Jesus but even Paul was a non-historical character of literary fiction, the product of some early Christian thinker's imagination. See Chapter 13

29 Life of Jesus. JE Renan. 1863.
Unfortunately for Strauss his was an age where academic reasoning was subordinated to the fact that what many people thought about and what was affirmed about the historical Jesus mattered a great deal. Civil authority also became involved in religious matters while outrage forcibly expressed by church officials was common and influential.

Nevertheless and despite church antagonism and the attentions of the civil authorities liberal scholarship into Christianity was at its peak. In Germany the period of the Wilhelmine empire was the high-point of theological liberalism and the classic search for the historical Jesus. A completely speculative christology was unacceptable. There was a seeking of a kernel of history in the gospel accounts which would stand the test of criticism and could become the basis of faith. Jesus was seen in this period as a religious genius and, if he was to be imitated, there was a necessity for some historical records.

Scholars were driven by the thought that by reconstructing the authoritative person of Jesus and his history by historical-criticism there was the real possibility of a renewal of Christian faith and a subordination of the church's dogma of Christ. Heinrich Julius Holtzmann was prominent in this line of thinking. His liberal views involved him in many controversies.

It was Holtzmann, using the gospel of Mark as a primary source, who set out a two-stage biographical life of Jesus. In this Jesus initially was successful but ultimately failed. Holtzmann reconstructed the authentic sayings of Jesus from
the Logia source which he inserted into the biographical framework derived from Mark. Thus for Holtzmann Jesus’ messianic consciousness was developed in Galilee. The turning point was in the eighth chapter of the gospel of Mark where in Caesarea Philippi Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as messiah.

During this period of the first quest the whole thrust was to emancipate the historical Jesus from the traditional church picture of Christ and thereby present a coherent account of the life of Jesus. Examples were publications by KF Bahrdt and KH Venturini. These authors were predominantly concerned with criticism and explanation of events in Jesus’ life. At a later stage there was a seeking of the personality of Jesus. Reconstruction of Jesus’ teaching, his conduct, his inner development and his impact upon his contemporaries was a means of arriving at this personality. This was important in supporting the claim that historical method was neutral and discovered facts. Yet at the same time it was shown there was an idealist view of history for which personality was important. Humanity was seen to be a partner in the movement towards the divine goal of the historical process and shared in the process by individuals making themselves open to this power. Chief among these was Jesus, on whom God brought his fatherly goodness to bear, revealing the infinite value of the human soul. (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 308)

50 Explanation of the Plans and Aims of Jesus. KF Bahrdt. 1784-1792
51 Non-supernatural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth. KH Venturini. 1800-1802
Liberal systematic theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Hermann, along with the liberal historian Adolf von Harnack, set out to maintain a distinction between fact and value and between history and faith. This however proved difficult to maintain in practice. It was shown that their attempts to reconstruct a historical Jesus had become fatally entangled with a second task of constructing a figure considerable enough to replace the Christ of the church’s tradition as an object of faith.

In retrospect it can be seen that the liberal lives of Jesus were a combination of the apriostic notion of a development of the personality of Jesus reflected in the sources with an acute literary-critical analysis. (Theissen & Merz 1996: 5)

Schweitzer also drew attention to what he regarded as equal in epoch-making importance to Strauss’ thinking on the historical Jesus to that of Johannes Weiss who in 1892 laid down the third alternative which the study of the life of Jesus had to meet. First of all there is historical versus supernatural; then synoptic versus Johannine. The third alternative was eschatological versus non-eschatological. Weiss recognised the gulf between the eschatological Jesus and the picture of Jesus presented by liberal theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl, his master and father-in-law.

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32 A reasoning from cause to effect or deductively
33 Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes. J Weiss. 1892
British scholarship in rationalism was sparse. JR Seeley's work was an attempt to move away from a theological to a more human historical portrayal of Jesus. A mark of the British scholarship was one of being less unsettling for traditional belief. The trend showed that these historians believed that they knew the main lines of what the figure of Jesus would embody when he was discovered and they then projected what they were looking for on to the lay-figure of Jesus whether there was support in the gospels or not. There was also within British theology a strongly confident piety of British Victorianism as opposed to the extreme scepticism of Reimarus and Bauer.

Despite the differences amongst theologians in this period of quest there was a uniting factor in the conviction that by applying appropriate critical methods it was possible to reconstruct a genuinely historical account of Jesus' life and teaching. It proved however not to be. Again it is worth repeating that in 1909 George Tyrrell, in reference to Adolf von Harnack's famous Berlin lectures in 1900 portraying a liberal Jesus, made the significant comment which could be applied mutatis mutandis to the general works of the lives of Jesus in the period:

"The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a dark well."

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34 Ecce Homo, JR Seeley. 1865
35 Designated What is Christianity
In retrospect it was evident and probably inevitable that the portrayals of the religious personality of Jesus were radically subjective, so that the rediscovered Jesus of history turned out to be merely an embodiment of an ideal figure by the progressive standards of the 19th century. It was however not that obvious to the adherents, who regarded themselves as practitioners of the objective historical method, that their approaches were rather historically conditioned phenomenon in themselves.

To summarise the 19th century quest, there was widespread agreement that the historical Jesus had great significance for Christian faith. About this there was general agreement amongst such disparate groups like hostile debunkers, orthodox defenders, and liberal revisionists. Debunkers delightedly assumed that Christianity could be discredited by showing what the real Jesus was like. Orthodox defenders, with their vigorous insistence upon the historical accuracy of the gospel portraits of Jesus, implicitly affirmed that any significant discrepancy would be destructive of the truth of Christianity. Liberal revisionists argued that Christianity could be purified and reformed by rediscovering the Jesus of history behind the doctrinal encrustations of the tradition. But all agreed: the historical Jesus mattered. (Borg 1994: 186)
The Collapse of the First Quest

Around the end of the 19th century, there was a change to the claim that the historical Jesus mattered. Indeed, it was turned on its head.

It was the studies published on the same day in 1901 by Albert Schweitzer\(^{36}\) and William Wrede\(^{37}\) that effectively saw their not only calling into question the specific accounts of Jesus which had emerged from the first quest but also declaring an apparently unmanageable gulf between the historical Jesus and the portraits offered by theological writings. Both stressed that most of these fresh attempts to say what could really be known about the historical Jesus actually told more about their authors than about the person they sought to describe. (Witherington 1995: 9) There was a projection by the authors to show in Jesus the ethical ideal which, in the eyes of the authors, was most worth striving for.

Wrede's contribution was to place into question what had up to then been regarded as the starting point in studying the life of Jesus, namely the historical character of the gospel of Mark. In Wrede's judgement the author of the gospel of Mark was a dogmatic theologian and the work was an expression of community dogma. Further Mark's narrative was designed not so much to give an account of real events but to defend a belief in Jesus as messiah - a belief that Wrede theorised Jesus himself never shared! As far as Wrede was

\(^{36}\) The Mystery of the Kingdom of God. A Schweitzer. 1901
concerned the post-Easter faith in the messiahship of Jesus had been projected by the author of the gospel of Mark on to the intrinsically un-messianic life of Jesus.

For Wrede the repeated emphasis on secrecy in the gospel of Mark was not a historical desire on the part of Jesus to restrain inappropriate messianic enthusiasm. It was rather the own invention of the author of the gospel of Mark to explain the embarrassing lack of material in the Jesus tradition in supporting the historically unfounded belief of the early church that Jesus both was and claimed to be the messiah. (McGrath 1993: 261/2)

Karl-Ludwig Schmidt showed the fragmentary character of the gospels. In this the Jesus tradition consisted of small units and in the case of the gospel of Mark the chronological and biographical framework of the story of Jesus was secondary. For Schmidt there was no possibility to ascertain a development in the personality of Jesus from the sequence of the pericopes.

If Schweitzer put a damper on the first quest in terms of what could be discovered, an important work in 1892 by Martin Kähler, a professor of systematic theology, on the historical Jesus effectively silenced the quest by a critique of its methodology and the limits of historical inquiry. Kähler subjected

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37 The Messianic Secret in the Gospels. W Wrede. 1901
38 The Framework of the Story of Jesus. KL. Schmidt. 1919
the theological assumptions of the *life of Jesus movement* to devastating criticism. Kahler's work was surprisingly not noticed by Schweitzer although published 14 years before his own work. Some commentators feel the work was purposely ignored by Schweitzer.

Kahler asserted there was an impossibility of grounding belief in God's saving act in Jesus Christ on the uncertain and changeable methods of scientific study. Kahler also disputed the theological right to enquire behind the gospel material of the pre-Easter Jesus of Nazareth. He drew the significant distinction between the *historical* Jesus and the *historic biblical* Christ. In Kahler's estimation the real picture of Christ is the proclaimed Christ of the apostolic witnesses while the 19th century quest for the historical Jesus was a false trail of no value. Further the historical Jesus does not matter for Christian faith and theology. Only the biblical Christ does!

For Kahler, the historical Jesus was a historically reconstructed Jesus which resulted from the historian's activity. The biblical Christ is the Christ of the gospels and the New Testament. The historical Jesus, he argued, was an irrelevance for Christian faith. In part this is because the gospels do not provide adequate materials to write a life of Jesus and in part because all historical reconstructions are relative and can at most be probable, not certain. Christian faith cannot be dependant upon constantly changing historical reconstructions accessible only through the work of scholars.
Kähler was adamant that a dispassionate and provisional Jesus of the academic historian cannot become the object of faith. If it were, it would, among other things, make Christian faith inaccessible to most Christians. Rather, Kähler argued, Christian faith is faith in the biblical Christ, the Christ of early Christianity's proclamation as found in the New Testament as a whole. It is the Christ of the church's proclamation - the kerygmatic Christ - who matters for faith and theology. The historical Jesus does not. Kähler nevertheless commended the quest as a protest against abstract dogmatism. But Kähler felt it had immodestly gone too far. (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 310)

The key point of Kähler's argument was a defence of the core of traditional christological claims. Kähler did this positively, arguing between two poles. The Christ of the Bible (not just the earthly career of Jesus, but the Lord ascended, risen, proclaimed) evoked in the past and still evokes the confession Christ is Lord. It was Christ as Lord who influenced history and who is also confirmed by the present experience of the believer. This is the only Jesus in whom scholars should be interested. The way in which each of these aspects confirms the other is sufficient to give the believer certainty. It is quite impossible to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, not least because the former is known only through documents written about and exalting the latter.

Kähler wanted to end forever the senseless psychological enquiries being made by the liberals. In this Kähler unerringly pointed to the weaknesses of the first
quest. There were inadequate sources which show substantial differences. There were no certain eye-witnesses and an almost incomprehensible carefreeness in transmission with the material being made subservient to the evangelists' purposes. In much of this Kähler was echoing David Frederich Strauss. Kähler's work in itself is remarkable in many ways. Not least because it seems to have appealed equally to conservatives and liberals. (Witherington 1995: 10)

In summary Kähler repudiated any effort to make faith dependant on historical research. Kähler's thinking shows a total rejection of all attempts to get behind the Jesus portrayed by the gospels and a seeking out of the person Jesus by critical investigation of the text. Kähler's view was that the entire 19th century quest was a blind alley.

Although in different terms Albert Schweitzer articulated a similar position in the epilogue to his epochal 1906 Quest for the Historical Jesus. In the conclusion of a book in which he (at age thirty) brilliantly systematised and critiqued the history of the quest to his day Schweitzer pronounced the whole enterprise theologically and religiously irrelevant. Schweitzer's work consisted in a collection of the various attempts to portray lives of Jesus with considerable attention being given to criticism of these efforts. Schweitzer argued that the 19th century lives of Jesus had all neglected - or incorrectly minimised - the eschatological and apocalyptic dimensions of Jesus' life, teaching and actions. To Schweitzer these were not minimal or minor aspects of Jesus or his
teachings. The result of this reductionism was a significant distortion rather than clarification of what the historical Jesus was like. Schweitzer's book is considered the death knell of the first quest since he concluded that the liberal lives of Jesus which had resulted from the work of the first questers were not historical enough.

To Schweitzer the writers had inevitably stopped their historical research at a point where they presented a Jesus in terms of their own ideals and aspirations, varying though these might be. Schweitzer pointed out that the problem was the writers' endeavours to reconstruct the historical image of Jesus and simultaneously engage in building a Christ who would coincide with their faith image. (Perrin 1967: 212) Accordingly failure was inevitable as they were never able to separate the two tasks.

Instead Schweitzer argued that the 1st century phenomenon which Jesus shared with his contemporaries was apocalyptic providing the expectation of the imminent end of the world. For Schweitzer the whole character of Jesus' ministry was conditioned and determined by an apocalyptic outlook. This led to a phrase which was to become normative especially in the English-speaking theological world as thoroughgoing eschatology. In other words every aspect of the teaching and attitudes of Jesus were determined by an eschatological outlook. The entire content of Jesus' message, according to Schweitzer, was consistently and thoroughly conditioned by apocalyptic ideas. These thoughts of Schweitzer were quite alien to the settled outlook of late 19th century Western Europe.
McGrath 1998: 274) Jesus was also for Schweitzer a strange figure from an
different 1st century apocalyptic milieu, so that, in Schweitzer's well-known
phrase Jesus comes to us as one unknown.

Ironically Schweitzer proved himself to be the last of the first questers since he
offered his own interpretation of Jesus somewhat along the lines of his
predecessors, although his picture was startlingly unlike theirs. (Cairns 1976: 336)
There was a daring and boldness to the portrait of Jesus set out by Schweitzer.
It was a position that would dominate theological scholarship throughout
much of the 20th century. As mentioned before the Jesus discovered by
historical research was to Schweitzer a stranger to our time. A product not of
objective scholarship but of need being determined by rationality, endowed
with life by liberalism and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb. He
was a totally different Jesus, the Jesus unlike all expectations. Jesus was strange
to a large extent because of the eschatological beliefs that, Schweitzer argued,
animated his life: Jesus believed that the supernatural kingdom of God was at
hand, and that he himself would be transformed into the apocalyptic Son of man
who would rule that kingdom as God's vice-regent and messiah. Jesus
confidently expected that God would step in and bring the world to an end
during the course of his ministry When Jesus became aware and disappointed
that this did not happen and the great wheel of history refused to turn Jesus
threw himself on that wheel and was crushed in the process. Jesus by his
despairing action did succeed in turning it none the less.
So for Schweitzer the fact that Jesus was incorrect did not matter for it is the spiritual Christ, not the historical Jesus, who matters for humanity in the succeeding centuries. The spiritual Christ is the one who is known; the historical Jesus is a remote and strange figure from the distant past. The bridge between the historical Jesus and Christianity is formed by his personality. Jesus towers over history and calls people to follow him in changing the world. The very failure of Jesus' hopes to set his people free from their Jewish shackles was nevertheless to become, in a new guise, the hope of the world. The main ideas of Schweitzer's Jesus remains sharp and striking nearly a century later.

Schweitzer asserted that the scholar researching into Jesus was faced with a stark choice and a label to this alternative was to be found in the title of the last chapter of his book: Thoroughgoing Scepticism and Thoroughgoing Eschatology. It was Schweitzer's firm opinion that historical methods in seeking the historical Jesus are not powerless. They had in the first quest just been tendentiously used.

In retrospect it can be seen that Schweitzer's picture of Jesus resulted in a figure that made it difficult to imagine a Christian faith that had more than a remote relationship to the historical Jesus. Despite his considerable research into the subject of the historical Jesus Schweitzer's conclusions did not turn out in the end any more satisfactory than other examples of the first quest.

But the result of these rejectionist triple-salvos by Schweitzer, Wrede and Kähler had demonstrated clearly that the whole idea of searching for the
historical Jesus was suspect in principle as well as hazardous in practice. The impact of Kähler, Wrede and Schweitzer was to extend long into the 20th century. And during this time the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus was considered to be dead.

But despite its demise there was, because of the work of Wrede and Schweitzer, an important dimension in later years to the search for the historical Jesus. Recognised by Nicholas Thomas Wright,⁴⁰ is that there have been two streams of critical writing about Jesus in the late 20th century. And that the origins of these two positions can be judged as stemming largely from the way Wrede and Schweitzer offered their conclusions about the basic position of Reimarus.

In this Wrede and Schweitzer considered that serious historical study of Jesus would determine something very different to what mainstream orthodoxy had supposed or wanted. But there their ways divided into what can be best defined as the sceptical critique and the apocalyptic critique.

The sceptical critique is associated with Wrede. To Wrede the messianic secret was based on the gospel of Mark. All that was known about Jesus was that he was a Galilean teacher or prophet who did and said some exceptional things and was eventually executed. Mark's gospel, in Wrede's estimation, was a theologically

⁴⁰ In his Jesus and the Victory of God. See Bibliography

56
motivated fiction in the guise of history in which the gospel writer imposed the theology of the early church upon the available material that had already substantially altered direction away from the teaching of Jesus. The gospel of Mark was thus not objectively historical but a creative theological re-interpretation of history. It was accordingly impossible to get behind Mark’s narrative and reconstruct the history of Jesus since - if Wrede was right - the narrative is a theological construction beyond which one cannot go. (McGrath 1998:275)

Schweitzer, on the other hand, while agreeing with Reimarus that Jesus belongs within his 1st century Jewish context asserted that this context there was not a revolutionary purpose; rather Jesus’ approach was apocalyptic. In this way Schweitzer felt that there was more to the gospel material than did Wrede. Accordingly Schweitzer suggested the gospel writings gave a far more comprehensive development to the early church.

If this distinction between Schweitzer and Wrede is fully appreciated it will become clear that this basically remains the distinction in the two approaches of critical writing about the Jesus of history which has been published in the late 20th century.

The Wrede approach is that comparatively little can be known about Jesus and that the gospels, in outline and detail, contain much that reflects only the concerns of the early church. In this there is the thoroughgoing scepticism seen in
some modern studies of Jesus. The Jesus Seminar discussed fully in chapter 9 is a prime example of modern scepticism in the search for the historical Jesus.

The Schweitzer approach in placing Jesus within apocalyptic Judaism postulates far more continuity between Jesus, the early church, and the gospels. There is allowance for important and different historical settings in each case. This can be seen in the thoroughgoing eschatology which is found in the current third quest. This approach is discussed in chapter 7.

So due to Kähler, Wrede and Schweitzer the claim that the historical Jesus was irrelevant to Christian theology and faith became the dominant position during the early part of the 20th century among both theologians and Jesus scholars. In a famous formulation of theological thought at the time Rudolf Bultmann argued that only the thatness of Jesus having existed and being crucified mattered, not the whatness of his historical life.

On a positive note what the first quest had done was introduce a significant re-thinking of New Testament criticism to which attention is now given.

\[\text{\footnotesize 41} \] The third quest of the historical Jesus began in the 1980's by scholars who realised that they had to place Jesus much more self-consciously into the Jewish world in which he lived and ministered.

\[\text{\footnotesize 42} \] Bultmann's contribution to the subject is more fully discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM

As a result of the first quest for the historical Jesus there was a fundamental erosion in the framework of canon, creed and church by which Christianity had defined itself since the late 2nd century CE. Because of the battle within Christianity generated by the historical critical method since the first quest the creed has been under attack, the canon has been challenged and the church's tradition has been regarded as the problem. (Johnson 1996: 71)

There is a general agreement by those concerned with critical examination of the gospels that the authors had little genuine historical interest and, in a contemporary sense, almost no critical historical judgement. This has led to the strong perception that many of the incidents in the incarnational narrative about Jesus of Nazareth were recorded for theological, liturgical or polemical reasons rather than because they had actually occurred.

Accordingly there has grown a strong belief in critical circles that if any genuine historical knowledge can be extracted from the gospels, it can only be wrestled from these writings with great ingenuity. In contrast to traditional beliefs what seems possible to be gained from the gospel material is seen by many critics as
quite meagre. This had led to the theological phrase “The problem of the historical Jesus.”

What this meant for the problem of the historical Jesus was the advent of more sophisticated and critical methodologies in scripture reading.

**Source Criticism**

Up to the 18th century the gospels were treated as harmonisations forming a single picture of Jesus. A first step beyond this approach was a work by Johan Jakob Griesbach, a German New Testament scholar, who in 1775, published the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke in parallel, together with the relevant material from the gospel of John. This procedure already showed a special relationship between the first three gospels whereas the gospel of John played a different role. Also in examining the synoptic gospels it was contended there were two primary sources: a primitive form of the gospel of Mark and a collection of sayings of Jesus called Q. Crossan (1994: x) sees the reconstructed document known as Q imbedded within both of the gospels of Luke and Matthew. By asserting that the two authors of the gospels of Luke and Matthew used the gospel of Mark as a regular source, it is the claim of many scholars - initially from Germany and now in North America - that Q is discernible wherever the two gospels agree with one another but lack a Marcan

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43 These have become known as the *synoptic gospels*
parallel. Crossan claims that Q has its own generic integrity and theological consistency apart from its use as a source for other writings.  

In the early period of critical examination of the gospel material the question whether the synoptic gospels were prior to John was an open one. A number of writers, including Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, favoured the fourth gospel because of the lesser degree in which the miraculous appeared in this work. David Friedrich Strauss, on the other hand, argued for the secondary nature of the gospel of John. Griesbach himself had argued that the gospel of Matthew is the earliest of the gospels and this position was favoured by Ferdinand Christian Baur and the Tübingen school. In 1838, however, CH Weisse argued that Mark was the first of the gospels and, following a period during which his work was almost forgotten, the theory was revived in 1863 by Heinrich Julius Holtzmann. This was developed further by scholars in Germany and, most notably, in England. It gained almost universal acceptance and became the foundation stone for the later works on the lives of Jesus. It was claimed that the gospel of Mark offered a reliable chronological framework on the basis of which the life of Jesus could be portrayed. A substantial majority of scholars have continued to accept the priority of the gospel of Mark among the synoptic gospels. However in recent years this view has again been challenged strongly.

44 From the German word Quelle = Source
45 In chapter 10 the Q hypothesis is examined more fully
Thus after a period of little or no attention being accorded to the gospel of John the historical value of the fourth gospel is again being put forward. The geographical information contained in the writing is now rated much more highly. Also attempts have been made to discount the differences between the discourses attributed to Jesus in the fourth gospel and the sayings in the synoptic tradition. Some scholars see a tradition behind the fourth gospel which rivalled that underlying the synoptic gospels. This tradition is attributed to a community of followers of Jesus other than the twelve apostles. This has introduced yet more uncertainties into the discussion. And the assumption held for so long that Mark provides a chronological framework for the life of Jesus is now regarded as debatable. (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 309)

Form Criticism

Martin Kähler, in answer to the objection that the picture of Christ on which he relied would itself also turn out to be an arbitrary figment of the imagination, pointed to the way in which the gospels offer a series of sketches - examples of how Jesus customarily acted - each one reflecting the full person of Jesus. The attention of New Testament critics was drawn to these sketches. It is worth emphasising that this new study did not spring directly from Kähler's work - although it did provide the impetus - but from various hints that had already offered by New Testament scholars. More particularly the
enquiry had foundation in the work pioneered in the Old Testament writings in the history of forms, now commonly known as form criticism.

New Testament form criticism is a method which attempts to write a non-biographical life of Jesus Christ under the assumption that the gospels were composed of isolated units that were heavily doctrinally coloured. There is a recognition which is more fully discussed below that the traditions of a community are shaped and stylised according to its life and needs. According to this approach various settings and purposes in the story of Jesus are seen to give rise to quite specific forms. For the radical form critic the gospels are the end product of a period of oral tradition when the Jesus stories circulated as single units throughout the various branches of the Christian community. Accordingly the gospel narratives are studied as more or less self-contained passages or pericopes.

These pericopes are believed to be elements that were circulated and passed down in the early church and which underwent a process of re-shaping in the transmission in response to the practical religious needs of the community. Such needs were homiletic, apologetic, didactic, liturgical and ethical. As they circulated they were reshaped:

- by adaptation to practical needs.
- The community’s post-resurrection experience.
The community's sense of the continuing presence of the resurrected Christ.

These pericopes were then arranged in various ways by the authors of the gospels.

Early in the 20th century Hermann Gunkel46 offered new literary grounds for questioning the historical basis of the gospel traditions and established basic methodological presuppositions for form criticism. It was a fundamental view within form criticism that as the community lacked any strong interest in history for history's sake and since its members were not research students, the boundary between the original events and the growing faith of the community was not maintained. (McArthur 1969: 191)

In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, form criticism was an attempt to trace the history of the biblical material before it was written down. The task of the critic is not only to deal with the various types of material but to understand them in the socio-political situation of the early church, its Sitz im Leben 47 for the forms which are studied. The response to this criticism has led to the assertion that much of the material in the gospels tells more about the problems and needs of the early church than about the historical Jesus. In this the gospels were seen as unreliable sources for a biographical life of Christ.

46 Genesis. H Gunkel. 1901
47 The setting in the life of the community.
Nevertheless it was assumed that a pure account of Christianity could be composed if everything attributed to the faith and experience of the primitive church were eliminated from the biblical accounts.

The undifferentiated use of the term form critic can, however, be misleading, particularly in the New Testament field. This is best exampled by three pioneers in form criticism, namely Karl Ludwig Schmidt,48 Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius whose works in this field appeared independently and almost simultaneously. When examined closely it can be seen that their thinking varied considerably in their approaches. Schmidt examined the framework of the gospel of Mark and the other synoptic gospels and theorised from the details contained in the writings that, far from being original, they represented an attempt on the part of the evangelists to impose an order on material which reached them with no fixed chronological sequence. The only connecting links within the gospels were found only towards the end in the passion narrative.

On the basis of increasing information about the situation of the early church, Bultmann49 and Dibelius50 examined the individual pericopes of which the synoptic gospels were seen to be made up. Bultmann subjected the gospel material to a thorough analysis and concentrated attention on the pericopes

48 Mentioned before - see footnote 37
49 _The History of the Synoptic Tradition_. R. Bultmann. 1921
50 _From Tradition to Gospel_. M. Dibelius. 1919
themselves. Dibelius made an imaginative attempt to picture the life of the community and to see from this picture the way in which the gospels might have arisen. Inevitably, in either case the argument proved a circular one, by the very nature of the evidence. Furthermore there was considerable divergence on points of detail because of the scarcity of the sources. Nevertheless, some general conclusions of agreed importance began to emerge. It was theorised that the material that was available to the evangelists had had a long period of oral tradition within early Christianity beginning from the historical Jesus. These oral traditions had been preserved and shaped in the worshipping life of the Christian community with an end-result that saw the selection of material to suit the community's ends in its preaching and teaching. This tradition was accordingly subject to unlimited modification and accretion to fit the developing life and thought of the early Christian communities. The essential information upon which the modern historian would use as the basis of research was regarded as having been discounted. The gospels were seen as being written from faith to faith, to meet specific needs of origin in the early churches. It was this thinking that led to study of the gospels as a whole as opposed to individual pericopes. This approach was given the name redaction criticism.
Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism is quite a different enterprise from form criticism. However the two ways of looking at the texts are by no means incompatible. There is an underlying similarity. Both tend to assume that the gospel documents are not reliable history. (Evans 1996:20)

Redaction criticism views the evangelists, and their predecessors, who authored the gospels from whatever sources they used, not so much as passive compilers of inherited traditions, but as active authors, who edited or redacted the material for theological purposes. Thus redaction criticism sees the evangelists as authors who felt free to rewrite or even create narratives for their perceived purposes. This has similarities to form criticism which considers biblical pericopes as created and shaped by church communities for their aims.

The redaction critic attempts to elucidate the features which go to make up the theological portraits presented by each of the evangelists. By this it suggests that at an early stage the evangelists' story of Jesus turned into christology. Redaction criticism postulates that the framework of the gospel of Mark, the backbone of the 19th century lives of Jesus, no longer sustains the weight placed on it. Further because of the process through which the gospel tradition has passed, the historicity of its details can be asserted confidently only where their origin cannot be explained from the life of the church. On the other hand the
redaction critic has also to assume that in some cases, at any rate, the concerns of Jesus and the interests of the church coincided. Precisely where is difficult - if not impossible - to say. So many are the imponderables that there is a very high risk of uncertainty and such are the problems found that those undertaking redaction criticism contend there is an improbability to write a *life of Jesus*.

**General**

A truly critical scholar will be open to critical reflection on the methods of criticism itself. Methods that made possible new insights and discoveries may also contain limitations and blind spots. (Evans 1996: 21) A major weakness in the impetus for form-criticism and redactional-critical studies came from the proposition that pieces of synoptic material about Jesus could not be historical. There is almost a presumption about the historical Jesus which claims that a further tradition-hypothesis is required to explain the evidence.

It is also evident that historical, critical studies of the bible have not led to important new discoveries and insights. Nor are they seen to have had positive significance for the life of the church. Form criticism was not, at its heart, designed to find out about Jesus. In fact it can be likened to being part of a quest. In this case the even more difficult quest for the kerygmatic church. It is
an attempt to reconstruct movements of thought and belief in the 1st century
and, in particular, to recapture early Christian thought.

Rudolf Bultmann, considered by many to be the greatest New Testament
exegete of the 20th century, took up and fully developed the thesis of Martin
Kähler.51 For Bultmann history was not of fundamental importance to
christology. In a 1934 publication52 Bultmann effectively dismissed as fantastic
and romantic the attempts of the preceding 150 years to discern Jesus' life and
personality. In effect Bultmann's form criticism left only the barest details
about Jesus. Bultmann insisted that research into the historical Jesus was not
only practically fruitless, because of the nature of the sources, but theologically
illegitimate as an effort at self-salvation through human intellectual works.
(Komonchak 1987: 540) Thus Bultmann's oft quoted conclusion: 53

"I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and
personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either,
are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus
do not exist."

In essence Bultmann, like Kähler, saw the enterprise of the historical Jesus as a
blind alley. As far as history was concerned it was merely necessary to know
that Jesus existed and that the Christian proclamation, or as Bultmann defined
it the kerygma, was somehow grounded in the person of Jesus. Bultmann was
able to reduce the entire historical aspect of christology to the single word that.

51 Kähler's work has already been referred to in chapter 4
52 Jesus and the Word. R Bultmann. 1934

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It was accordingly only necessary to believe that Jesus Christ was the basis of the proclamation or kerygma.

Interestingly Bultmann’s view did not prevent him from claiming Christian faith up to the end of his life because he held to a bifurcating approach to faith and historical enquiry. (Withenrooth 1995: 253) Nor should it be seen in Bultmann a simple veto of a quest for the historical Jesus. What Bultmann vetoed is a quest undertaken with the wrong motive or intention of proving its authority or of establishing faith in God’s word by means of historical investigation. (Cairns 1976: 346) In short Bultmann objected to any quest to legitimate the gospel.

Bultmann in claiming that the real object of Christian faith was the kerygmatic Christ and asserting that any historical connections between this Christ and the historical Jesus were unimportant to Christian belief was rejecting the 19th century liberal Protestant Jesus. Bultmann’s assertion was that Jesus’ personality could not be recovered from the records and would in any case have been of no interest to theology. The stories about the historical Jesus were basically faith statements about the risen Christ read back into his lifetime. In essence these stories were the current faith of the early church rather than that of historical memory. It is not surprising that Bultmann was severely critical of the first quest since he saw it as an attempt to justify Christian faith on historical research. For Bultmann the answer to the problem is that the kerygma changes

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53 Again from *Jesus and the Word*, R. Bultmann, 1934, New York, Scribners page 14
the once of the historical Jesus into a once-for-all event that remains present in the preaching.

For Bultmann the cross and the resurrection took place in history and as such are historical phenomena. The events must however be discerned by faith as divine acts. The kerygma is not concerned with matters of historical fact. It has to convey the necessity of a decision by its hearers and must transfer the eschatological moment of the past to the here and now of the proclamation itself.

It was the fundamental basis of Bultmann’s approach to the historical Jesus that one could not go behind the kerygma and use it as a source to reconstruct an historical Jesus with his messianic consciousness, his inner life, or his heroism. That would merely be Christ according to the flesh who no longer exists. It is not the historical Jesus but Jesus Christ, the one who preached, who is Lord. (McGrath 1998: 278)

The pendulum had indeed swung the whole way since the confident pronouncement at the height of the first quest that Jesus of Nazareth could be known very well.

Bultmann, whose prowess in exegesis has already been noted, was also a major proponent of dialectical theology. Dialectical theology was significant between 1919 and 1968. By this Bultmann was prepared to point the way forward. In
this the historian who is exploring the gospels should actually enter into an existential encounter with history, in which the historian confronts the possibility of understanding human existence. This self-understanding was an important concept for Bultmann and it later became a bone of contention for his students who participated in the new quest discussed in Chapter 6.

Dialectical theology is quite unique. God and the world is opposed so radically that it is asserted they touch only at one point. Much like a tangent touches a circle the point of contact between God and the world is the that of Jesus' coming and the that of his departure in the cross and the resurrection. Accordingly it was not what Jesus had said and done which were thought to be decisive. What was convincing is what God had said and done in the cross and the resurrection. The message from God's action which can be defined as the New Testament kerygma is not the historical Jesus but the kerygmatic Christ.

For Christian existentialism human beings achieve their authenticity in decision. This decision is not guaranteed by objectifiable arguments such as historical knowledge of Jesus. Rather the decision is an answer to God's call in the kerygma of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, which Christians give in an existential dying and living with Christ. (Thiessen & Merz 1996: 6)

If Strauss had seen the truth of the Christ myth in the idea Bultmann saw the kerygma as a call from God coming from outside.
There was a further point to Bultmann's argument. Research into the history of religions showed theologically Jesus belongs to Judaism. There was the well known dictum of C. Wellhausen\textsuperscript{54} that "Jesus was not a Christian but a Jew." From this it was clear to Bultmann and like-minded scholars that Christianity only began with Easter. It was in this line of thinking that Bultmann was adamant that the teaching of the historical Jesus was of no significance for a Christian theology. Bultmann's theology\textsuperscript{55} began with the statement:

"The message of Jesus is a presupposition for a theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself."

It is apposite at this juncture to question Bultmann's position. In fact many scholars feel it cannot go unchallenged. There was alarm at this radical move away from history. What Bultmann had determined was to separate effectively the Christ event from real history. To critics Bultmann had seriously imperilled the very heart of Christianity by severing Christian faith from its claimed historical roots. For an increasing number of theologians Bultmann had merely cut the Gordian knot without resolving the serious historical issues at stake. The practical result of this was seen by Bultmann's critics to allow the New Testament to become devoid of its content and unique message. How could there be any assurance that christology was properly grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. How could christology be checked if the history of Jesus was irrelevant.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Einleitung in die Ersten Drei Evangelien}, C. Wellhausen. 1911

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Jesus and the Word}, R. Bultmann. [1934] 1958. New York, Scribners
Bultmann's position was seen as a dissolving of Christianity into an abstract mysticism or a very vague docetism of a Christ-idea or Christ-principle, empty of specific and concrete content. In this there is no resurrection, no ascension, no sin, no atoning death, no salvation, no judgement, no miracles, no Son of God, no eternity, and no Holy Spirit. Further because Bultmann eliminated *a priori* everything that is divine in the scriptures, there is no revelation except that God acted in Jesus to bring about a new self-understanding.

Joachim Jeremias\(^{56}\) comprehensively and lucidly rejected Bultmann's views. Jeremias admitted that the dream of possibly writing a life of Jesus was unlikely. But Jeremias uncompromisingly asserted the prior importance of the ministry and message of Jesus. Jeremias was adamant that the origin of Christianity is not the kerygma, nor the resurrection experience of the disciples nor the *Christ idea*. It was the historical experience of Jesus of Nazareth as a person.

Probably one of the better directives to any success in the quest for the historical Jesus was postulated by Jeremias when he rejected the liberal temptation to modernise Jesus. Rather as a result of literary criticism there is better methodology to know Jesus as he really was through study of the formation of the gospel traditions. Added to this would be to understand more fully the environment of Jesus' time on earth as well as knowledge of his mother-tongue, namely Galilean Aramaic. Finally all this must be encompassed

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\(^{56}\) *The Present Position in the Controversy Concerning the Problem of the Historical Jesus.* J. Jeremias. *The Expository Times* Vol. LIXIX No. 11 pages 333-9
by the eschatological nature of Jesus' message. To Jeremias by treating the gospels as history, and with all the critical sources available, to get back to the historical Jesus allows detection of the presence of God.

Another theological giant of the early 20th century was Karl Barth who also entered into the debate about critical studies of the New Testament. Barth, in 1921, called into question the kind of sovereignty the 19th century had accorded the historical critical methodology. Barth was not convinced by the claims of so-called scientific scholarship into the historical Jesus. For Barth those who would require historical knowledge about Jesus were like Adam, hiding in the garden and seeking to evade the decision demanded by God's proclaimed Word. (Komonchak 1987: 539)

Bultmann and Barth - although from different perspectives - ensured that little was done to advance genuine historical work on Jesus in the intervening years up to the middle of the 20th century.

Another important work in New Testament studies was that of Joseph Klausner57. In many ways Klausner's thinking at that time foreshadows more recent studies of Jesus from the Jewish perspective by setting Jesus in his own cultural context. Klausner argues that it is subsequent theological development which turned a Jewish teacher into the Son of God of Christian orthodoxy.

57 Jesus of Nazareth. J Klausner. Published in 1922 in Hebrew and in 1925 in English.
Attention in the early part of the 20th century was focused on early Christian faith and experience in the belief that there, rather than in a dubiously reconstructed Jesus, lay the key to divine revelation that was presumed to have taken place in early Christianity. (Wright 1996: 22)

In broad strokes this was the position of Jesus scholarship up to the middle of the 20th century. In retrospect, one can see that Jesus scholarship from its beginning up to this period saw a pendulum swing between the poles of two related either/or's:

- The first either/or was the historical Jesus or the Christ of faith (who may also be spoken of as the biblical Christ or kerygmatic Christ). Who is normative for Christian faith and theology? Is it the historical Jesus or the Christ of faith?
- The second either/or was a common (though not necessary) corollary of the first: either the historical Jesus is of normative importance, or it is of little or no significance at all.

To speak schematically, scholarship in the 19th century generally affirmed the Jesus of history and thus the theological importance of the historical study of Jesus. In contrast it can be seen that in much of the 20th century there has been affirmation of the Christ of faith and hence the theological unimportance of historical Jesus scholarship. (Borg 1994: 188)

It is apposite at this stage to evaluate the gospels-as-history approach which has been raised as an orthodox defence of the gospels against the docetising
tendency to dissolve Christianity into the abstract mysticism of the Christ-idea.

The positive aspects are:

- Justice is done to the affirmation that God was in Christ;
- A worthy and full incarnational theology is possible;
- Since the good news is stressed as fundamentally a historical event, Christianity can be said to begin, chronologically speaking at least, with the event of Jesus of Nazareth.

Negatively there are the following aspects:

- It should be acknowledged that there is no access to the history of Jesus save in the records of the evangelists who responded in faith to Jesus as Christ and Lord;
- While revelation is historical, revelation in and by itself, cannot be subjected to historical criticism or scientific analysis. Historical criticism cannot per se lay bare the significance of the career of Jesus as the revelatory and redemptive action of God;
- Does the continuous process of claims made to discoveries of new knowledge of the sayings and deeds of the historical Jesus - especially by the contemporary highly developed skills and techniques - bring closer the reality of Jesus' selfhood? If so does this involve a denial of the absolute finality of the gospels' witness of Jesus?
- It is not enough to assert the priority of Jesus' career and message to the church's proclamation of him as Lord. There must be concern to show the integral place Jesus' history occupies within the context of the early church's faith.
In summary the period of the first half of the 20th century should be seen as one when any search for the historical Jesus was firmly opposed by the foremost theologians of the time. Theologically it was a time when the quest for the historical Jesus was to all intents and purposes in limbo.

Nevertheless and despite the dominance of Bultmannian views the quest had not been totally abandoned. There developed towards the middle of the 20th century an uneasiness about Bultmann’s position that the establishment of a material continuity between the historical Jesus and the historical Christ was neither possible nor necessary. Bultmann had himself conceded that post-Easter christology is implicitly presented in Jesus’ pre-Easter call to decision. That was the starting point for Bultmann’s own students to raise afresh the question of the search for the historical Jesus. It probably stemmed from their being close to this great theologian and by this they were afforded the greatest insights into Bultmann’s position and were more aware of his weaknesses. The tension between these insights and weaknesses arose when Bultmann’s students noticed that his theology hardly allowed for any continuity between the preaching of Jesus and the church’s kerygma. While it was true that Bultmann did connect the cross of Jesus with the cross of the kerygma, he did so in terms of a summons to existential self-authentication. The danger seen by Bultmann’s students was that Christian faith if it was allowed to continue to be defined in Bultmannian terms would as mentioned before degenerate into mere mysticism or, worse, a docetism whose Jesus was an illusion.
It was this concern which provided the energy and stimulus in what was to become known as the *new quest* for the historical Jesus.
Albert Schweitzer demolished the old quest so successfully that, coupled with the negativity of the views of William Wrede and Rudolf Bultmann, there was a hesitancy amongst serious scholars during the first half of the 20th century in having any dealings in the search for the historical Jesus.

Books about Jesus continued to be written but basically these books continued to set out 19th century lives of Jesus which ignored Schweitzer's thesis and challenge. Examples of this type of publication were those of Thomas Walter Manson and Charles Harold Dodd. These writings attempted to take the historical questions seriously but there was no integration into a larger picture that might have given direction to further study. Also in this category of thinking - although in other ways they are part of the third quest - can be included the works of Otto Betz, Martin Hegel and Leonhard Goppelt.

60 See chapter 7 in which the third quest is fully discussed
61 What do we know about Jesus? O Betz. 1968. London. SCM Press
What was to become known as the *new quest* was the first sign that the wall of resistance to a renewed serious study of the historical Jesus had begun to crack. It took place roughly over a period from 1953 to 1962.

The designation of the *new quest* derives from that of a book⁶⁴ by James McConkey Robinson which chronicled and supported the early stages of a revolt within the school of Bultmann. Although Robinson did much of his work in the United States of America, he is considered to be in the Bultmannian category of theology due to his existentialist interpretation of the new quest. What has especially made the work of Robinson interesting is that although an American, his grasp of European theological scholarship invoked the approval of Bultmann for Robinson's *methodological reflections*. Despite this approval Bultmann when referring to the new quest could not understand Robinson's insistence of an encounter with Jesus instead of with the kerygma. Bultmann's essential criticism was that the latter did not just repeat the words of Jesus but demanded faith in the risen Christ.

Robinson, on the other hand, saw the historical Jesus confronting humanity with existential decisions just as the kerygma does. A historical encounter with Jesus was accordingly an eschatological encounter with God. Similarly an existential decision with regard to the kerygma is an existential decision with regard to Jesus.

⁶⁴ *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, JM Robinson. 1959. London. SCM Press
The new quest might not evoked so wide an interest but for Robinson’s persuasive arguments. In this Robinson postulated that it was possible to be optimistic about having knowledge of Jesus because of a change in the understanding of history. Whereas the historians of the 19th century were concerned with facts - names, places, dates, events, sequences - there was within the thinking of the new questers a more optimistic perception of history at a deeper plane. History was now seen to grasp the act of intention, the commitment, the meaning for those involved, behind the external events. There was concern with the selfhood of those involved. Robinson argued that material about the selfhood of Jesus is precisely what is contained in the gospels. Robinson was accordingly able to declare that a second avenue of access to the historical Jesus was available because of the advance of scientific historiography since the Enlightenment.

To underline this point there was the posthumous contribution by the British historian RG Collingwood who was a leading champion of this new approach to historiography. Collingwood not only stressed the past discovered by the historian but also the historian’s act in discovering the past. Collingwood felt there was some sort of ontological relationship between the two. Though Collingwood was more a neo-Kantian rather than an existentialist, Robinson and others in the Bultmannian school, regarded Collingwood’s conclusions

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similar to theirs in their attempts to handle history existentially.

This mode of thinking enabled Robinson to assert that it was through the selfhood of Jesus that Jesus can be known. In retrospect it can be seen that this optimistic view has not established itself. It can be debated that if it is difficult enough to understand Martin Luther or John Henry Newman, with all the copious material available - how can this be possible in the case of Jesus? (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 312)

Despite the initial confidence expressed by the early Robinson in seeing the function of the new quest to investigate the understanding of existence which emerged in history from Jesus’ words and deeds, the later Robinson gave up on the new quest because he had found it personally not fruitful.

Although Robinson’s contribution was significant, the launching of the new quest is normally credited to Ernest Käsemann67 who with others such as Günther Bornkamm and Ernst Fuchs in the Bultmannian school asserted that while form criticism showed that the fragmentary nature of the oral tradition might not allow a historical reconstruction of the outline of Jesus’ ministry, sufficient of its key themes, both in Jesus’ teaching and life style, emerge in the tradition to allow a responsible portrait to be presented. In this they pointed to the need for a fresh evaluation of the historical Jesus. Their view was that

Bultmann's scepticism about what could be known about the historical Jesus had been too extreme. (Witherington 1995: 11) While the first quest had contrasted Jesus against the proclamation of the church Bultmann's pupils began from the kerygmatic Christ and posed the question whether Christ's exaltation - grounded in the cross and resurrection - had any support in the proclamation of Jesus before Easter.

For Käsemann there was a need to explore the continuity between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching about Jesus. Conceding an obvious discontinuity between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ, Käsemann saw a thread of continuity linking both in that the proclaimed Christ is always present, in some sense, in the historical Jesus. (McGrath 1998: 279)

Käsemann also posited that ironically the historical data required could even be gleaned from Bultmann's own research findings. For Käsemann unless the question of the continuity between the historically-ascertained data on Jesus and the Christ figure of scripture were resolved the door was open to a docetism in which God no longer revealed himself in history. Accordingly Christians had no answer to the charge that their beliefs were mere myth comprising the Easter faith of the early church and there was no connection to the one who they claimed as the founder of their religion.

It was the view of the new questers that proper investigation of the evangelists' aims and motives reveal that the authors were devoutly interested in the history
of Jesus. They described their own situation and experience in the church not in
general religious and spiritual terms of Jesus' life but specifically in event-
meaning terms in which they were themselves participants. The primary
emphasis of those contributors to the new quest was on the kerygma which
confronts humanity with the true Selfhood of One who can be encountered
historically. Thus a Thou with whom humanity can share in a dialogue. The
gospels are not objective historiographies nor, as in the view of form criticism,
merely testimonies to the history of the early church.

The new questers postulated that the writers of the gospels with their
memories of Jesus sustained and stimulated by the traditions circulating at the
time had revealed Jesus kerygmatically in the light of their faith of the risen
Christ. Thus they confronted their readers in a profound sense with the reality
of Jesus' individual being. The kerygma was seen to open up the possibility of
encountering Jesus in his history since it had preserved enough of Jesus' own
understanding of his existence, even if the topography, sequence of events, and
other details of Jesus' history can never be verified or established.

It is clear that the new quest of the historical Jesus was qualitatively different
from the discredited first quest of the 19th century. Käsemann's argument
rested upon the recognition that the discontinuity between the Jesus of history

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68 The German term is Geschichte
69 The German term is Historie
and the Christ of faith does not mean that they are unrelated entities, with the Christ of faith having no grounding or foundation in the Jesus of history. Rather, the kerygma may be discerned in the actions and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, so that there is a continuity between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching about Jesus. It was asserted by the new questers that the first quest had been fatally flawed by the assumption that there was a discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. This had led to the view that the gospel Jesus was potentially a fiction and Jesus of Nazareth required to be reconstructed in the light of objective historical investigation. Käsemann stressed that such reconstruction is neither necessary nor possible.

In this new quest there was as mentioned no confident reconstruction of historical detail which marked the thinking of some of the practitioners of the first quest. Rather the new quest had about it painstaking and critical rigour to compile what the theologians claimed to be the historically indisputable traits.

While the old quest had the aim of discrediting the New Testament portrayal of Christ, the new quest's approach led to a consolidation of it. There was a stress of the continuity between the preaching of Jesus himself and the church's preaching about Jesus.

Methodologically the place of the literary-critical reconstruction of the earliest sources in the first quest was replaced by a comparison using the history of
religions and the history of traditions. This resulted in the criterion of difference. (Thiessen & Merz 1996: 7)

Ernst Fuchs, another former student of Bultmann, sought to balance Käsemann’s emphasis on Jesus’ words by a parallel emphasis upon Jesus’ conduct.70 For example Jesus ate and fellowshipped with sinners. For Fuchs this aspect of Jesus’ behaviour found a real parallel in Easter faith. To Fuchs demythologised Easter faith meant that rather than a God who evokes fear in a person there is refuge for that person in which God is loved.

Gerhard Ebeling71 also opposed Bultmann’s stress on the kerygma and saw the constitutive priority of Jesus, who is the hermeneutic key to any subsequent christology. For Ebeling the person of Jesus is the fundamental basis of christology. If christology was a misinterpretation of the significance of the historical Jesus then christology would be brought to an end. Notable in the results from this new methodological rethinking were works by Hans Conzelmann72 and Günther Bornkamm.73 Like Käsemann and Fuchs, Bornkamm regarded the unmatched authority of Jesus as both historically valid and relevant for Christian faith and proclamation.

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70 Especially an essay published in Studies of the Historical Jesus. E Fuchs. 1956
71 In Word and Faith. G Ebeling. 1963
72 The English translation of Conzelmann’s 1959 work was published as Jesus in 1973
It was generally agreed by proponents of the new quest that it is quite impossible to write a life of Jesus, as the necessary material is simply not available. Yet at the same time they stressed it would be very wrong if such scepticism were to lead to a complete loss of interest about the earthly Jesus. While the question about what can be known about Jesus is an extraordinarily difficult one it does not mean that no attempt should be made to answer it. The change seen in the new quest was thus one in theological position as well as a strong reaction to those who claimed that it was illegitimate to go beyond the church’s kerygma. But the new quest also showed that the critical position had hardly changed. This can easily be seen from a comparison between the factual material about Jesus in Bultmann\textsuperscript{74} and that of Bornkamm\textsuperscript{75}.

In fact Bornkamm’s position represented virtually no advance over that of Bultmann. The distinction between the two was that whereas Bultmann was saying, vis à vis the 19\textsuperscript{th} century quest, that only this can be known what Bornkamm was saying, vis à vis Bultmann, that all this is known. Bornkamm also did not, like Käsemann and Fuchs, single out passages in the gospels in which it could be argued that the material was so unique that it found no analogy in the faith of any branch of the church. To Bornkamm the immediate presence of Jesus pervades every aspect of the gospels. This saw Bornkamm’s position as close to Kähler who maintained that the historicity of Jesus is found in the impact

\textsuperscript{74} Jesus and the Word. R Bultmann. 1926

\textsuperscript{75} Jesus of Nazareth. G Bornkamm. 1956
Jesus’ life makes upon a person reading the gospels.

It was thus Bornkamm - whose work is regarded as fairly representative of that of the scholars of the new quest - who presented the initial results of the new quest with its hesitancy of any attempt at a full-blown biography of Jesus which the new questers regarded as impossible in view of the character of the New Testament writings. Rather Bornkamm opened his argument with a view on the relationship of faith and history in which he held that the decisive importance of the earthly life of Jesus falls within the context of the primitive church’s faith in the risen and ascended Jesus. Bornkamm then sketched the characteristic traits of Jesus’ activity and message. Though similar to a rabbi or prophet, Jesus was unique - certainly greater than Moses - in the authority with which Jesus spoke and acted. Implicit in this authoritative manner was a claim to be, in Jesus’ person, decisive in how people stood with God. It was this implicit claim, in light of Easter, which Jesus’ disciples acknowledged and consequently the disciples expressed by the various titles they conferred upon him.

In this line of thinking Bornkamm was recognising the life of Jesus to be messianic but in a rather special sense. Jesus did not use the various titles in his earthly lifetime but the early church thought him to be the messiah because they encountered his messiahship in the inward meaning of his words and acts.
In effect the work of Bornkamm reflected, in line with the new quest, a new found confidence that something about the historical Jesus can be known by fully implementing the tools of critical enquiry. The inference to be drawn from Bornkamm is that the secret about who Jesus really is, his selfhood, his life, is disclosed independently of the historical enquiry about whether he employed certain titles to himself during his ministry.

While the new quest had much about it like the first quest in another form, the studies by leading followers of Bultmann marked the end of the no-go period in the study of the historical Jesus in mainstream German scholarship. (McGrath 1993: 263)

In this a notable development in Germany was a publication\textsuperscript{76} by Ethelbert Stauffer. This was not so much a life of Jesus as the prolegomena to one. Stauffer’s method was to avoid interpretation and to offer only historical fact. Stauffer utilised a wide range of extra-biblical sources, primarily Jewish, to illuminate the gospel stories. The result was an optimistic assessment of the historical worth of the gospels and of the possibility of providing not only a portrait of Jesus but an impressive array of actual data to support it. (McGrath 1993: 264)

An influential German scholar and a conservative critic of the new quest was

\textsuperscript{76} Jesus and His Story, E Stauffer. 1957. London. SCM Press
Joachim Jeremias. Jeremias is noted for his considerable knowledge both of Aramaic language and the history and culture of first-century Judaism. His aim has been to get behind the gospel accounts to a point that he asserts is as near as possible to the actual words of Jesus. Jeremias' concern is that the kerygma should not be isolated from Jesus' message - resulting in docetism - or the message isolated by itself - resulting in Ebionitism. Jeremias asserted that a historical Jesus and his message must not be understood from the Bultmannian point of view as one presupposition among many for the kerygma. Rather Jesus and his message should be the sole presupposition for the kerygma. Nothing else is sufficient. Jeremias' work culminated in a notable publication wherein he concludes that in the synoptic tradition the burden of proof lies in demonstrating the inauthenticity - and not the authenticity - of the sayings of Jesus.

Jeremias' work is seen as one which exudes confidence in the ability to know the mind of the historical Jesus. Notwithstanding his critique of the new quest, Jeremias nevertheless gave hope to the enterprise with his assertion that while there is no longer a possibility of modernising interpretations of Jesus there is nevertheless enough of the knowledge now obtainable about Jesus' environment and language. (Schleter 1976: 244)

British scholarship, although influenced by scholars of the Bultmannian school involved in the new quest, characteristically adopted a more conservative approach to the search for the historical Jesus. What was evident was a general acceptance of the literary methods of the German scholars but not an acquiescence of their historical scepticism. Prominent in this thinking were Vincent Taylor, Thomas Walter Manson, William Manson, John Arthur Thomas Robinson and Charles Harold Dodd.

Dodd especially continued to work at the area of history and the gospels and in particular attempted\textsuperscript{78} to defend the use of the gospel of John as a source for historical data about the life of Jesus. Earlier scholarship, as mentioned before, had concluded that John was a late and theologically motivated gospel. But Dodd argued for an independent and valuable historical tradition used by the author of the fourth gospel as well. Dodd's life's work culminated in a deceptively simple account of the life and teaching of Jesus\textsuperscript{79} which represented a British alternative to Bultmannian historical scepticism.

This line of reasoning was taken further by John Arthur Thomas Robinson\textsuperscript{80} which argued that John is not only a source of historical data but the primary source. By this Robinson was able to produce an account of Jesus' life with a confident reconstruction of chronological development.

\textsuperscript{78} Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel. CH Dodd. 1963. London. Nisbert

\textsuperscript{79} The Founder of Christianity. CH Dodd. 1970. London. Collins

\textsuperscript{80} The Priority of John. JAT Robinson. 1985. London. SCM Press
Bultmann was not finished yet. In 1959 he responded to the new quest by pointing to what he perceived as its weaknesses. Bultmann still maintained that the only historical fact about Jesus was what he designated as the \textit{what}\footnote{The German expression is the \textit{Dass}.}: the fact that Jesus had lived and died. Bultmann was not entirely negative about the \textit{what}. Though he opposed any quest, new or old, for the historical Jesus, Bultmann did not deny a certain historical continuity between the historical Jesus and the primitive kerygma. For Bultmann the disciples preached a Jesus in the kerygma who was similar to the earthly Jesus. Bultmann, nevertheless, maintained that it is impossible to believe that the historical Jesus could be \textit{identical} with the Christ of the kerygma as the latter is accepted by faith and not proved by the critical-historical method. It is precisely the paradox of the kerygma to assert that the historical event of Jesus is an eschatological occurrence and hence the importance of the fact that God acted. Both Fuchs and Ebeling polemised against Bultmann's thinking so much so that in some ways both are seen to be the most outspoken advocates of the new quest to the point that their positions are tagged as \textit{neo-liberalism} for attempting to revive the 19th century quest.

Karl Barth\footnote{\textit{How my Mind has Changed}. K. Barth. 1960. Article in \textit{The Christian Century}. page 77} bluntly refused to have anything to do with the new quest. Barth remained steadfast in his conviction that the only Jesus who could be known from the gospels is the resurrected Jesus and, since the resurrection is not
accessible by historical research, the new quest was completely futile.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1996: 283) saw a weakness of the new quest to be that its proponents left out of account the Easter message because of what they asserted was its dubious historicity.

In retrospect the purpose of the new quest can be considered as an effort to ensure that the kerygma to which a faith response is looked for is the legitimate kerygma that is continuous with Jesus and not a falsification thereof. Such a determination was not to render faith as superfluous but merely to define its true object.

A characteristic of the new quest was its focus on the present relevance of Jesus' teaching. In many cases Jesus came off sounding like an existentialist philosopher, an emphasis that may be seen as the residue of Bultmann's appropriation of existential philosophy in interpreting the New Testament. It is fair to say that as the towering influence of Bultmann and the enthusiasm for existentialism began to wane so did the enthusiasm for the new quest. To all intents and purposes the movement was left dead in the water by the early 1970s.

One of the abiding lessons to be learned from a critical evaluation of the contributions to the first two quests for the historical Jesus is that it is important to distinguish between who Jesus was two thousand years ago and
what he actually did and said against what the historical-critical method can
discover and conclude about it. While Christian faith should in principle be
grounded in the historical Jesus and his ministry it is a different proposition to
claiming such faith should be based on the ever-shifting tides of New
Testament scholarship. What is true about the historical Jesus and what the
historical method can demonstrate are not one and the same. The latter will
always be at best a truncated version of the former. (Witherington 1995:10-12)

From the results of the first two quests it becomes apparent that what the
historical-critical methodology cannot do is prove beyond a shadow of a doubt
that Jesus did not say or do this or that. All historians dealing with ancient
subjects necessarily work in the realm of probabilities and not certainties. New
Testament scholars can no more prove Jesus did or did not do or say
something than Roman historians can prove that Nero did or did not have
some responsibility for the great fire of Rome in the 60s CE. They can only
hope to show good probability one way or another.

Furthermore, just because one cannot establish the authenticity of some
particular saying or event with the historical-critical method does not mean that
it absolutely did not happen or was not said. In various cases the fault may lie
in the following:

• The limitations of the methodology itself;
• The paucity of the evidence at hand;
• The bias or limited skills of the one handling the data.

The upshot of the first two quests, as much as anything else, was to reveal the frustrating limitations of the historical study of any ancient person.

It thus becomes an important point of recognition, before examining the third quest which is discussed in the following chapter, that the most historical-critical methodology can accomplish is to establish a good probability as to whether or not a certain saying or action reported of Jesus did actually originate with him and whether or not a given interpretation of Jesus has some historical basis. This is necessarily a minimalist approach and conflicts with the manner of full-orbed picture of Jesus with which an orthodox Christian believer is familiar and fully comfortable.
Chapter 7

A RENAISSANCE IN JESUS STUDIES

Borg (1994: 5) correctly sees dating the beginning of a renaissance to be difficult. This is because a renaissance is never *ex nihilo*; it always has antecedent causes. But developments in the closing decades of the 20th century clearly indicate that a renaissance in Jesus scholarship is underway.

One of the signs of this renaissance in Jesus studies has been the plethora of publications on the subject. Another aspect when contrasted to the past is the employment of a wide-range of non-biblical historical data in such publications. The claim is made that the result has been a more richly detailed picture in gaining an understanding of Jesus.

Another sign of the renaissance is the emergence of distinctively new questions and methods. In previous quests the basis of the search for Jesus and research into the subject has been on a theological level. So the relationship between Christian doctrines and what can be know historically had been fundamental to that period of research. The aim was to see if any of the christological titles of Jesus could be traced back to Jesus. So the concern was manifestly theological.
In the framework of the current search for Jesus the scholarship has been less Christian specific. And Borg (1994:6) discerns that the majority of biblical scholars involved in contemporary Jesus studies are found more in secular organisations rather than seminary and divinity school settings. Thus the questions about the historical Jesus have become more global in considering the effect of pre-industrial societies on the world of Jesus.

This can be seen especially in the last few decades in the increasing separation between historical Jesus scholarship and systematic theology (including christology) as intellectual disciplines. A corresponding separation of historical Jesus scholarship can also be noted from an explicitly Christian theological agenda. The reasons alluded to in the globalisation of the search for the historical Jesus are quite important. One factor already observed is institutional. Many scholars searching for the historical Jesus now teach in the increasingly secularised and pluralistic environment of colleges and universities, rather than seminaries. The result is that scholars in the present renaissance for the historical Jesus are not routinely involved in scholarly dialogue with theologians, and the questions raised are generally not generated by explicitly theological concerns. A second factor is the increasing specialisation of the institutions and persons within the academic world and the proliferation of publications within each discipline.
Much can be gained in the separation of Jesus scholarship from a purely theological agenda. Already observable are the fresh questions generated as well as the increasing emphases in historical Jesus scholarship than before. It has seen a position where historical Jesus scholarship is thought by many to be not only historically difficult to the point of being problematic, but also without theological relevance. Yet having noted this trend, the second half of the 20th century has also seen significant movement away from the sharp either/or of earlier scholarship to more of a both-and position.

Since the collapse of the new quest during the 1960s a series of works have appeared offering re-evaluations of the historical Jesus. This renaissance in Jesus studies has seen the term of the third quest applied to these writings.

NT Wright (Neill & Wright 1988: 379 and n.3) may have been the first to use the label third quest as the term to define a new phase and direction of scholarship into the historical Jesus. Instead of the first quest brought to a close by Schweitzer and the new quest inaugurated by Käsemann, Wright (1996:83) argues that what was to be a new phenomenon in Jesus studies is distinct enough to derive the title of the third quest.

The third quest emerged firstly and predominantly in the English-speaking world. A feature was that a sociological interest superseded the theological interest which was the basis of the previous quest.
The designation of the third quest has its challengers. There is a view that the scholars gathered under the umbrella of this term do not share much in common in their pursuit of the historical Jesus. Examples are that some writers appeal to sources outside of the New Testament, especially to the gospel of Thomas, while in others there is a restriction to analysis of New Testament material especially the synoptic gospels.

The designation of the third quest has thus not caught on very widely. But there are signs of late it is gaining better acceptance. This terminology does help to contrast thinking in the new period between the extreme historical caution of the Bultmannian scholars and the resurgence in contemporary Jesus scholarship which has appeared since about the 1970s which is markedly more optimistic about the possibility of obtaining a truly historical account of Jesus.

A feature of the third quest is its method. The sayings of Jesus are not detached from the rest of the evidence nor are they examined in isolation. This supports the verdict of Sanders (1985: 3) about most of the exegetical efforts of the last few decades when he asserted that analysis of the sayings material did not appear to give a picture of Jesus which is convincing and which answers historically important questions. Sanders (1985: 131) also pointed out that a method which claims that a careful exegesis of the Jesus sayings will lead to a correct decision has led many a modern New Testament scholar into a quagmire from which the scholar never emerged.
The third quest also demonstrates that research into Jesus dissociates itself clearly from the criterion of difference as its methodological foundation of research. There is rather a tendency towards a historical criterion of plausibility.

Within the theological aspects of the third quest there is a search for Christian identity. But that Christian identity excludes Christian-labelled heresies like gnosticism and enthusiasm. There is a preference for orthodox sources.

In essence the pursuit of truth - historical truth - is what the third quest is all about. The much-vaunted normal critical tools, particularly form-criticism, are being totally - and rightly in the view of Wright (1996: 87) - bypassed in the search for Jesus. It is the view of the third questers that form-criticism remains a valid tool but more for the study of early Christianity rather than of Jesus.

Third-questers claim that the whole thrust of their method is to study Jesus like any other figure of the ancient past. There is an emphasis of serious historical hypotheses - the telling of large scale narratives - about Jesus and the examination of prima facie relevant data to see how they fit. (Wright 1996: 88) It introduces a sense of the gospels being seen as texts in their own right. Third-questers contend that the authors of the synoptic gospels - which provide the bulk of the relevant source material - intended to write about Jesus and not just about their own churches or theology.
For most of its history New Testament scholars have used primarily literary - and in a fairly narrow sense - historical methods. Today there is a systematic use of the insights and models gained from the history of religions, current anthropology, and the social sciences. These new questions and methods have resulted in new ways of researching what has been perceived as familiar material.

It was this new methodology that led Bernard Brandon Scott to comment that the historical quest for the historical Jesus has ended; the interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus has begun.

On the fringes of this new renaissance have been those accounts of Jesus - often written at a semi-popular level - which locate Jesus, in deliberate defiance of the gospel accounts, in the mainstream of Jewish nationalistic liberation movements. (McGrath 1993: 264) Best known of these is a publication by SGF Brandon with similar themes by HJ Schonfield and J Carmichael. For Brandon Jesus was the instigator of a violent Jewish uprising. However Martin Hengel, one of the leading authorities of the Zealot movement, has rejected this thinking as has E Bammel and Charles Francis Digby Moule.

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83 A remark made at the annual meeting of the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago in 1984.

However Brandon's thinking cannot just be dismissed by means of the old division of politics and theology, reflecting the reasoning of post-enlightenment dualism. It is a valid deliberation about the actions and methods of Jesus which resulted in his execution on a Roman cross. There is validity in a thinking that Jesus was in some way side associated with those who wanted to overthrow the Roman occupation. Certainly as will be discussed in chapter 14 the followers of Jesus, after his death, under the leadership of James probably were involved in clashes with the Roman authorities which culminated in their forced dispersal from Jerusalem.

A interesting result of the new renaissance in Jesus studies is the many alternative pictures of Jesus continuing to be offered. Generally these have been more at the level of journalism than of scholarship.

One notable exception to the journalistic trend has been the scholarly work of Morton Smith where he has centred his thinking upon mainly gnostic writings of the second century and later. It is Smith's contention that the New Testament gospels represent a ruthless and successful cover-up by Christian orthodoxy of a historical Jesus whose teachings and behaviour they found embarrassing.

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A feature of the third quest is its sharp opposition to the thinking seen during the previous quests which had asserted that though historically a 1st century Jew, the Jewishness of Jesus was not significant. Thus the specifically Jewish features of Jesus were played down. Rather the objective was to find those features which he may have shared with other Mediterranean customs. In contrast there is a serious and determined concern within the third quest to find Jesus a place in Judaism.

Thus the third quest in locating Jesus firmly within Judaism couples this with a natural enquiry as to the reasons why Jesus and his followers were rejected by the Jewish authorities. This quest also assumes a major continuity between Jesus and his followers and also that these followers were seen not as just one more movement within Judaism. There has accordingly been a renewed interest in Jesus' Jewish background and an emphasis of the importance of such history in relation to christology.

The application of recent Jewish studies to the question of the historical Jesus was given important impetus by Geza Vermes.\textsuperscript{86} Vermes attempted to locate Jesus in the real world of 1st century Judaism. In this Vermes sees Jesus as a Galilean holy person or charismatic, rather than in the context of the rabbinical establishment. Vermes' work was widely welcomed even by those who did not

\textsuperscript{86} Jesus the Jew. G Vermes. - see Bibliography
accept the reduction of christological titles of the New Testament to meanings consistent with Jewish orthodoxy.

The book by Vermes is one of a series of Jewish studies which have attempted to reclaim Jesus for Judaism. In this context Christianity is dismissed as the invention of Jesus' followers. Other works representing similar thinking have been published by Ben Meyer,87 Anthony Harvey,88 J Riches89 and Ed Parish Sanders.90 It has now become more widely accepted that Jesus of Nazareth, whatever may eventually be known about him, does belong to his day and its thought world. Extrapolating this thinking has had the result that the historical Jesus is having only an indirect relationship to contemporary Christian questions. (Richardson & Bowden 1983: 309)

Another recent contribution to Jesus studies is a historical novel by Gerd Theissen91 which is written with a light touch. But his approach in no way diminishes the value of the work as Theissen draws upon an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the period. The aim of the work is to sketch in narrative form a picture of Jesus and his time which is in line with the present state of scholarly research and is understandable to present-day readers. There

88 Jesus and the Constraints of History: The Brampton Lectures. AE Harvey. 1980. London. Duckworth
is an awareness of the tensions of life under Roman occupation in the Judaism of the period. Theissen's work is a successful experiment in showing how Jesus would have been perceived by his contemporaries. (McGrath 1993: 265)

Roman Catholic exegetes, especially after the 1964 Instruction of the Pontifical Bible Commission, have also joined in the renaissance in seeking historical data on Jesus. This is notable in the latest biblical christologies of prominent Roman Catholic theologians. A consensus has emerged in Roman Catholicism with the historical data concerning Jesus of Nazareth providing a wide range of theological interpretations of Jesus.

These recent developments have shattered the framework of the Roman Catholic neo-scholastic manual and have resulted in a christology with a wholly different shape to what had been in vogue for many centuries in the Roman Catholic church. Contemporary christologies by Roman Catholic theologians typically open with the question of the historical Jesus. Such works offer an interpretation of the historical data obtained by exegetical research. In a second move Roman Catholic scholars commonly take a definitive position on the nature, knowledge, and significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Having thus secured the factors accounting for the genesis of Christian faith, they survey the diverse christologies of the New Testament and proceed to reconstruct the development of the classical christological dogmas of the patristic era and to reformulate these in a manner appropriate to the present day situation.
Extending the christological process into that situation, the Roman Catholic exegetes and historians have articulated the significance of Jesus for those who seek to follow him as disciples today, thus reintegrating soteriology with christology. In a final move, they frequently attend to the newly emergent question of the relationship of Christ to the world religions. (Komonchak 1987: 542)

It can be clearly seen that much of the diversity in current times in the interpretations of Jesus is due to the contemporary authors allowing their own faith commitment and historical situations to impact on their work. Thus, for example, in a context of massive political and economic oppression enforced through systemic violence, Latin American theologians focus upon the historical Jesus' identification with the poor and downtrodden, discovering the liberating potential of his earthly ministry. Feminist theologians similarly find in Jesus' prophetic activity their resources for challenging the evils of patriarchal culture within and outside the church. Some of the more radical feminists have articulated a methodology for reconstructing the early Jesus movement as itself an egalitarian community.

In the light of these divergent pictures of Jesus it is therefore a fair comment that the third quest lacks a coherent theological or historical core. But despite its clear weaknesses the current works appearing within the term third quest are likely to remain an integral part of the on-going scholarly discussion of the issue of the historical Jesus.
In the period of some 200 years since the work of Reimarus it can be said that
the various quests and especially in current thinking have placed the historical
question of Jesus firmly on the theological and secular agenda. As yet however
there has been no definitive outcome to the search for the historical Jesus. One
result has certainly been that particularly in regard to method no contemporary
scholar can ignore questions of who Jesus was, whether he said or did roughly
what is set out in the gospels, the reasons for his death and the reasons for the
rise of Christianity. It has also become apparent that following the thinking of
those like Reimarus who wish to demonstrate the unbelievability of Jesus
Christ cannot ignore or fail to take these questions seriously.

Further the contemporary thinking into the historical Jesus has demonstrated
clearly that Jesus studies is not only for the benefit of the church and theology.
It has extended well beyond those limits.

The search for the historical Jesus thus remains valid and vital, despite its
proven difficulty. The sources have been found to be no less complex to use
now than they were 200 years ago. The questions are no less urgent. And
during the period 1745 CE to date there has been a tremendous production of
research trying to address the questions the search for Jesus being followed
with renewed vigour and enthusiasm.

And in the present time the energetic pursuit of answers to the Jesus mystery
has emerged as a phenomenon on the North American continent. While many
scholars see the North American research as part of the third quest there is much to distinguish it and make it a subject worthy of reflection on its own. Accordingly it is to this phenomenon that attention is now turned.
Chapter 8

THE MODERN AMERICAN QUEST

There is a resurgent debate in the United States about the historical Jesus. Rather than the suggestion that it is part of the third quest it is more correctly termed the North American Quest\(^{22}\) because as will be seen in what follows it is clearly distinct from previous quests into the historical Jesus. It is not a part of the current third quest. A feature of the North American quest is a return to the non-eschatological portrayal of Jesus in which Jesus, according to Burton Mack and John Dominic Crossan, is seen as a Jewish Cynic. This Jesus shaped by Hellenistic influences is at the periphery of Judaism. This contrasts to the third quest where Jesus is very much interpreted in the framework of his eschatology and placed at the centre of Judaism.

On the one side of the equation in the North American debate are those who assert that the search for the historical Jesus is a necessary quest. It is claimed this necessity of the historical investigation of Jesus avoids two dangers. That Jesus not be regarded as a mere mythological hero, or that recognition of him

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\(^{22}\) This terminology is used in disagreement with JD Crossan (Carlson & Ludwig 1994: 151) who maintains that his 1991 book *The Historical Jesus* was a conscious attempt to launch a third quest for the Historical Jesus. (Vanamaker 1996: 4). As mentioned in chapter 7 NT Wright (Neill & Wright 1988: 379) saw the work started in the 1970s as the beginning of the third quest. The North American quest is quite distinct from the third quest and needs differentiation in labelling.
as messiah and son of God not be reduced to some irrational fideism. (Fitzmeyer 1986: 7) Those on the other side assert the whole matter is misguided; in essence echoing the 19th century statement by Martin Kähler that the entire life of Jesus movement was a blind alley; indeed any search for the historical Jesus only served to conceal the living Christ.

Distinctive in this quest is the suggestion that the North American scholarship be labelled historical Jesus research as a more precise term for what is more usually known in theology as the problem of the historical Jesus. Another distinction from other quests is the manner developed by those in the North American quest to involve the secular press and publishers of religious works. Indeed it is quite evident that what has developed on the North American continent in Jesus studies has become a very profitable trade in the subject as evidenced by the variety of publications about Jesus coming off the printing presses. These writings have created a commotion in both the academy and the church and has resulted in a media-fed demand for more of the same. A by-product is the growing number of works also being published in the United Kingdom which are devoted to the subject of Jesus.

Luke Timothy Johnson (1996: Week 2) summarises this spate of literature by asserting that, with some variations, these recent historical Jesus books do five things:
1. There is a move to isolate traditions about Jesus from other canonical writings (especially the letters of Paul).

2. The narrative material of the canonical gospels is dismantled and regarded as theological constructs.

3. The individual units (pericopes) of the gospels concerning what Jesus said and did are put through a process of testing for authenticity, in comparison and competition with other non-canonical Jesus traditions.

4. An alternative framework for understanding Jesus is used in place of that provided by the gospel narratives, derived from historical analogy, anthropology and other associated disciplines. The result, for example, is a Jesus who was a peasant or a charismatic or a magician.

5. The authentic pieces are then fitted into this new framework, to provide the historical Jesus.

Johnson sees the fourth and fifth steps being sensible once steps one and two are made. The reason? A pile of pieces - sayings, deeds - do not constitute a story and without a story there cannot be character, and without character, there cannot be meaning. Once that personage depicted in the gospels is abandoned, another must be imported. All the sifting and sieving of the individual pieces leads nowhere by itself. Johnson thus polemises against Crossan's assertion (1991: xxvi) that the opening selection of authentic Jesus traditions in his publication is a score to be played. Johnson asserts that it is really a set of notes that still needs scoring, which is what Crossan's social reconstruction attempts.
The polemical positions of Johnson and Crossan demonstrate clearly that the character of the present debate in North America over the historical Jesus can be likened to a culture war in which the institutions of academy, church and media are drawn into a confused conflict and collusion. (Johnson 1996: 1)

The new methods and questions have nonetheless produced new results - still tentative and not formal. There has been a transformation in the image of Jesus which dominated much of the first half of the 20th century. In this the following elements of a new consensus amongst North American scholars engaged in Jesus research are being seen:

1. As mentioned there is a move away from the earlier idea that Jesus was an eschatological prophet who proclaimed the end of the world. This idea stemmed from the element of urgency and crisis found in the gospels which alluded to an imminent return of the Son of Man with the concomitant thought that there was no time to waste as the end was at hand. However during the latter half of this century the biblical texts that served as the basis of this thinking were being discounted and seen rather as sayings created by Jesus’ followers decades after the Easter event. They expressed the early church’s conviction that the crucified and exalted Jesus would return as vindicator and judge. As a consequence of eliminating the idea of Jesus’ return there is a new direction adopted by theologians in North American in finding out what was at the heart of Jesus’ message if the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God was not.

2. There is a growing belief that Jesus as a teacher destroyed the conventional wisdom of his day. A world of conventional wisdom provides those living in it guidance, sanctions identity, and status. Contrary to this Jesus invited his hearers to ground their lives in the spirit of God rather than in the
securities and identities offered by the culture of his day. Another feature of the modern North American quest is the focus on the social world at the time of the earthly life of Jesus. This has been the result of new information coming from more sophisticated archaeological excavations, a growing and more sophisticated study of extant materials and the ongoing analyses of recently discovered documents such as the Dead Sea scrolls and the Nag Hammâdi texts. This additional material is regarded as not simply the accrual of information but providing an alternative way of construing the material. The result has been that in current times it is considered that much more is known about 1st century Palestine than there was at the disposal of earlier generations of scholars. In effect the act of historical imagination required, added to by the dynamics of the earlier social worlds, has enabled a clearer picture of the rootedness of Jesus' mission and message.

(Borg 1994: 12)

Fiercely critical of this trend Johnson (1996: week 3) asserts that theological scholarship in North America to have declined in direct proportion to the unwillingness of book reviewers in the field of religion (especially in books about Jesus) to rigorously examine and sharply challenge less than adequate offerings. He sees the field literally flooded with second-rate material. Johnson considers that in the absence of censorship, peer response is the only quality control mechanism.

While what Johnson says is valid, recognition must be given to a unique and important differentiation at the heart of the present North American debate and that is whether the historical Jesus is the Jesus of the gospels? If so, how is this Jesus read: simplistically? selectively? synthetically? Or is Jesus one of scholarly reconstruction? In this case is this Jesus read self-consciously and self-
critically. In regard to Johnson's views about peer response this surely is a feature that has always been part and parcel of theological literature and is certainly not uniquely absent from the North American debate if only evidenced by Johnson's criticisms themselves.

One of the main contributors in the North American quest for a historical Jesus to what can only be described as an aggressive approach is an organisation known as The Jesus Seminar. And it is to that organisation that attention is now directed.
Chapter 9

THE JESUS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

As opposed to those involved in the third quest for the historical Jesus who generally have tended to pursue the thoroughgoing eschatology of Albert Schweitzer, there are also modern-day followers of the thoroughgoing scepticism of William Wrede. While there can be no hard-and-fast distinctions those who follow the Wrede road are adamant that very little can be known about Jesus and that the gospels are little more than theological fiction. An organisation in the United States of America known as the Jesus Seminar has been prominent in its symbolic journey along the Wrede road.

The Jesus Seminar has received an immense amount of media attention - some see it as the result of a concerted marketing campaign - flowing from its procedures and results. Its activities receive repeated attention in periodicals like Time and Newsweek especially during the Easter period each year when the subject of Jesus is seen by publishers of these periodicals as relevant.

The Jesus Seminar has reported some startling theories about the person upon

93 Some may question whether this dissertation should give so much attention to the Jesus Seminar. Especially as their methods and views appear to be unbelievable to many. Nevertheless the Seminar represents a powerful contemporary media presence. They also raise crucial issues for those searching for the historical Jesus as the third millennium approaches. Further the Seminar represents the major and current alternative to the third quest. It is therefore a current phenomenon in the modern debate into the historical Jesus that has and still earns wide publicity. In fact the sheer volume of books, articles, and even Internet debate emanating from those involved or sympathetic to the Jesus Seminar makes it the most controversial organisation ever engaged in the search for the historical Jesus.
whom the foundations of Christianity rests. For example the Seminar claims that Jesus did not say about 80% of the words attributed to him in the canonical gospels. Borg (1994: 174) plays down criticism of the media-seeking publicity and opines the deliberate seeking of attention by the Jesus Seminar not to be for self-serving ends but rather to provoke discussion about what the bible is and how to understand it. It is suggested by proponents of the Jesus Seminar that the organisation is a serious move to renew the post-Bultmannian study of Jesus.

Critics question the confidence of the Seminar because of its research methodology and published results. It is alleged that the Jesus Seminar does not reflect either responsible scholarship nor critical consensus. Further the Seminar’s efforts which have culminated in a most widely publicised and recently issued *The Five Gospels* is regarded as an anomaly among many New Testament scholars who see it as a throwback to 19th century methods and conclusions.

The Jesús Seminar first met in 1985 at the Pacific School of Religion, a Protestant inter-denominational seminary in Berkeley, California, United States. The Seminar embraces a small, self-selected - some describe it as a very carefully selected - association with participation at its peak numbering about 200 academics. It was founded - and continues to be led - by Robert Funk, a New
Testament scholar and Greek grammarian of the Westar Institute and at that time a professor in the University of Montana. The co-chair is the well known scholar John Dominic Crossan of DePaul University in Chicago.

The project of the Jesus Seminar as described by Funk was:

*We are about to embark on a momentous enterprise. We are going to inquire simply, rigorously, after the voice of Jesus, after what he really said. In this process, we will be asking a question that borders the sacred, that even abuts blasphemy, for many in our society. Our basic plan is simple. We intend to examine every fragment of the traditions attached to the name of Jesus in order to determine what he really said - not his literal words, perhaps, but the substance and style of his utterances. We are in quest of his voice, insofar as it can be distinguished from many other voices also preserved in the tradition.*\(^{95}\)

Wright (1996: 32) sees Funk’s statement as strongly reminiscent of a saying of Jesus found in the gospel of Mark.\(^{96}\) This in itself is interesting as in the Seminar’s conclusion this was an inauthentic saying of Jesus. Perhaps the real allusion to The Jesus Seminar is more contemporary: *boldly going where no one has gone before!*\(^{97}\)

Crossan considers that the Seminar was nothing new at the time of its inauguration as he had been using a similar approach on the historical Jesus since 1969. (Van Biema 1996: 43) What was new was what Crossan characterises as the ethical necessity propounded by the Jesus Seminar to let the public know

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\(^{94}\) The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholar's Version. 1992. Sonoma. Polebridge Press. This is a multi-coloured edition of the gospels, including Thomas, in which can be seen how the Seminar has evaluated the various sayings of Jesus. The method of evaluation is discussed later in this chapter.

\(^{95}\) The Issue of Jesus. RW Funk. 1985. Foundations and Facets Forum 1 no.1 page 7

\(^{96}\) Mark 8:34 ff.

\(^{97}\) An expression used in the television series *Star Trek.*
what the Seminar was doing. And this raises the serious issue of the relationship and responsibility of scholarship to the public domain. Some scholars feel keenly that often the work of the Jesus Seminar in its findings - which are regarded by critics as unscientific - amounts to *fiddling while Rome burns.* (Hollenbach 1989: 13)

Borg (1994: 162) counters critics of the Seminar's approach with the assertion that as the first systematic and collaborative examination of the totality of the Jesus tradition ever undertaken, the Jesus Seminar is unprecedented in the history of New Testament scholarship. But Borg has ignored the problem seen by New Testament scholars that while the central role of narrative has been emphasised by the Jesus Seminar its earliest efforts have and are still focused on Jesus' sayings in the relative absence of any story setting. After about 13 years of existence it is valid to question whether the Jesus Seminar has any intention ever to get at the story through the sayings.

The Seminar in Borg's estimation (1994: 162) represents a broad spectrum of contemporary scholarship. The members are called *fellows.* Requirement for membership is not *ideological* but formal. Typically fellows have a Ph.D. in relevant areas of New Testament research. Most are professors in universities, colleges and seminaries. Due to the cost of travel - which is borne either privately or by the institutions where they are employed - most are from North America and most are men because it is asserted by the Seminar there are few
women in the discipline. A notable characteristic is its largely North American composition. Only a handful come from outside North America; European scholarship is almost entirely un-represented. The fellows are about equally divided between Protestants, Roman Catholics and those of non-religious persuasion. Significantly, although invited, no fundamentalist scholars have become members.

While as many as 200 scholars have participated in the Jesus Seminar over the years the latest membership within the Seminar is reported to be about 70 fellows. The reduction is for various reasons. Some who left expressed discomfort about the disproportionately high representation of the most radical fringes of New Testament scholarship. Others voiced disagreement with Funk's propagandistic purposes of popularising scholarship in a way designed explicitly to undermine conservative Christian credibility.

The latest group of fellows fall roughly into three categories. Fourteen of them are among the leading names in the field of historical Jesus scholarship today, including a few who have published major works on the historical Jesus in recent years.\(^\text{98}\) Two of these 14 are sympathetic to many evangelical concerns.\(^\text{99}\) Roughly another 20 are names recognisable as New Testament scholars who keep abreast of their field, even if they are not as widely published. These, too,

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\(^{98}\) Examples are John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg

\(^{99}\) Bruce Chilton (of Bard College, New York) and Ramsey Michaels (of Southwest Missouri State University).
include several who have written important recent works on the ancient
traditions about Jesus, particularly in regard to various non-canonical gospels.\textsuperscript{100}

The remaining 40 - more than half of the Jesus Seminar - are relatively
unknown; most have published at best two or three journal articles, while
several are recent Ph.D.s whose dissertations were on some theme of the
gospels. For a full 18 of these fellows a computer-search of the American
Theological Library Association and on-line Computer Library Centre
databases of published books and articles revealed no entries relevant to New
Testament studies whatsoever.

Amongst the current fellows there are three women and two Jews. Thirty-six -
again almost half of the current membership of the Seminar have a degree
from or currently teach at one of three theological schools of well known
universities\textsuperscript{101} noted for having some of the most liberal departments of New
Testament studies.

Considering the small number of fellows at their formal meetings the Seminar
can be fairly challenged as to whether it has a sampling representative of critical
New Testament scholars. In fact it is patent that the Jesus Seminar is nowhere
close to reflecting an adequate cross-section of contemporary New Testament
scholars. This is important in view of the widespread perception created by the

\textsuperscript{100} Examples are Marvin Meyer (of Chapman University) and Karen King (of Occidental College).

\textsuperscript{101} Harvard, Claremont, and Vanderbilt universities
media that the ideas of the Jesus Seminar represent the views of the majority of experts and who are in a privileged position to know and disseminate real facts to the public. (Wilkins and Moreland 1995: 20)

The Seminar meets twice a year with the professed aim of establishing some scholarly consensus on the historical Jesus. As mentioned before a factor which limits the representative nature of the Jesus Seminar is that the cost of travel must be borne either personally by the fellow or by the institution where the fellow is employed. Thus a norm of some 30 to 40 fellows are present at the Seminar's twice-yearly meetings. Again it is worth repeating that this is a very small number of people to substantiate the Seminar's claim to a conclusive decision making process.

Each meeting focuses on a particular collection of sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospel narratives. For efficiency and economy of time papers are circulated beforehand and the meetings are dominated by one-by-one discussions of the particular sayings. When discussion is exhausted there is a vote taken about the validity of the saying. The vote is by secret ballot.

The style of the Seminar's proceedings has been, from its inception, what most distinguishes it from other scholarship. It has three important features:

1. All relevant Jesus material is included in its studies. This includes the canonical gospels, the gospel of Thomas and numerous other extra-biblical
works, several of them fragmentary. Strangely the Jesus Seminar has chosen to ignore the Pauline evidence.

2. Voting takes place by choosing one of four categories which symbolise grades of probability. This voting procedure is discussed in greater detail later.

3. As indicated before it is one of the Seminar’s key objectives to publish its results as widely as possible. The motivation behind the Seminar’s thinking is that it is not only scholars who may be interested in their findings.

The approach of the Jesus Seminar is a working toward an inventory of what its participants consider as originating from Jesus, separating such units from what they consider the creation of earlier church tradition or a later evangelist. It uses a highly ritualised procedure to achieve what it regards as consensus. At each meeting, after papers are presented and arguments discussed, participants vote for the probability of the authenticity of a particular statement attributed to Jesus in the gospel accounts and other extra-biblical literature. It measures the degree of consensus amongst the fellows on how much of the gospel material goes back to Jesus himself. (Borg 1994: 21)

Robert Funk defensively states that such voting takes place in scholarly settings, such as translation committees. Individual votes are carried out

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102 Borg (1994: 21-22) sees the Jesus Seminar’s first (and most important) source as the early layers of the synoptic gospels and the second source as the early layer of the Gospel of Thomas found in Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945. Missing is the Gospel of John which the Seminar has decided is almost all the community’s experience of a post-Easter Jesus.

103 In Los Angeles Time of 13 December 1992
privately although the results are made public. Funk also claims that as opposed to the absence of decision-making in other literature or philosophical settings, the members of the Seminar find it exhilarating to be able to make up their minds about something.

The first phase of the Jesus Seminar's work was to consider the sayings or teaching of Jesus. The Seminar has claimed to have now examined approximately 1500 sayings attributed to Jesus on the basis of comparing historical records. From this task a large number of Jesus' sayings have been discounted because in the Seminar's conclusions the versions differed from one account to another or did not appear to fit chronologically into Jesus' life. This task was completed over the initial six years of the Seminar's existence.

The second phase of the Seminar's work has been the analysis of the deeds traditions or the historicity of the events associated with the life of Jesus in the gospels.

But there is the view that the Jesus Seminar is omitting a very great deal from their deliberations. A major presupposition is a philosophically naturalistic world view which categorically denies the supernatural. Thus the teachings of Jesus that are not parables or aphorisms are omitted from the Seminar's considerations. In addition the controversy dialogues and the various of the proclamations in the so-called pronouncement stories are excluded. The latter

104 In Christian Century of 23 November 1988
is considered by the Seminar to be too direct to have been spoken by Jesus who is regarded by the Seminar to be an ever elusive and allusive sage. Also omitted, almost altogether, is the theological and eschatological matrix out of which all this teaching of Jesus operates. For example, it has long been the consensus of most scholars that if there are two things that Jesus certainly spoke about are the subjects of the *Son of Man* and the *kingdom of God*. Yet these subjects hardly surface in the Seminar's discussions of important topics. (Witherington 1994: 55)

It is the methodology of voting to arrive at the Seminar’s decisions that has evoked the most controversy. The voting is carried out by colour-coded beads which each participant uses to decide upon the historical accuracy of a saying of Jesus that is being addressed at a Seminar meeting. Each colour represents a descending spectrum of historical probability which is:

- **red**: It's certain that Jesus said that;
- **pink**: Somewhere between probably and more likely yes than no;
- **grey**: Somewhere between more likely no than yes;
- **black**: Quite certain that Jesus did not say that.

To many detractors of the Jesus Seminar is the feeling that the one enduring image it will leave in the minds of many will be the idea of a group of biblical scholars using coloured beads to decide on the veracity of the sayings of Jesus.
Mention has been already made about the restriction of the Seminar's agenda to the sayings of Jesus. Significant to this is that each participating scholar must likely have in mind a story about the life of Jesus where it is believed these various sayings of Jesus fit. Yet this framework is not a subject for discussion. And this must be another area of criticism against the Seminar. The determination of what is authentic or inauthentic among the sayings of the Jesus tradition should be checked against not merely the broader historical matrix in which Jesus operated (the historical Galilee of the early first century) but against the particular narrative, as can be reconstructed of Jesus' life. The judgement that Jesus couldn't have said or done that presupposes knowledge about what fits in with the facts of Jesus' life and with Jesus' character and ministry. This is why scholars like Ed Parish Sanders have stressed the need for a framework of facts about Jesus' life into which his teachings and actions can be placed and be interpreted. The story of Jesus is the matrix out of which his words and deeds must be understood. (Witherington 1994: 55)

Luke Timothy Johnson is prominent amongst the most severe critics of the Jesus Seminar. Johnson (1996:5) sees the process adopted by the Jesus Seminar to be biased against the authenticity of the gospel traditions. Johnson argues that the historical or pre-resurrection Jesus was never intended to be the basis of Christian faith. Rather the resurrected Christ is the important development to the Christian community. Further Johnson disputes the fundamental

\[\text{Johnson is the Woodruff Professor of New Testament at Chandler School of Theology at Emory University, Atlanta, United States.}\]
approach of the Jesus Seminar that *earlier is better and development is decline* when it comes to scholarship and criticism. Johnson stresses that narrative is the context in which the history of Jesus has been given and that narrative cannot be divorced from the interpretation made of the meaning of Jesus' life. Johnson feels strongly that critical scholarship and historical scholarship cannot be set at odds with one another; neither can they be mixed unintelligibly.

History always has a bias. To believe otherwise to Johnson's way of thinking is at best overly romantic and at worst deceitful. (Wade 1996:3) Johnson sees it as the very nature of scholars to vie with one another to be more critical, to be harder graders. The procedure adopted by the Seminar forces *sayings* attributed to Jesus to prove their authenticity rather than the burden of proof being placed on showing inauthenticity.

Even on a charitable interpretation of its activities one must conclude that the steering committee of the Jesus Seminar had as one of its major agendas the presentation of a *critical* portrait of Jesus that must necessarily be distinguished from the fundamentalist or traditional portraits. There is an unmistakable *we/they* language in their results. This calls in question the Seminar's claim to be taking an unbiased approach. Some see the Jesus Seminar to be part of a movement to trivialise religion and to dismiss its power in society. (Wade 1995:1)

Another area of controversy about the Seminar is its intentional aim to be aggressive in its communications about the results of their half-yearly meetings.
As already noted critics are accusatory about the media-manipulation of the Jesus Seminar. The Seminar's voting mechanism is seen as a deliberate attention-getting device. And there is a view that the media have allowed themselves to be gullible on the issue.

Wright (1996: 32) from a different perspective also questions the Seminar's overwhelming desire to communicate its deliberations. To Wright it has led to some astonishing oversimplifications and many statements which the Seminar has offered as premises are really conclusions and many of these conclusions are very dubious.

The result that has been seen is that the United States media which has a propensity to report on election winning and losing have given much emphasis to this aspect of the Seminar's work. In contrast Witherington (1996:43) sees the devout lay person of whatever denominational affiliation finding the Seminar's enterprise to be presumptuous.

The Seminar's spokespeople are unrepentant about the Seminar's voting system. This despite the views of many people that the idea of voting on Jesus is bizarre and, to some, as blasphemous. Borg (1994: 21) strongly defends the voting as having a simple purpose to measure the degree of scholarly consensus on how much of this material goes back to Jesus himself. The Jesus Seminar in Borg's estimation (1994: 163) is well aware that one cannot actually determine what Jesus said by voting. Voting cannot settle historical questions and some
sayings would in likelihood obtain a different vote some decades earlier. Perhaps Borg does not appreciate the negative significance of his viewpoint. It really places the authenticity of the Jesus sayings almost akin to the whims and fantasies at a given point in time of a small number of scholars as opposed to giving any sort of solidarity to their accuracy. One is almost drawn back to the oft repeated maxim of a particular scholar seeing her or his own face in the well. Only this time it is a composite picture of the Seminar fellowship.

Crossan agrees that the voting mechanism is intended to catch the media’s attention. But he sees this to be positive. It was one of the Seminar’s purposes to promote popular education about the problems and difficulties, results and conclusions of contemporary historical Jesus research. Crossan (1991: 425) counters the objections about the inappropriateness of voting on Jesus by reminding scholars who have raised objections to the fact that the very Greek text of the New Testament on which any modern translation must be based is itself a reconstruction and the result, however executed, of a scholarly vote in a committee of experts.

Borg for his part not only opines the voting to measure current scholarly opinion and the degree to which there is consensus within the group of scholars but also asserts the voting to provide a visual representation of this degree of consensus.
For this Borg explains red and pink both indicate a quite solid positive consensus. Thus for a saying to receive a weighted average in the pink range indicates a considerable degree of positive consensus - and, of course, even more so in the case of red.

Grey is of a more mixed and ambiguous category. On a descending scale of historical accuracy it is natural for the Seminar to think of grey pointing to a moderately negative consensus (as probably not). Grey thus points to uncertainty and that the distribution of votes is all over the place. Thus rather than meaning Jesus probably did not say that grey often means that there is considerable uncertainty and/or direction about the saying. Thus the verdict is considered unclear and signals a likely direction of research over the next few years as no reasonably firm judgement has yet been formed by the Seminar fellows.

But despite Borg's defence there must remain questions about the weighted average approach of the Seminar's voting system, allied to its fervent wish for publicity, in purporting to tell the world what Jesus really said.

Probably the most debatable point about the Seminar's voting procedure is that the Seminar is a largely North American constituency. The fact that the United States of America is a thoroughly democratic society has probably been influential amongst the fellows of the Seminar. There is the basis of the democratic assumption that the majority view is likely to be right and to reflect a true critical opinion on the truth. There are however major methodological
problems with this assumption, especially when the test group of scholars is self-selected and represents only one portion - and a very small proportion at that - of the spectrum of scholarly New Testament opinion. While the voting may make the process appear democratic, the pre-selection of the fellows, the fact that it is a small minority of scholars, the disregard for the \textit{vox populi}, and, perhaps most tellingly, the disregard for the opinions of eminent scholars of previous generations, shows that the Seminar has an elitist and not a democratic approach.

Coupled to that is the Seminar's determination to push through its viewpoint at all costs. This is confirmed by the voting records of the Seminar. Notable is the heavy weight of \textit{red} votes - thus authentic - which falls on Jesus sayings which are found in either \textit{Q} or the gospel of Thomas.\footnote{Both \textit{Q} and the gospel of Thomas are discussed in chapter 10} Luke has a brief acceptance in the Seminar's estimate of authenticity.\footnote{The parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and the Incompetent Manager (Luke 16:1-9)} But the pattern of \textit{Q} and the gospel of Thomas continues to dominate. There is much reason to agree that the main reason the Seminar considers the Jesus sayings found in \textit{Q} and the gospel of Thomas as authentic is not because each one has been tested individually against some abstract criteria, but they have been judged to fit into the picture of Jesus \textit{which the Seminar has already been chosen}.\footnote{A Good example is a statement by Burton Mack: "We may have to give up the criterion of dissimilarity in favour of the criterion of plausibility, given what can be reconstructed of the social life and though in the Galilee of the times." This effectively renders redundant most of the other criteria of the third quest so painstakingly reassembled and developed.}
Luke Timothy Johnson considers the Seminar a dangerous contagion and a self-indulgent charade in its 13 year exercise in academic self-promotion. (Von Biema 1996: 45) Johnson is dismissive of the Seminar and its silly Jesus books. Johnson (1996: Week 5) suggests that the organisation should be named the Not-Jesus Seminar since this seems to be their main message.

While Johnson (1996: 2) accepts the legitimacy of the Seminar and its right to conduct its business as it chooses, he feels its precise academic standing needs clarification. The indication in the media of the Seminars membership of some two hundred scholars may sound impressive it is not that large as already noted. But it is when this figure is compared with the United States Society of Biblical Literature whose membership comprises of over 6 900 members (half of which are New Testament scholars), the Seminar’s membership is seen not to be that significant.

Johnson does not doubt the seriousness or ability of the members of the Seminar but does not consider them meeting the standards which would verify their representations of critical New Testament scholarship. It has no members of the theological faculties of leading United States universities109 nor established scholars from England or the European continent. Johnson asserts that most of the participants in the Jesus Seminar are in relatively

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109 Johnson cites as examples universities such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Duke, Union, Emory, and Chicago
undistinguished academic positions. Some are not in the strict sense in
academic positions at all.

In short Johnson's view is that the Seminar does not represent the cream of
allow that both Funk and Crossan are scholars of notable reputation as is
Marcus Borg whose visibility has increased due to the Seminar's work. Johnson
sums up the Seminar's goal as to discover a Jesus devoid of anything mythical
or concerned with the actual possibility of a world to come, but reflective
instead of the counter cultural attitude favoured by liberal academics. (Von Biema
1996: 45)

Borg (1996: Week 4) polemises against Johnson's views. Borg does not accept
Johnson's criticisms about the members of the Seminar nor that the objectives
and workings of the Seminar is as Johnson portrays it. In fact Borg suggests
that Johnson is skewed in his views which are in main culled from a pile of
newspaper clippings.

Despite such defences the Jesus Seminar has major flaws. It has rejected Jewish
eschatology, particularly apocalyptic, as an appropriate context for
understanding Jesus himself and in order to do so has declared the Marcan
narrative a fiction. (Wright 1996: 81)
Craig L Blomberg\textsuperscript{10} sets out a number of major areas followed by the Jesus Seminar which he feels reputable scholarship would reject. These are:

1. The Seminar establishes far too restrictive principles for the forms of speech Jesus could have used. Thus if an utterance is neither a parable nor an aphorism they claim Jesus did not speak it. Jesus never composed full-length sermons and he never engaged in dialogue or controversy with others. It is difficult to grasp how the Seminar fellows arrive at such assertions which are not found in serious scholarship.

2. The Seminar is equally restrictive in the topics that it permits Jesus to address. Thus Jesus never quoted scripture or compared his teaching to that of the laws of Moses or called himself the Son of Man. He never predicted the future.

3. Closely related to the first two observations, the Seminar's Jesus is not sufficiently Jewish to be a historically credible figure. This is clearly against contemporary scholarship stressing the necessity of recovering Jesus the Jew. There is widespread consensus amongst most New Testament scholars that Jesus must be read against the historical-cultural milieu of his world which was nothing less than Jewish.

4. There is no convincing reason left in the Seminar's Jesus for his death as a criminal by crucifixion. Thus the Jesus they have produced is an exceedingly eccentric, somewhat pacifist Jesus who never once suspected that he might be angering others or endangering his life. In other words Jesus did absolutely nothing to provoke such hostility.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} This statement by Blomberg is found in chapter 1 (page 206f) of a study of Jesus published by MJ Wilkins and JP Moreland included in this dissertation's Bibliography

\textsuperscript{11} John Meier(1991-Vol 1) in his recent work on the historical Jesus sums up the Seminar's Jesus as a tweedy poetaster who spent his time spinning out parables and Japanese koans, a literary aesthete who toyed with 1\textsuperscript{st} century deconstructionism, or a bland Jesus who simply told people to look at the lilies of the field - such a Jesus would threaten no one, just as the university professors who create him threaten no one.
5. After ignoring the Jewish roots of Jesus the Seminar claims that later Christians re-Judaised him. Thus the Seminar asserts that a generation later, the wisdom traditions of the gospels were overlaid with apocalyptic traditions. This idea fundamentally inverts the commonly held view that early Christianity spread from the Jewish world to the Graeco-Roman world. This presupposes a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary development of the gospel. In this Burton Mack of the Jesus Seminar has written two major works that propose this thesis with the assertion that the author of the gospel of Mark was the primary instigator for this picture of Jesus. Thus Funk's thinking is that about a generation later from the events in question, the author of Mark, radically transformed the authentic circulating information about Jesus, superimposed a body of material four times as large while the church suffered sufficient collective amnesia to accept the transformation as legitimate.

6. One of the major reasons the Seminar suggests Jesus the sage preceded Jesus the apocalyptic prophet is because it is felt by the fellows of the Seminar that the gospel of Thomas contains independent traditions about the historical Jesus that are at least as reliable, if not more so, that those found in the canonical gospels.

The insufficiency of the Seminar's Jesus is seen, most tellingly, by their including nothing of real consequence about how Jesus died nor is there anything found to be authentic in their research about the passion or resurrection narratives that might present any clues about who Jesus was and why he was executed. This is because the gospel of Thomas has no such material, and Q has precious few hints in that direction. If one starts with the gospel of Thomas and a very Lukan version of Q, it is hard to arrive at the
picture of Jesus that one finds in the gospel of Mark in general and in the passion narratives in particular.

In the final analysis there seems little doubt that the Jesus Seminar has as its agenda a particular view of Jesus and the early church which has worked its way through into a detailed list of its conclusions about Jesus sayings that accord with this view.

On reflection it can be seen that despite having an alleged Bultmannian thrust in their endeavours, the Seminar’s fellows are quite un-Bultmannian in their concern to find out about Jesus and to discover what he said.\footnote{Bultmann would have regarded this as a very unsound preoccupation.} The Seminar is less concerned to locate Jesus within his social and cultural milieu.

It is evident that the Jesus Seminar should be discounted because it is out of touch with mainline scholarship. Their Jesus seems to have a more Californian than Galilean local colouring. So much for the Jesus Seminar, a contemporary organisation, travelling down the Wrede road. Its probable end will be a road-block.

It is apposite to state the real task which confronts all students of Jesus is that of major hypothesis and serious verification rather that the Seminar’s pseudatomistic work on apparently isolated fragments as found in the gospel of
Thomas and the book of $Q$.

So where does a search for Jesus start? There are those within and without the Jesus Seminar who strongly assert that both $Q$ and the gospel of Thomas have significant parts to play in the search. So this is now considered.
Chapter 10

WHERE DOES A STUDY OF JESUS START?

The much publicised Jesus Seminar\textsuperscript{113} has, amongst others, promoted the idea that new research on Jesus is different and more informed than previous attempts because of the increased evidence arising from the use of extracanonical documentation. So it is appropriate to consider whether this is where a search for the historical Jesus ought to start.

In assessing the sources for the historical Jesus there are two characteristics that need to be taken into account. They are the historical proximity of the source to the historical Jesus and the independence of the source. Thus the closer the source to the earthly historical life of Jesus the more value it has. Age is however not identical with historical proximity. The letters of Paul are older than the synoptic gospels, yet the latter are seen to be historically closer to the earthly Jesus. They are reputed to contain individual traditions considered older than the letters of Paul and they are seen by some scholars to be free of the Pauline tendency to regard Jesus as a pre-existent, mythological being.

Thus much debate has been given in recent times to the age of the sources in the search for the historical Jesus. Also the independence of the sources from one another has an important role. When the agreement between the sources is too great there is the assumption they are dependent upon one another. Where
the sources contradict each other there is conjecture that one or more of the sources distort reality and may be valueless. The position over sources is considered satisfactory where inconsistencies between the sources confirm their independence but because they can be interpreted coherently it is accepted they stem from one and the same historical reality.

In line with this thinking it is appropriate to focus on the Q hypothesis, the gospel of Thomas and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**The Origin of the Q Idea**

The earliest information about the gospels of Matthew and Mark is given by Papias (ca 110 CE) who stated that Matthew completed *the oracles* in a Hebrew dialect. Concerning Mark, Papias commented that *the oracles* are paralleled with *the things either said or practised by Christ*.

The theory of Q can be regarded as beginning some 150 years ago. It was part of the *two-source* theory of the gospel origins. It is an entity that has been inferred.

The Enlightenment had pointed to the gospels being historically unreliable and that their origins were primarily literary in nature. It was theorised that the

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113 See Chapter 9

114 Abbreviation for the German word Quelle meaning source.
writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke which have many texts in common - predominantly *sayings* material - had composed their narratives not on the basis of historical recollection but by using as dual sources the gospel of Mark and a hypothetical document called Q. It was further theorised that Q had come to the authors in Greek and in writing.

Outside of more conservative circles, few scholars believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the gospels attributed to them. Mark is usually dated in the 70's CE (occasionally in the 60's). Matthew and Luke in the 80's CE and John near the end of the first century CE or even a little later.

Frederich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher is credited as having accepted - and some scholars claim erroneously\(^\text{115}\) - that Papias' statement meant that the author of the gospel of Matthew primarily wrote a document consisting of Jesus sayings. And it was only later that a gospel was written containing this document.

Christian Hermann Weisse (1801-1866) accepted Schleiermacher's view and, in addition, claimed the sayings-source was a root for Luke's gospel. In fact HH Stoldt\(^\text{116}\) surmises that Schleiermacher had argued the opposite. Whatever the background Weisse's ideas were to prove determinative. Thus the concept

\(^{115}\) It is held by some serious scholars that Schleiermacher wrongly thought the meaning of Papias to be *sayings* when it was *what the Lord Jesus said and did*.

of Q made its debut into the theological world. The two-source theory is now the basis of upwards of 40% of contemporary New Testament science. It is therefore ironic that the two-source theory is probably founded upon an error by Schleiermacher and an invention by Weisse.

The basis of the Q construction was to take the material common to the gospels of Matthew and Luke which they do not share with the gospel of Mark. The resultant Jesus *sayings* consist of *utterances* in the pure sense but also apophtegmata, parables of all sorts and even a miracle report. Also included are words by John the Baptist.

It is out of this thinking that proponents of the Q hypothesis gained support. It was speculated that the 200 plus verses making up Q having been extracted from the gospels of Matthew and Luke are primarily *sayings* of Jesus. To make the point negatively, there are basically no narratives about Jesus in Q - no miracle stories (though healing and exorcisms are referred to in the sayings) and no stories about Jesus' birth, journey to Jerusalem, or death, or resurrection. Q was thus seen to be an early collection of the teachings or the sayings of Jesus. It was initially defined solely as a source document which was used by the authors of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It was not seen as a text with its own integrity.

117 Compact, instructive sayings
The Q theory gained ascendancy in Germany where the two-source theory has achieved a virtual monopoly amongst New Testament scholars with widespread support by scholars - especially those embracing liberal approaches - in many other countries. (Linnemann 1996: 3) To these scholars Q is seen as the most important source for reconstructing the teaching of Jesus. However many Anglo-Saxon scholars - an example would be Brooke Foss Westcott - as well as formidable German-speaking authorities - like Theodore Zahn and Adolf Schlatter - declined to embrace the Q hypothesis.

During the 1920s the two-source hypothesis was being used by Rudolf Bultmann in his study of the synoptic tradition.118 BH Streeter focused on the manuscript traditions119 in which he stressed Q as the best and earliest evidence for the first chapter of Christian history. (Mack 1993: 21)

The hypothesis was later expanded into a supposition that there was a Q-church in Syria which finalised Q's form in an era ca. 30-65 CE. This has led to the idea of a lost gospel of Q as a discrete witness for recognition with its canonical counterparts. To Borg (1997: 133) the Q gospel is the earliest source of the gospels. Borg speculates it may have been produced as early as the 50s of the 1st century. In this thinking the document is seen to have already been in existence when the gospels of Matthew and Luke were commonly regarded as being written about the last quarter of the 1st century.

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142
Prominent amongst scholars of contemporary times who have argued for this theory - in addition to Borg - are Siegfried Schultz, James M Robinson, Helmut Koester, Burton Mack, Arland Jacobson and John Kloppenborg. Kloppenborg\textsuperscript{120} is noted for his painstaking analysis of the Q material. He theorises it has a three-stage composition.

Mack breaks the composition of Q down to four stages \textsuperscript{121} but fails to provide any proof for his theories. Mack's reconstruction of Jesus from the Q tradition is an example of the very different pictures of Jesus that arise. Mack uses a basis of 7 thematic groups of logia which he allocates to the earliest stratum of Q. The result for Mack is that Jesus is a Galilean cynic. By contrast if the apocalyptic sayings are thought to come from Jesus a quite different picture of Jesus arises. (Theissen & Merz 1998: 29)

A massive study of Q by Siegfried Schultz\textsuperscript{122} concludes almost exactly the opposite to the determinations of Kloppenborg and Mack. Some see the difference of opinion about Q amongst scholars to be simple. Scholars who have immersed themselves in the study of Q on the same scale as Kloppenborg, Mack and some other North American scholars consider the rhetoric used by Kloppenborg et al for what after all is a hypothetical source to


\textsuperscript{121} proto-Q1, Q1, proto-Q2 and Q2

\textsuperscript{122} The Sayings of the Evangelist. S Schultz. 1972. Zurich. Theologischer Verlag

143
be *fairy-tale* in nature which calls for something dead to become a commanding personal authenticity.

There is really no conclusive evidence for the existence of Q which seems to be an unnecessary hypothesis that has never lived up to its announcement. It cannot be corroborated from manuscript evidence, Paul's letters or the known history of the early church. In fact the Q hypothesis was never heard of until the 19th century.

Nevertheless in recent times especially by the proponents of the Jesus Seminar and like minded scholars the idea of Q is certainly making its presence felt in contemporary Jesus studies and in a very determined manner. And the question is why? It appears to result from redaction criticism giving way to a strictly literary criticism informed by contemporary theories of authorship and composition.

Mention has already been made that in the United States during the 1960s religious studies were moving away from purely theological programmes in the universities. In using the full range of human sciences there was an understanding of the New Testament in the context of Christianity emerging as a complex cultural phenomenon when read against the social histories of the Graeco-Roman age. The idea of the New Testament texts as normative were in contrast now seen as literary achievements developed in an evolving social experimentation.
This saw New Testament scholars beginning to work in areas of discourse, rhetoric, narrative imagination and relationship of authorship to authority. (Mack 1993: 26) The scholars began examining social formation, human society structures and the way in which myths and rituals were used to shape a group's identity.

It was in this context that there was a resurgent interest in the idea of Q. And this was for reasons other than solving the synoptic problems of the gospels. Attention was given to a host of extra-canonical writings from the early periods of Christian history. In the case of Q attention was given - and still is - to the establishment of the text, the literary form of composition and the early history of transmission and composition.

Text critical studies of Q have been produced by Siegfried Schultz, Wolfgang Schenk, Athanasius Polag and Dieter Fuller. In 1988 John Kloppenborg published a further work on Q parallels123 which has assumed the status of the standard text of reference for Q studies especially in the United States. Coupled to the gospel of Thomas, support to the theory of Q is being used in an attempt to pry Christian faith from its biblical moorings. (Linnemann 1995: 19)

What is interesting is that Q, which is considered as a sayings source excludes much of the same kind of material that it includes such as material found in all

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three synoptic gospels. For Linnemann (1996: 8) the deeper one probes\textsuperscript{124} the less convincing the Q hypothesis appears.

The problem in using Q is that as a document it is striking for its paucity or references to Jesus with a corresponding dearth of characterisation of him. Thus conclusions drawn on the basis of Q about the historical Jesus are thus suppositions made about the kind of person who would say the sort of things found in Q. (Vaage 1989: 159) And when a person supposes there will always be disagreement about what could be applicable or not.

There is a fundamental disagreement amongst contemporary scholars as to whether the teaching or the actions of Jesus are likely to have been historically preserved. One group holds that the narratives about Jesus are highly coloured by mythology but that some of his teachings have been preserved in the hypothetical Q source.\textsuperscript{125} Other scholars are quite sceptical about this, doubting even the existence of the Q hypothesis.\textsuperscript{126}

There are prominent and serious scholars who believe that Q is a modern fiction from start to finish. Also there are important differences of opinion

\begin{footnotes}
\item[124] For a detailed statistical analysis of Linnemann’s rejection of the Q hypothesis see her reasoned and systematic approach in The Last Gospel of Q - Fact or Fantasy included in the Biography.
\item[125] An example is John Dominic Crossan in his The Historical Jesus (see Bibliography) is a prominent and recent defender of Q which he regards as an independent and to some degree reconstructable source.
\item[126] William Farmer in his The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem, together with his school are the most well known critics of the Q hypothesis.
\end{footnotes}
about Q's historical, geographical or theological location within early Christianity or on its supposed stages of redaction.

**The Gospel of Thomas**

As will be seen there is a commonality amongst some scholars holding to the Q hypothesis about a relationship in thought between Q and the gospel of Thomas. They are adamant that no modern discussion of Jesus and the origins of Christianity can be complete without inclusion of what Q and the witness the gospel of Thomas has to offer.

In 1945 13 leather-bound volumes - known as the Nag Hammâdi Codices - were discovered at Jabal al-Tarif which overlooks the fertile Nile valley close to the modern town of Nag Hammâdi in upper Egypt. After years of being bought, sold, traded and smuggled the material was finally assembled in the Coptic museum in Cairo.

The codices contained more than 50 Christian, Jewish and pagan tractates, most of them hitherto unknown, dating from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE. Again for those scholars who are proponents of the Q hypothesis the codices are considered to be the single most important archaeological find of the 20th century for the study of the New Testament and the origins of Christianity. (Koester & Patterson 1990: 30) Amongst this material was found the gospel of Thomas.
The gospel of Thomas probably originated in eastern Syria. Speculation is that it was composed in the town of Eddessa. Other documents connected with the gospel of Thomas - the book of Thomas and the acts of Thomas - come from this region. Further backing for this geographic identification is the fact that only in this region was Thomas known as Judas Didymus Thomas as he is identified in the gospel of Thomas and the other Thomas works amongst writers of East Syrian origin. This is not undisputed as some scholars suggest that the Thomas tradition widely attested in East Syria could be accounted for by its popularity and not necessarily for its origin.

There have been a group of scholars who over the years had known about a gospel attributed to Thomas but the discovery at Nag Hammâdi was the first occasion that the full document had been revealed. A snippet from the gospel was quoted by the 3rd century Christian apologist Hippolytus who was writing between 222 and 235 CE. This reference by Hippolytus was to inform his readers that the gospel of Thomas was being used by a suspicious heretical gnostic group. Origen also mentioned that heterodox groups were using a gospel of Thomas. It was thus assumed that the writings could hardly have preserved words of Jesus from an early tradition. (Koester & Patterson 1990: 30)

However when the full text of the gospel of Thomas became available it was seen that it did not primarily contain mysterious gnostic speculations. Rather it

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127 The document contains a Coptic collection of sayings which begins with the words "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Judas Didymus Thomas wrote down."
was a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus. The gospel of Thomas has no narrative material and no reference within the sayings tradition to any actions of Jesus including his miracles. Genres include wisdom sayings, parables, sayings about the law, brief dialogues and prophetic sayings. Strikingly christological titles, references to Jesus' death and resurrection and apocalyptic sayings are almost completely absent.

About half of the sayings have parallels in the canonical gospels. This gave ammunition for those scholars who promote the existence of Q as an early sayings gospel. Both Helmut Koester and James M Robinson strongly advocate this view.

In the years following the publication of the discovered gospel of Thomas several scholarly positions have been set out in reference to the gospel. Some scholars regard it as a late composition and therefore of little or no value for recovering material from the earliest tradition of the sayings of Jesus. There are some who argue that it is a compendium of sayings based on the canonical gospels and that the writer's interpretation of the sayings of Jesus is a deliberate attempt at gnosticising the canonical tradition of Jesus' words. It was the Bultmannian Ernst Haenchen who argued that the gospel of Thomas was a later gnostic interpretation of the gospel tradition, whose original kerygmatic cast had already been set in the canonical gospels. (Patterson 1990: 614)
Patterson (1990: 623) is adamant that the gospel of Thomas is not partly a combination of a gnostic gospel and Jewish wisdom speculation as is alleged in some quarters. It also has for Patterson a large corpus of sayings whose ethos is social radicalism. This is supported by other scholars opting for an early date with the hypothesis that the writings are a trustworthy tradition.

There is also a view that the rise of gnosticism is not a late Christian phenomenon as even among the other material found at Nag Hammâdi there are a number of texts showing a legacy of Jewish gnosticism which suggests it to predate the beginnings of Christianity. The gospel of Thomas certainly reflects a gnosticism in a state of growth, without a developed cosmology, doctrine of aeons, which can be explained as a further development of a gnosticising tendency which is inherent in the wisdom tradition. (Theissen & Merz 1996: 41)

Witherington (1995:48) who has made an extensive study of the gospel of Thomas finds no evidence that suggests that the gospel is a 1st century document. Theissen & Merz (1996: 38) differ because they feel the Oxyrhynchus Papyri is conclusive that 140 CE is the latest date of composition.

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129 After the Nag Hammâdi discovery 3 papyri found in Oxyrhynchus at the beginning of the 20th century were identified as Greek fragments of the gospel of Thomas. However divergence in the wording and the sequence of sayings show that the papyri were not originals from which the Coptic text was directly translated.
What is of interest to theologians is that the gospel of Thomas shows that a gospel without a passion narrative is quite possible. Thus a theology grounded on Jesus' words, without any particular interest in his passion and resurrection. Like Q the sayings have no reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. This is in complete contrast to Paul's striking use of the passion story in his missionary proclamation. It is however dubious to hypothesise as do some scholars that both Q and the gospel of Thomas came from communities where sayings gospels were the only or main forms of gospels in use. This position is especially supported by the fact in the case of the gospel of Thomas in view of the other Thomas documents mentioned above. This also is relevant in casting doubt that there ever was a Q community as advocated by some North American New Testament scholars if that implies that a Christian community used as their sacred tradition only the Q collection of sayings without some form of passion and resurrection traditions.

Nevertheless the absence of the passion and resurrection traditions lead to some interesting speculation. For example it can be contemplated that reflections on Jesus' death and resurrection may have only been seen as important in some parts of the early church. It is certainly a key element in the Christianity found in Paul's letters. It could also be implied there was no unanimity in primitive Christianity on this matter to the extent that some parts of the primitive Christian community did not make the resurrection the focal point of their theological consideration and of their Christian faith. In this form of Christianity the significance of Jesus to those who it is theorised
accepted both Q and the gospel of Thomas in their normative belief lay in his words and not in his deeds. Yet this also leads to the thought that the lack of interest in Jesus’ death and resurrection, which was repudiated by gnosticism, could support the church fathers’ view that the gospel of Thomas was a heretical or gnostic document.

Another feature of the gospel of Thomas is that while it has a high christology there is an almost complete absence of christological titles. With the title messiah being absent it contrasts with other Gnostic writings. It also differs markedly from the Q hypothesis where the title Son of Man is prominent as a designation of Jesus. Scholars who give strong credence to Thomas and Q explain this anomaly by asserting that Q was composed in two successive stages. In the earlier stage the understanding of Jesus as the Son of Man was not present.

Despite the strong motivation of scholars like John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg and Burton Mack that the gospel of Thomas is an early 1st century document other recent and equally responsible scholarship dates the earliest composition of Thomas to be about 140 CE which would be more than 40 to 70 years after the writing of the canonical gospels. Nothing seems to support the modern liberal scholarship theory that the gospel of Thomas was a model for Q in the 35-65 CE time span.
In summary the gospel of Thomas suggests an original charismatic movement and promotes the hypothesis that from the beginning the sayings of Jesus were handed down principally by itinerant charismatics promoting a radical social Christianity.

William R Farmer\textsuperscript{130} suggests a reason for the gospel of Thomas being promoted for reconstructing early Christianity. It is because if the gospel of Thomas was of late 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 4\textsuperscript{th} century composition it could not easily take the historical Jesus off its New Testament foundation. The same point applies to Q. Nevertheless liberal scholars are resolute in using both Q and the gospel of Thomas together as they are seen to reinforce one another. This of course raises a very pertinent question of how a heretical or gnostic writing could be used as the prototype for the construction of the canonical gospels.

Linnemann (1996: 13) who has made a special study of both Q and the gospel of Thomas sees a clear motive by those advocating an early dating of both documents. Both Q and the gospel of Thomas are seen by Linnemann to give a biblical basis for persons who do not accept Jesus as the Son of God, reject his atoning death on the cross and deny his resurrection. They can then combine their newly minted biblical basis with early church diversity to justify calling themselves Christians despite their aberrant convictions.

What seems evident within responsible scholarship is that contrary to the ability of dating with some certainty the writings of the canonical gospels there is no proof that Q ever existed\(^{131}\) or that the gospel of Thomas was composed other than in late gnostic thinking. Such a view is supported by Patterson (1990: 617) who notes the exclusion of the gospel of Thomas material in what he defines as the high quality of contributions by third questers and who concentrate on the significant events of Jesus' life. To those participating in the third quest the gospel of Thomas has no value given its lack of biographical happenings.

Despite this it is worth noting that the eminent scholar Joachim Jeremias\(^ {132}\) made extensive use of the gospel of Thomas as a form-critical tool in his construction of what Jeremias contends is the original proclamation of Jesus. Norman Perrin\(^ {133}\) also finds applicability in the gospel of Thomas for his discussion on Jesus' teaching.

The balance of evidence seems to sustain a position of some scepticism in using the gospel of Thomas as a major source for reconstructing the teaching of the historical Jesus; not least because of the document's theological tendencies. These inclinations, especially its gnosticising agenda, are not found

\(^{131}\) John P Meier (A Marginal Jew. Volume 1. 1991. New York. Doubleday. Included in Bibliography) puts the matter succinctly and humorously: I cannot help thinking that biblical scholarship would be greatly advanced if every morning all exegetes would repeat as a mantra: "Q is a hypothetical document whose exact extension, wording, originating community, strata, and stages of redaction cannot be known."


154
in the synoptic gospels. This should be seen as a meaningful sign that the gospel of Thomas arose, at least in its present form, in the 2nd century when gnosticism was well developed. This does not mean that the gospel of Thomas may not occasionally preserve an early authentic saying not found in the canonical gospels.

All this leads to the other sensational archaeological finding of this century when the writings known as the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Some of the more recent and sensational claims in the search for the historical Jesus have been based on the purported new evidence stemming from the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered in the late 1940s at Khirbet Qumran. It consists of a substantial body of literature covering the Hebrew bible, other religious compositions, and works proper to a particular Jewish sect. (Vermes 1975: 12) A great deal still remains to be published.

The value of these documents are that they are unaffected by either Christian or Rabbinical censorship. Historians thus have at their disposal not just another aspect of Jewish belief and customs. Rather they have the whole organisation,
teaching and aspirations of an inter-testamental religious community known as the Essenes.

Despite the much publicised views of Barbara Thiering \(^\text{134}\) there is little to support her opinion that Jesus was an Essene or was even significantly influenced by them. What is of importance in the study of the historical Jesus is that Jesus, his followers and the Essenes shared the same territory, nationality, chronological period and adversaries - namely, the Romans, Sadducees and intermittently the Pharisees and the Zealots. So the idea of a relationship between both the Essenes and the Jesus movement is plausible. While Jesus was not an Essene he may have shared more with them than the same time frame, nation and place. It can be no coincidence that both groups emphasised the sinfulness of humanity, the need of God's grace, the eschatological time, the presence and power of Satan and the demons. Both groups were products and to a certain extent examples of Jewish apocalypticism.

Yet any comparison also shows vast differences. The Essenes were extreme legalists and, for the sake of purity, quarantined themselves from outsiders. In contrast Jesus rejected legalistic rules - especially concerning the Sabbath - and involved himself with all ranks of humanity. This underlines the fact that Christianity did not evolve out of only one sect on the fringes of a normative Judaism. Christianity developed out of many currents.

In the search for the historical Jesus the value of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that they give light to a previously dark period of history and especially Jesus' theological environment. They reveal the social settings of the pre-70 CE Palestine Jews. In short they provide the ideological landscape of Jesus' life and enable an understanding of the distinctive features of Jesus' theology.

The framework of the Dead Sea Scrolls gives scholars the opportunity to evaluate the uniqueness and the contours of Jesus of Nazareth. It also shows the genesis and genius of earliest Christianity and the reasons it became distinguishable from Judaism.

Summary

To summarise this chapter the idea of Q and the gospel of Thomas being primary documents in the solution of the Jesus mystery are rejected. Also discarded is the suggestion that the data that has thus far emerged from the Dead Sea Scrolls causes a radical re-evaluation of Jesus or the assumption that he was a member of the Qumran community.

But what is important about these documents in the search for the historical Jesus is that scholars must remain open to all possible sources of information - both canonical and non-canonical. If, for example, fresh evidence arises from the work being carried out on the Dead Sea Scrolls which speaks clearly about Jesus then careful attention must be given to it.
It must be a golden rule for theology that all sources must be evaluated with critical and non-discriminatory scrutiny. It is not correct as is promoted by many liberal scholars that the canonical gospels must be treated with high scepticism while there is a high receptivity - almost blinked - given to non-canonical gospels and other extra-canonical sources.

Another important aspect for theology is that earlier documents are on the whole likely to be more reliable and closer to the source and its original form than later documentation which becomes more susceptible to tradition enhancement.

The vast majority of critical scholars still believe the canonical gospels, especially the synoptics, are the earliest resources for research into the historical Jesus.

The question that now becomes pertinent is where the foundation of Christian faith is based. Is it the New Testament writings or historical occurrences, particularly the history of Jesus of Nazareth.
Chapter 11

HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

Christian faith has about it a concern with a symbol system, a message and a possibility of self-understanding. It has a primary reference to the person Jesus of Nazareth in whom God is believed to have resided in the world in a definite time and place and in a definite life.

Johnson (1984: 31) confirms this definition of Christian faith in that he sees the centre of Christian faith not to be a message, law or set of principles but rather the person of Jesus of Nazareth, confessed as the Christ, the self-revelation of God.

Within this definition of the belief system, Christian faith affirms the salvation of God in Jesus Christ and is a responsive trust in God, whose self-manifestation came about in Jesus of Nazareth. There is thus an essential link with Jesus and his history which forms an inner dimension of Christian faith. But this raises the question whether knowledge of Jesus in his past actuality is of prime necessity for faith. While knowledge about the historical Jesus contributes to Christian faith it is felt by some theologians not to be the only source of faith. It is clearly the view of these theologians that the proclamation
of the early church was grounded on the experience of the resurrected Jesus and this in effect was the origin of Christian faith. Other theologians differ and see the historical Jesus as an important content to the Christian faith image.

If indeed Jesus' history is accepted as an important ingredient for faith it becomes clear that one of the shortcomings of much of the recent literature about the historical Jesus is the premise that history is unproblematic. There appears no need in the writers' approach to define what is meant when the term history as related to Jesus of Nazareth is used.

In much of the literature emanating from North America it is noticeable that the term historical is normally opposed to the mythical. There is the inference that one refers to what really happened and the other to something that was made up. In this historical equals true while non-historical equals false. It is thus appropriate to consider what the business of history is all about.

History is a mode of human knowing. It is an interpretative activity. Human events in time and space - often but not necessarily written - are the product of efforts to make sense and to interpret such experiences. It should be accepted that there has to be intrinsic limitations to this form of knowing. Also there is not much difference in these limitations even if the human event was recent. Historical knowing has proved to be analogous to a sieve that catches the large pieces but lets the fine substance fall through.
Further there is a selectivity about which human events to record. Not everything that happens is recorded nor is everything that is recorded preserved. Thus an event which is a truly important event may sometimes be known only by a single sentence in one book. Historical evidence is very much limited to what interpretation is given by observers or participants to such events.

At the end of the 20th century historians can still be found who are still overlooking the cautions of both George Tyrrell and Albert Schweitzer that the liberal lives of Jesus were no more than mirror-reflections of the views of 19th century humankind. In recent times lives of Jesus have and are being written or portraits created about Jesus which reveal more of the concerns of the writer's themselves than the likely character of Jesus himself. In fact this difference evidences deterioration in that with the weakening of church structures and the increasing specialisation of theology, coupled with a general decline in general theological literacy, the new pictures being presented of Jesus range over even a wider spectrum than before and are seen to be venturing into areas which in the previous century would have been unthought of. 135

Part of the complexity and difficulty of the best historical research is to find a way through the labyrinth of subjectivity and self-interest to be found not only in what has past but also what is in the present. It is difficult to carry out such

135 Like the sexuality of Jesus
self-criticism in a consistent manner. To accomplish an authentic historiography is a daunting task.

Notwithstanding these difficulties in historiography the theological impetus to know who Jesus really was in history is of major importance for Christian faith. Christian faith has a historical context to the factuality of the history of Jesus. Further this is within the history of God's self-manifestation.

But this in itself raises the issue where to find the historical Jesus. The gospels are virtually the only sources of information about Jesus. But they are precisely gospels. They are in reality proclamations of Jesus as the one in whom God has come, not accounts of Jesus' life. (Macquarrie 1977: 274) The gospels are strongly coloured by the faith and the teachings of the early church. Nevertheless as the gospels are the main sources of reference it is crucial for Christian faith to determine what the evangelists said about Jesus and keep an open mind to discover what they claimed to see in Jesus whom they recognised as the Christ.

No one should question the validity of trying to delve behind the faith testimonies to determine the historical situation from which they arose and to reconstruct it. The ideal would naturally be the re-enactment of the original situation. But it has to be acknowledged this is impossible. As the gospels are a finite human work the historical presuppositions made will never get beyond provisional probabilities. These are always susceptible to correction because the
view and means are limited. Also every investigator’s subjectivity is a factor to be taken into account.

John Dominic Crossan has no doubt that the historically-read Jesus, now seen in terms of the best contemporary scholarly work, is for non-gnostic Christianity an integral component of Christian faith. The Christ of faith, however portrayed, is a legitimate interpretation of the meaning and significance of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth who lived then and there. (Carlson 1994: 42) Crossan accepts that it is certainly possible to have Christian faith without any constitutive reference to the historical Jesus. He calls it gnostic Christianity. Crossan sees its possible trajectory already latent in the gospel of Thomas. Also Crossan sees Christian faith to be very much a belief in the historical Jesus as the manifestation of God. At the heart of Christianity there is always the dialectic between an historically-read Jesus and a theologically-read Christ. Crossan argues that the structure of Christianity will always be: this is how we see Jesus-then as Christ-now.

Borg (1996: week 2) polemises against those who assert either the historical Jesus, as reconstructed by historians, to be normative for Christian faith or the canonical/narratival Jesus is normative. Borg does not subscribe to an either/or approach but sees both the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus - the Jesus of Christian experience and tradition - as significant for Christian faith.
Historical investigation in itself cannot lay the ground for faith. With its limited means and empirical orientation, it cannot specifically assert that God is actively present in Jesus. Historical research nevertheless has the important function to correct, refine and elucidate faith's presuppositions. (Berkhof 1986: 283)

Crossan (1995: 214) is convinced that reason and revelation, or history and faith, or historical reconstruction and credal articulation cannot contradict each other unless there is a misreading of one or both of these alternatives. It is necessary to hold these alternatives in tensile dialectic. Thus, for example, while in theory revelation is superior reason, in practice reason is the final judge. Thus another word for that dialectic of reason and revelation is divine consistency. It does not concern what God can do but what God actually does in the 1st century or the 20th century or any time.

Crossan (1995: 217-218) does not accept the argument that Christian faith itself tells what needs to be known about the historical Jesus. Christian faith shows how the historical Jesus (which is fact) is the manifestation of God for Christians here and now (which is interpretation). One cannot believe in a fact, only in an interpretation. And no amount of faith can turn an interpretation into a fact. Here occurs a lethal deceit that too often ravages the heart of Christianity. It is argued that Christians have facts not interpretations, that Christianity has history not myth, that Christianity has truth and others have lies. No longer is this sort of thinking accepted contemporarily. Christians, like other human
beings, live from out of the depths of myth and metaphor. And there still remains the urgent challenge for Christianity to accept its own foundational myth without shame or denial and that of the other world religions without hate or disparagement.

The question of whether the historical Jesus is necessary for Christian faith is a very ancient debate. One as old as Christianity itself. Crossan (1996: Week 1) views it a contest, on the one side, between catholic or universal or incarnational Christianity and, on the other side, docetic or gnostic or spiritual Christianity.

Catholic/universal/incarnational Christianity is a belief that the material universe was created by the one and only good God and was radically good. The human body was therefor profoundly good. And Jesus was utterly, fully and totally human. By this a confession of the divinity of Jesus could in no way diminish his true humanity.

Docetic/agnostic/spiritual Christianity on the other hand distinguishes between the good God of pure spirit and the evil god or godling who created the material universe which, so created, was therefor radically evil. Humans were in themselves good spirit trapped in evil matter. Accordingly Jesus’ body could only be a docetic, an apparent or a seeming one and that to confess his true

Crossan asserts that the ancient term Catholic must not be confused with the contemporary term Roman Catholic.
humanity was to render his divinity absurd. There were, of course, all sorts of divisions between these two groups and other groups besides them in the rich plurality of earliest Christianity. Crossan's view (1996: Week 1) is that research into the historical Jesus is theologically necessary for Christianity or, at least, for catholic as distinct from gnostic Christianity. For someone to deny the significance of historical reconstructions of Jesus has effectively severed the connection between the gospels and history. This, as far as Crossan is concerned, makes that person's position gnostic.

Johnson (1996: Week 1) disagrees with Crossan that it is an either-or matter. To dwell only in the present experience of Jesus is for Johnson - using Crossan's definition - to be gnostic (or something). To dwell only in a historical reconstruction reduces Jesus, ultimately, to a Socrates or a Apollonius. For Johnson Jesus' presence within Christianity continues in a way more powerful than mere memory or mere reconstruction. It is imperative, however, that the actual Jesus be affirmed in Christian faith. David Tracey 137 differs in seeing this being done through the memory of the tradition rather than the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

While admitting that his reconstructed Jesus is an interpretative construct, a matter of probability and not certainty, Crossan notes that probability is the very

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Furthermore this is not the 19th century's quest and Crossan's Jesus is not presented as the essence of Christianity. (Carlson 1994: 38)

Crossan claims that he has moved beyond the old quests for the historical Jesus and is offering theology an important way forward. His work suggests that Christian identity is inevitably the product of a process of dynamic interaction and selective reconstruction.

Not surprisingly Johnson (1996: 85) again offers a different position to Crossan by seeing the best practitioners of critical historiography making clear that the character of their craft is a limited mode of knowledge, dependent upon the frailties of the records of memory and the proclivities of self-interest. Serious historians appreciate how fragile their reconstructions are, how subject to revision, how susceptible to distortion when raised from the level of the probable to the level of the certain.

It becomes clear that faith irresistibly forces a personal choice with respect to Jesus. There are those who assert God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. 138 This goes far beyond the publicly historical phenomenon and is an expression of a faith which shows that what has been seen in Christ has worked upon this category of believers is some manner and led to a belief that in Christ God has become present in his reconciling work. (Macquarrie 1977: 273)

138 II Corinthians 5:19
One of the failures of the historical critical method in relation to earliest Christianity is its inability to deal adequately with the compositions of the New Testament in their literary integrity. From the Tübingen school onward historical criticism has involved the dismemberment of the literary compositions to find sources. Accordingly the New Testament writings - as writings - have been neglected.

The New Testament writings can respond to questions about the experiences and convictions that generated their composition, about the symbolic worlds used to interpret those experiences and about the ways in which the interaction of experience and symbol created new worlds of meaning within the first-century world. (Johnson 1996: 104) Macquarrie (1990: 353) feels that from the strands of tradition a tolerably reliable picture of Jesus can be constructed. While it falls far short of a biography of Jesus it is not negligible. Historical criticism of the gospels is far from being merely negative. In fact, by pruning away the docetic tendencies that very early entered into the picture of Jesus there is recognition that the one who permeates the gospels is no mythological demigod but a genuine human being in the fullest sense. (Macquarrie 1990: 358)

Berkhof (1986: 273) polemises against those who infer that the gospels are unreliable as historical sources and that the real Jesus is not accessible from them. In this line of thinking Christian faith cannot be grounded on the real Jesus. Berkhof has no doubt that the evangelists sought to advance the
proclamation of Christ. Thus they wished to pass on the story of a decisive and liberating event. The gospel writers accordingly wrote with a great measure of freedom and variation but they were very careful to pass on what really happened.

Accordingly for Christian faith the historical analysis of early Christianity and Jesus is worth doing. It must however be genuinely critical scholarship. It must operate within the intrinsic limitations imposed by the scarcity of evidence and controls. Accordingly historical reconstructions so favoured in the contemporary historical Jesus literature is exceedingly difficult because of insufficient sources or controls. Thus the claim of critical history to have supplanted the internal myth of Christian origins must be treated with caution. The wealth of multiple and conflicting hypotheses generated by the various publications of the historical Jesus give the impression that they are just as mythic as those they seek to supplant.

Christian faith relies for its meaning and truth by referring to the past. There is however a problem between a present-day faith and a past event which in the 20th century is seen as conceptually unstable. In the early part of the 19th century it was especially Søren Kierkegaard who charted out a position designed both to overcome Hegelian fusing of the rational and the historical; and to seal off faith from the damaging effects of historical enquiry.
This approach came to its fullest expression by the sophisticated efforts of Rudolf Bultmann whose *de-mythologising* project was designed to subdue the various difficulties that history and historical enquiry pose for faith. Bultmann’s position was that Christian faith was logically independent of any particular historical claim. Faith was thus not reliant on any single aspect of historical knowledge. By this faith was secure from any negative results of historical enquiry.

Bultmann’s position was that there was a distinction between the Jesus of history - who had no theological significance - and the Christ of faith - who was theologically decisive. This was basically a Kantian distinction mediated to Bultmann by both Kierkegaard and Martin Kähler.

In the latter part of the 20th century Wolfhart Pannenberg set out a quite different position. It is evident that Pannenberg is especially anti-Bultmannian. Indeed Pannenberg’s theology is an explicit effort to dislodge the Kantian-Kierkegaard immunisation of faith against the effects of historical research. Pannenberg’s conception of faith is that understood as a genuine form of knowledge rather than as a *risk* or a *self-understanding* without content.

Pannenberg has also boldly presented a historical *proof* for the resurrection of Jesus. It is part of his strategy of depicting the robust cognitive content of faith. Pannenberg repudiates the distinction between the *eyes of faith* and the *eyes*
of history by eliminating the very distinction between history and revelation in a way that is intentionally reminiscent of Hegel. (McGrath 1993: 213)

The theologies of Pannenberg and similar thinking theologians show an authentic new stage in the debate over faith and history. There is nevertheless a sense that the problems are still unresolved between the meaning and truth of Christian faith and the occurrence of particular historical events concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

The question that becomes apposite at this point is the relationship between history - particularly the historical Jesus - and christology.
Chapter 12

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

At the Council of Chalcedon the christological doctrine of the church was formulated that the identity of Jesus Christ involved a double rationality. Jesus Christ was one in being with the Father and one in being with the human race. This two natures terminology ensured a non-negotiable place within the church’s doctrine for the full humanity of the incarnate Word.

Chalcedon notwithstanding the humanity of Christ has proved difficult for christology. As Karl Rahner pointed out orthodox christology has a mysterious monophysite undercurrent running through it. Despite denials there is in much of christology a docetic tendency. To correct docetism requires a stress on the importance of the historical Jesus.

There is certainly enough consensus amongst scholars that Christians proclaimed greater and more significant things about Jesus after his death and resurrection than the historical Jesus had said about himself. Indeed post-Easter christology is grounded both historically and in terms of content because of the Easter events. Through this the historical Jesus became the kerygmatic Christ.
As seems to be always the case in theology strong arguments on both sides of the question must be considered. Some scholars claim that only the scantiest knowledge of Jesus is known or that as a matter of principle such knowledge is not needed. Other scholars assert that although the material is inadequate it is necessary for christology to know something of the life and character of Jesus. (Macquarrie 1990: 351)

The differing results about the historical Jesus are problematical for the systematic theologian who clearly does not want a theology dependent upon the changeable views of New Testament scholars. But the question of the historical Jesus cannot just be dismissed as if it does not matter for faith or theology whether there is any knowledge of Jesus and his history.

The systematic theologian is thus placed in a dilemma. Not wishing to disengage from historical questions concerning the proper interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth, the systematic theologian does not want to be trapped by them either. There is a school of systematic theology that holds that any interpretation of the significance of Christ other than that propounded by early Christianity is seemingly impossible. Thus, however reluctantly, it is held that the maxim of Martin Kähler holds: the real Christ is the preached Christ. If the first generations of Christians were wrong in their interpretation of the transcendent and supra-historical significance of Christ then not only has the

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Christ proclaimed today nothing to do with the Christ crucified yesterday but there seems no possibility of remedying the situation.

A plausible case can in fact be made that the current controversy over the historical Jesus is but the modern form of the old christological dispute of docetism, the ancient and apparently ingrained tendency to absorb the humanity of Jesus into the current perception of the divine in such a way that Jesus becomes a mere construct. (Johnson 1984: 36)

Since the beginning of Christian faith Jesus has been the subject of disagreement within Christianity itself. Where is the truth of Jesus to be found. In the earthly Jesus or in the risen Christ whom his church proclaimed and in whom it believed? (Moltmann 1974: 83) Adolf von Harnack’s aim was to return to the actual Jesus and to the pristine faith which Jesus taught and practised before it had become overlaid and distorted by the development of ecclesiastical dogma.

This foundation based on the history of Jesus is what underlies faith in Jesus. Christology must ask and show how this history of Jesus is the basis of faith. Pannenberg (1994: 282) sees this as the task of a theory of christological tradition. It traces the inner systematic consistency of the development of Christianity into a confession and clarification of Jesus Christ. It is also the benchmark to judge the aberrations and errors that have arisen in the course of christological development. It has a systematic character.
The difficulty is that the character of the gospel narratives are such that a satisfying historical reconstruction of Jesus' ministry is not possible. Much of the ancient testimony about the historical Jesus comes from the books of the New Testament. They cannot be read merely as a scholar might read other ancient documents, since that would be to disregard the faith character and the propaganda purposes of these writings.

As a result the gospels are not straightforward historical documents but are developing traditions of the early Christian movement put into written form in the last third of the 1st century. And it is the view of the radical form critics\(^{140}\) that the gospels are the final product of the period of oral tradition during which Jesus stories circulated as single units amongst and in response to the practical needs of the various branches of primitive Christianity. Despite fundamental polemics serious scholars have postulated that in the 40 to 70 years between the ministry of Jesus and the writing of the gospels, the early Christians not only adapted the traditions about Jesus to new circumstances, but also continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death. The gospels contain both their memories of Jesus of Nazareth and their ongoing experience of the post-Easter Jesus. (Borg 1994: 20) And since the early Christian community did not have a strong interest in history for history's sake the boundary between the original events and the growing faith of the community was not maintained. (McArthur 1969: 191) As a result each individual unit was at

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\(^{140}\) See Chapter 5
least coloured - if not created - by the community's faith. Also debatable are the conclusions of form criticism that the Christian community, like the rabbinic, transmitted the tradition in a professionally controlled fashion.

Some of the more conservative scholars would say that it is not the faith character of the gospels that makes them unhistorical. They yield traces of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but they are traces overlaid with the faith dimension. Additionally there is the view that what can be accepted as historical with a high degree of probability can be gleaned from the fundamental points of agreement in the gospel accounts together with outsider testimony and non-narrative New Testament evidence. The shortcomings of outsider testimony is the fact that one can almost count on the fingers of one hand the ancient extra-biblical testimonies to Jesus. These documents moreover tell very little about Jesus.

Alister McGrath (1984: 50) is a theologian of some stature who considers that there was at one time a bridge between the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ. This bridge was crossed by the early Christians. The bridge collapsed after them. A yawning chasm has been left which can never be crossed again from humanity's side. The historical Jesus has been left behind and the proclaimed Christ has marched into history. Any New Testament tradition

141 Such material includes the works of Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, Lucian, Josephus and a Baraita of the Babylonian Yakhud.
setting out the historical Jesus is considered a product of the community of faith in the light of their faith.

Such thinking is in line with the sceptical critique of William Wrede who identified in his theological approach three radical and fatal errors which he saw underlying liberal Protestantism.

1. The liberal theologians in appealing to later modifications of an earlier tradition when faced with unacceptable synoptic accounts of such aspects as miracles or contradictions between sources failed to apply this principle consistently. They failed to appreciate that the later belief of the community had a normative influence over the gospel writers at every stage of their work.

2. No account was taken of the motives of the evangelists. Liberal theologians simply excluded those portions of narratives considered unacceptable. They were content with what remained. There was a failure to determine the positive statements made by the evangelists. There is a need to approach the gospel narratives on their own terms and establish what the gospel writers wished to convey.

3. Because of the inadequate foundation used by liberal theologians there is confusion with what is conceivable in the gospel narratives with what actually took place. Thus liberal theologians tended to find in the gospels precisely what they were seeking on the basis of psychological guesswork. This in effect valued emotive descriptions more than strict accuracy and certainty of knowledge.

It was thinking similar to this that caused Martin Kähler to assert that the real Christ is the preached Christ. In Kähler's estimation it is simply impossible to
reconstruct the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth without committing the
most appalling and inexcusable historiographical errors. (McGrath 1984: 49) To
Kähler it is inevitable that any attempt to reconstruct Jesus of Nazareth would
be disputed by succeeding generations of scholars. The end result is
christological scepticism.

By ignoring the historical Jesus - upon which the proclaimed Christ is
ultimately based, and with reference to which the historical Jesus must
ultimately be justified - Kähler seemed at risk of basing christology upon
something which was not necessarily historical, but which was itself the
product of faith. It is accordingly theologically understandable to object to
Kähler's axiomatic correlation of the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ.
It is seen as a risk by basing the proclamation of Christ upon something that
was not ultimately historical. Kähler's response was his conviction that the
evangelists, writing from the background of the resurrection, had correctly
interpreted the life of Jesus in their collection of fragments. (Berkhof 1986: 274)
Accordingly for Kähler the New Testament epistles were reliable.

Notwithstanding the objections raised against Kähler's thinking, there can be
an element of validity to his arguments. To begin theological speculation on the
basis of the New Testament material itself means that one is not dealing with
raw data upon which to interpret. The New Testament is already an
interpretation of raw data. Personally committed individuals evaluated the
significance of Jesus Christ. Thus the literature cannot be isolated from their faith.

The choice offered by Kähler was either acceptance of the methodological point of departure of the New Testament tradition - and consider its associated theological implications - or else attempt an interpretation of the historicity of Jesus Christ which is likely to be significantly different from the Christ portrayed by the community of faith.

Nevertheless and despite Kähler’s powerful arguments theology cannot ignore the historical Jesus in its christology. It was Gerhard Ebeling who asserted that the person of the historical Jesus is the fundamental basis of christology and if it could be shown that christology was a misinterpretation of the significance of the historical Jesus, christology would be brought to an end.

Nowhere is this more evident than simply considering the interesting aspect of the historical Jesus having a sense of eschatological authority. There is consensus that Jesus saw the claim of a new world by his actions. (Theissen & Merz 1996: 513) He went beyond the Jewish charismatics and prophets that are known from canonical and non-canonical writings. This leads to a debate whether Jesus expressed his consciousness of authority implicitly without using christological titles or whether his consciousness of authority evoked expectations that were attached to Jesus by his disciples in the form of traditional honorific titles. There is the further alternative that Jesus explicitly
applied the honorific titles to himself. Thus the search for the historical Jesus has a bearing in distinguishing between implied, evoked and explicit christology.

It is likely that the primitive Christian view was already in the minds of the disciples before the Easter events. If so, the expectation that the kingly rule of God would result in a miraculous transformation of the world. For the disciples Jesus' death on the cross thwarted their hope that Jesus was the messianic saviour. This is nowhere better seen in the resignation of the disciples in the Emmaus story\textsuperscript{142} which indicated the failure of their expectations. The resurrection and the post-Easter appearances gave the disciples the certainty that Jesus was alive.

But this could not have led to the origin of post-Easter christology. The titles given to Jesus after Easter could not have been spontaneous as a result of Jesus rising from the dead. It is a valid speculation that the origin of christology can be understood if before Easter there was a claim to an exalted position (implied, evoked or explicit) which was confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus. This confirmation was the renewal amongst Jesus' disciples of the original expectations as well as a transcending of them. This is because the expectations were surpassed in that with the Easter events the bounds of death were transcended and, more importantly, only through God's actions.

\textsuperscript{142} Luke 24: 13-27
This also allowed Jesus' eschatology to be expected to the extent that the whole world of angels and demons were subject to the risen Christ and the one who was stronger than death was stronger than all other powers. And thus it becomes understandable that post-Easter christology extended beyond all claims to authority made by the historical Jesus.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1994: 277) is firmly opposed to any attempt to allow in any way a docetic element into christology. For Pannenberg christology begins with the primitive interpretation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth as God's messiah. The primitive Christian early view was a sense that in the person Jesus the pre-eminent Son of God came to earth.

If the historical Jesus is the starting point and the measure of all christological statements about the person of Jesus it gives rise to what Albrecht Ritschl \(^{143}\) in his theology called a christology from below to above. In this christological statements are viewed as an interpretation of Jesus' historical reality. Ritschl viewed all christological statements as the continuation of Jesus' historical work on earth. Thus the thinking is that God himself is known only in that which took place here below in the human history of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul Althaus, amongst others, associated his thinking with Ritschl in demanding that christology must move from below to above and that christology

must begin with the person and story of Jesus and consider from that point how Jesus requires and gains faith.

Of significance for a christology from below to above is that the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth needs to be seen against his political, cultural and religious milieu and his characteristics, personal stories, teaching and manner of believing. If this is done then there is christological assurance that the human nature of Jesus is seen not as an abstract notion but as a concrete history and not subsumed by the very God which is an equally essential part of the church's confession.

The concept of resurrection was central and constitutive in Christianity from the beginning. It is often said that the Christian faith stands or falls with the veracity of Jesus’ resurrection. Without a clear liberating event such as the Easter story, analogous to the Old Testament redemptive acts, Jesus’ ministry could be seen only as a mistake or a failure. Berkhof (1986: 282) clearly feels that on the question concerning the how of the resurrection, historical research must have a voice.

On a contrary note Macquarrie (1977: 289) considers it obvious that the resurrection is not a historical event in the same way that Jesus’ crucifixion on

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144 Chalcedon’s  

145 Chalcedon’s  

146 There is the early gospel formula in 1Corinthians 15:3f and that in Romans 10: 9 where salvation depends on confession of the lordship of Jesus which itself depends on his resurrection.
the cross was definitely a historical event. The difference was that the resurrection was not a publicly observable happening. Stories of the empty tomb and of the accompanying marvels look to Macquarrie like examples of the usual mythologising tendency of the gospel authors. Primitive Christianity in this manner sought to express the faith that God has acted in terms of objectifiable and empirically verifiable phenomena. The only proof is that in the living Christian community, then and today, the person of Christ still lives on as the Christian community. The announcement of Jesus' resurrection, understood as a divine ratification of his life, shows that his people recognised in Christ a sign of God's victory over death and a pledge of the salvation promised for all those who follow Christ in his church. (Fitzmeyr 1986: 13)

Whatever the character of the ministry of Jesus or the Jesus movement before his death, it was the experience of the transformed Jesus as Lord that marked the beginning of the Christian movement. Especially for the more conservative theologians the resurrection of Jesus is the necessary and sufficient cause of Christianity as a religious movement as well as the literature it generated.

In other words the resurrection of Jesus was the sort of powerful, transformative experience required to generate the kind of movement that was earliest Christianity and its literature. The resurrection was an affirmation to the primitive Christian movement of the value of the body of Jesus.
Wolfhart Pannenberg (1994: 285) feels strongly that the question whether the resurrection is part of the basis of faith cannot be separated from its facticity or historicity. If the resurrection was not a historical event but was still the decisive starting point of primitive Christian proclamation, as Bultmann assumed, then Pannenberg is adamant that no significance at all can be ascribed to historical knowledge as the basis of Christian confession of Christ. If, however, it is necessary to go back to the historical Jesus to protect the kerygma against the suggestion that it is mere myth, then, assuming that the resurrection is not historical, agreement must be sought between the kerygma and the message of Jesus without including the subject of Easter. In that circumstance the development of christological tradition would be unintelligible as a historical process. Thus the basis of Pannenberg’s thesis is that if the fact of Easter can be established (in a way that is yet to be described) then it is possible that the history of the confession of Christ up to the formation of the christological and trinitarian dogma of the church can explain the meaning that is intrinsic to the history of Jesus in the light of the Easter event.

John Dominic Crossan (1996: week 2) accepts the normative Christian belief in the risen Jesus. He approves of Johnson’s understanding of the resurrection as Jesus’ continuing powerful presence in the world among believers. It was the continued presence of absolutely the same Jesus in an absolutely different mode of

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147 Pannenberg made the resurrection the basic thesis of his publication Jesus - God and Man. (See Pannenberg 1994: 285)
existence. (Crossan 1995: 210) And Crossan sees it part of the North American quest to determine who is the Jesus in that risen Jesus.

Marcus Borg (1996: week 2) agrees on the importance of the resurrection for Christianity. But the important question posed is whether the physical body of Jesus had to be raised. The proponents of the Jesus Seminar\textsuperscript{148} and its sympathisers in the North American historical Jesus research would argue whether valuation of the body depends upon something happening to the corpse of Jesus. In this Borg underlines the view of the Jesus Seminar that it is not whether the physical body of Jesus was raised/transformed but whether such physicality is required for Christian faith. In essence Borg asserts that to think of Easter does not mean that this necessarily involves an empty tomb or that anything happened to the corpse of Jesus. To this Crossan (1994: 165) would add his voice to the enquiry whether the resurrection as traditionally understood is the only way or just one of the ways to express faith in the continuing power and presence of Jesus Christ in the world?

Pannenberg's thinking (1994: 287) on the resurrection of Jesus differs strongly with Borg and Crossan. Historically and substantively the resurrection for Pannenberg was the origin of Christianity. It is the fundamental foundation of christological statements of Christianity. Pannenberg accepts that while individual faith can believe without accepting the fact of the resurrection, faith

\textsuperscript{148} See chapter 9
of that kind is not theology. Only arguments count in theology. Theology
cannot ignore the question of the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ.

Pannenberg accordingly attaches much importance to the resurrection and the
historical necessity to show it did occur. The resurrection of Jesus anticipates in
history God's eschatological self-revelation, makes Jesus the Son of God and
retrospectively establishes Jesus' whole earthly life to be one of unity with God.

Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Kung show - although in a more reserved
approach - a similar structural pattern to Pannenberg in their christologies.
They aver that Jesus as he is known through historical reconstruction must be
the primary criterion for a christological account of Jesus' significance.

What is important about the resurrection event is that if the resurrection of
Jesus was not a historical event but was only an idea and yet this was still the
decisive starting point of primitive Christian proclamation, as assumed by
Bultmann, then no significance can be ascribed to historical knowledge as the
basis of Christian faith.

In the light of the conflicting opinion it is clear that historical research about
Jesus' resurrection compels a personal choice - which need not be unscientific -
yet will always carry one beyond the boundaries of the investigation. And thus
within christology it is appropriate to consider the doctrine of faith as it relates
to the subject of the historical Jesus research.
In the light of the foregoing debate it is apposite to state that the first task of christology can be defined as the critical verification of the Christian faith in its origin of Jesus and his history. This can be called the hermeneutics of its origin. The second task is a critical verification of Christian faith in its consequences for the present and the future. This is the hermeneutics of its effects and consequences. Both must constantly be related to one another. A limitation to the former could easily result in faith becoming sterile and ineffective. A limitation to the latter leads to the inward justification and the authority of faith would rapidly disappear.

It is conventional thinking that the believing Christian lay person is convinced that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same. For the believing Christian there is coherence - identity even - between the gospel picture and that offered by the Creed. (Vermes 1983: 16) Some theologians go so far as to imply that if historical research is necessary to faith, this would make faith basically a work. On the other hand, if the historical record is accepted as it come down as a special revelation of God then a person may act on the basis of that record and come to experience faith. (Anderson 1972: 66) What is also disturbing to some is the idea of faith being allowed to rest upon the provisional results of research which may be discarded by a succeeding generation. (McGrath 1984: 49)
There is no doubt that the historical Jesus is bound as a constituent of christology, insofar that christology's aim is to make intelligible the Christian confession that Jesus is the Christ. This corrects the tendency of monophysite distortion seen in recent christology. It makes understandable the assertion that the one Christ is one in being with humanity in his humanity.

Nevertheless as a contrary view and given the negative outcomes of the various quests for the historical Jesus it is a valid question whether there is any relationship possible between the historical conclusions about Jesus and christological affirmations. More so as historical research has not as yet produced practical certainty about Jesus. Because of this there has been a number of different theological approaches to the relationship between the historical Jesus and christology.

Firstly there is the historical certainty school which asserts that it is possible to have historical confidence about Jesus of Nazareth or, at least, aspects of his ministry. This is seen by those advocating this approach as essential for Christianity.

The infallibility of the bible has continued to be a declining idea amongst scholars. Although it has to be acknowledged there is a considerable majority of ordinary worshipping Christians who hold to this position. Within Roman Catholic thought the authority of the church is seen as the guarantee of the historicity of crucial aspects of Jesus' ministry. This can be gleaned from the
many decisions by that church’s Pontifical Biblical Commission which aims to protect catholic scholars from what is regarded as extreme conclusions by Protestant and secular scholarship. However recent publications of catholic scholars display an inclination to interpret the Commission’s decisions with elasticity. So much so that the Commission’s decisions are no longer regarded as authoritative. But it has to be stressed there is no consistency seen in this direction.

There is also within the historical certainty school a belief that the central elements of the ministry of Jesus is derived from faith experience. Thus a certainty about the continuity and commensurability\(^{149}\) of the historical figure of Jesus and the gospel portrait with whom the message is seen to originate.

Historical certainty is an interesting position despite the methodological difficulties in arguing from faith to history especially when no specific details of history has been obtained except for the person and character of Jesus and that in a very broad sense. There is no doubt that there are a significant number of Christians who seem to have little or no anxiety if historical research proves Jesus to have been substantially different from their Christ of faith. There is about this lack of anxiety a faith conviction that Jesus is known in whom there is belief.

\(^{149}\) This can be defined on the lines that if all the facts about the historical could be known it would be seen that the reality and the portrait were commensurate. This was a position argued by both JW Herrmann and P Althaus.
A second approach is that of the historical-risk school. In this school the validity of Christian faith is contingent upon the historicity of certain elements in the tradition. Thus there is a risk that historical investigation may deny that historicity. This is implicit in any view which insists that the facticity of certain events is crucial for Christian faith. This is the position taken by Ethelbert Stauffer who, at the same time, was willing to accept the verdict of historians about that facticity.

The problem with this school of thought in its acceptance of the probability character of historical research is that evidence against the traditional claim of Jesus would, at the most, be a probability decision. (McArthur 1969: 200) The other question that must be posed is if there is a simple majority (say 51%) against the historicity of a crucial fact, is Christian faith or the christology of that aspect abandoned? If the preponderance of evidence is ignored then the position must surely be in line with the first approach of historical certainty. Another perplexing feature of the historical-risk approach is the tension between a faith commitment which likely has an absolute quality and a historical-research conclusion which is only relative; although it is claimed to be essential to the faith commitment.

150 The Relevance of the Historical Jesus. E. Stauffer. 1960 London. SCM Press
The query is worth making as to whether those scholars who claim allegiance to the historical-risk category have thought through fully the implications of their stance.

There is a further relationship between knowledge of the historical Jesus and christological affirmations which can be described as immunisation-from-historical-research school. While scholars of this category do not reject the significance of history in the beginnings of Christian faith, there is an insistence that Christian faith originated out of the historical events of Jesus’ ministry. Thus the gospels emerged from history but it is no longer theologically important to know precisely - or even generally - what that history was. Thus what is theologically important especially in so far as christology is concerned is an encounter with the results of these events.

Scholars who are in line with this immunisation-from-historical-research approach are:

- Rudolf Bultmann who was concerned about humanity’s encounter with the authentic existence proclaimed in the kerygma. 151

- Paul Tillich who had concern with the transforming power of the New Being in the portrait of Jesus as the Christ. 152


Van Austin Harvey who saw the illumination of human existence to be the *perspectival image* raised by the Christ-event.\(^{153}\)

While using different language and despite divergent theological orientations there is on this point a common methodological approach.

In essence there is a result for these scholars about the fact of the ministry of Jesus which came into being through history, which continues in history and which can be encountered today. Thus the decision of faith is related to this encounter and not to the historian's reconstruction of the personality or life or ministry through which the new reality came into existence.

The immunisation-from-historical-research school is a radical but interesting solution to the difficulties of the probability character of all research conclusions, the uncertainties in the knowledge of past history generally and the historical Jesus in particular.

As opposed to a christological concern about the definition of the person of the historical Jesus the immunisation-from-historical-research approach encourages a Christianity which defines what God is doing in and through the historical Jesus. It is a statement about the Christ event broadly construed rather that a description of Jesus of Nazareth.

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This dissertation has thus far concentrated on the historical research for Jesus and the various subjects that can be associated within a theological context about the historical Jesus. It can be fairly stated that while the journey has been interesting it has also been unsatisfactory in solving the Jesus mystery. One of the features in the unsatisfactory search has been the pre-occupation - perhaps a fixation - with the use of the gospels and extra-biblical material as the basis of this research.

There are two other players who have been largely forgotten and overlooked in the problem of the historical Jesus. Namely Paul of Tarsus and James, the brother of Jesus. While Paul of Tarsus has received limited attention in his own right because of the New Testament material bearing his authorship, little attention has been given to the historicity of Paul and the part he had in early Christianity. In the case of James apart from a few references in the book of Acts, he has been effectively written out of the search for the historical Jesus.

It is thus appropriate to consider the roles of Paul and James in Christianity and whether this raises any solutions to the Jesus mystery. In fact it will be seen that in dealing with Paul the Jesus mystery deepens.
Chapter 13

THE PROBLEM OF PAUL

If Jesus has provoked controversy since his birth, just so has Paul of Tarsus since his entry into the Christian story. In Paul’s lifetime people threw stones at him. In contemporary times it is words! Nevertheless it is the single personality of Paul, who after Jesus, dominates Christianity’s beginnings.

Traditional belief is that Paul is the greatest teacher of Christianity after Jesus Christ. As an itinerant messenger of the Christian movement Paul’s writings mapped out his own contribution to the last stage of God’s plan for humanity. Paul is regarded as the great interpreter of Jesus’ mission.

However the problem is that if one considers the position carefully Paul explained in a way Jesus himself never did, how Jesus life and death fitted into a cosmic scheme of salvation stretching from the time of the creation of Adam to the end of time. (Maccoby 1986: 3)

What is strange is that in so many studies of Jesus while scholars have long subjected to the closest scrutiny the parts of the New Testament which speak about the life and career of Jesus there is not the same degree of critical scrutiny of the parts that speak about Paul. In fact the information about Paul is generally accepted at face value. This is probably due to a confusion in the
reading of the gospels and the timing of their writing with the timing of their story. If Jesus died about 30 CE and Paul wrote in the 50s CE and if the gospels were written after 70 CE, the Pauline epistles cannot be read through the prism of the later gospels. Yet this is what is all too often the case. Conventional thinking among lay readers is gospels first, Acts second and letters third with a natural imputation of some chronological order in this. But modern scholarship is agreed that the gospels are later writings than the Pauline epistles.

In fact the earliest known writings referring to the historical Jesus are to be found in Paul’s epistles. And the surviving epistles have been dated from the 14th year of Paul’s preaching career (circa 54 CE) with some being written while Paul was in prison.

Nothing is known about Paul after about 62 CE. It is traditionally believed that Paul was put to death in Rome in the course of the Christian persecutions which marked the reign of the Roman emperor Nero from 54 to 68 CE. Whether or not Paul was actually executed is not certain.

When the gospels are read through the prism of Paul’s writings the Jesus mystery is deepened in that the epistles of Paul relating to the Christ of faith contrast significantly with the canonical gospels which tradition has it represent thinking about a religion only a few decades old. If Jesus was alive about 30 CE, it should have been expected that the principal Pauline writings of about 60 CE...
would have indicated this. (Wells 1975: 17) Paul's copious writings contain almost no details of Jesus' life. Only two historical points about Jesus emerge from Paul's letters. One is that Jesus was crucified at some unspecified date. The other aspect is that Jesus had several brothers, one of whom was James. Even the authorship of the material in the New Testament alleged to be by Paul is problematical. Scholars feel that Collosians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, the three Pastorals (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) were only written under his name.

Contemporary scholarship estimates the gospels - the earliest surviving accounts of the earthly mission of Jesus - to have been compiled and redacted in the latter decades of the 1st century CE. These canonical gospels probably relate to a number of traditions about Jesus which might have been passed down orally from the preaching of the contemporaries and associates of the earthly Jesus. The dilemma posed is if the gospels are based on reliable historical tradition why do Paul and other Christian writers make no reference to this tradition.

It was about 40CE that Paul appeared on the scene of Christian history. He claimed to be a strict Pharisee background. But even this claim to a genuine

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154 1 Timothy 6:13, which is not considered an authentic writing of Paul, adds by Pontius Pilate.
155 Galatians 1: 19
156 Many contemporary New Testament scholars prefer to speak of the gospel sources more cautiously and ambiguously as traditions (Salibi 1992: 10)
157 Or upholder of Jewish religious traditions.
Pharisaic family is doubtful and may have been a ploy by Paul to increase his status. Paul's desire to be thought of as a person of Pharisee upbringing should be seen in the light of the high regard for Pharisees throughout the Roman and Parthian empires as a dedicated group who upheld religious ideals in the face of tyranny, supported leniency and mercy in the application of laws. (Maccoby 1986: 6)

Within New Testament writings Paul is depicted initially as an ardent persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Paul lived in Damascus, the capital of present-day Syria. Paul freely admitted that he never knew Jesus in his lifetime; his conversion having come about a vision of Jesus. This event convinced Paul that Jesus was much more important than Judaic law. Thus Paul became - or better he appointed himself - an apostle of Jesus Christ which was the term that Paul now began to call Jesus of Nazareth. Paul claimed his interpretations of Jesus Christ came by personal inspiration. Paul professed a personal acquaintance with the resurrected Jesus which was gained through visions and transports to heavenly realms. In Paul's estimation his relationship with Jesus was superior to any familiarity with Jesus in his earthly life.

In his letters Paul claims to be the founding father of Christian congregations. It is likely that he was the primary missionary for some of them. But it is doubtful that Paul was the first to introduce the Christ gospel to all the places or which the writer of the book of Acts gives Paul the full credit.
Paul nowhere describes his missionary strategies or activities. It is only from the book of Acts that there is a traditional picture of Paul on the move, arriving at a local synagogue in a town to gain a hearing. It seems that Act's accounts of Paul should be seen as a support for the author's own theory of Christian beginnings. There are at time divergence with what Paul says about the same places and events.

Paul's conversion to the Christ-idea should be understood as switching sides in a social and ideological battle in the growing centre of a Judaism in the process of Hellenisation. And Paul's mission should be understood with such an audience in mind. (Mack 1995: 104) Only such a mixture of cultures would account for the willingness of some to receive Paul's message as well as the constant arguments of those who opposed Paul.

Paul's contribution was to turn the Christ-idea into a proclamation. Those of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem did not see their proclamation to the rest of the world. Their aim was to justify the origin of their own movement.

Paul's emphasis was freedom from the law. In using this argument Paul could enable Gentiles to become Christians and join the house of Israel without keeping the Judaic law. It naturally encountered strong opposition.
Paul also saw his own position as unique. In his letters Paul claims to have had supreme mystical experience quite apart from his Damascus experience. He also claimed to have special marks or stigmata which showed his self-identification with the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. These markings made Paul in his own eyes and that of his followers the supreme embodiment of the power of the mystery God, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Maccoby 1986: 107)

Because of this claim of uniqueness Paul’s religious approach for the duration of his life is depicted as a clash with the Jerusalem based apostles. The more one examines Paul’s references to the other apostles his respect for the Jerusalem leadership can be seen to be merely superficial and quite formal. Paul refers to them in cutting terms. Paul regarded his position as heavenly chosen. Paul asserted that he was neither appointed by any person, nor the earthly Jesus whom he had never met, nor any other body of people such as the elders of the Jerusalem church. He did not carry any letter of appointment from the Jerusalem church. Paul regarded his position as beyond temporal authority and not beholden to it.

On their side the Jerusalem apostles did not consider Paul their equal and disapproved of his preaching. (Salibi 1982: 23) Paul regarded the Jerusalem based apostles to be weak. The term is used often in Paul’s letters, always in a derogatory manner, in references to the leaders of the Jerusalem community.

158 For example 2 Corinthians 12: 2-3.
159 Galatians 6:17
particularly and to their directives.\textsuperscript{161} This remained the position for 17 years and the Jerusalem leadership only recognised Paul as an \textit{Apostle to the Gentiles} because they needed his financial help.\textsuperscript{162} Even then their opposition to him did not entirely cease. It would be fair to state that the old disciples of Jesus had to be bought at a price.

It was Ferdinand Christian Baur who, in a daring statement in the times of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, pointed out that Paul was by no means necessarily as revered a figure among members of the earliest church as often popularly supposed.

This introduces another aspect of the Jesus mystery. Any consideration of the historical Jesus and Christian origins should also take account of James, the brother of Jesus. Tradition has it that he was known as James the Just because of his righteousness and piety. Yet in the manner of Christianity's development and the central role assigned to Paul, it is apparent that James was consigned to the \textit{scrape-heap} of history.

James emerged as a principal personality and leader of the Jerusalem Church.\textsuperscript{163} But there is subsequent silence in Acts about his fate. It is all too rarely appreciated how little the surviving documentation tells of Jesus' original fully Jewish followers. What is also apparent is that when the New Testament

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{160} 2 Corinthians 3: 1
\item \textsuperscript{161} Romans 14: 1-2 and 1 Corinthians 8:7 - 9: 22
\item \textsuperscript{162} Galatians 2: 1-10
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
reached its final form there was a marginalisation of James and he was ignored in the further progress of Christianity.

The question is valid as why there is such reticence about James. Despite the popular supposition that Peter was the first head of the church, it can be gleaned from a variety of sources that James was the first true leader after Jesus' ascension. An example is the gospel of Thomas which in logion 12 represents Jesus naming James the Righteous as the disciples leader after his own departure. This is also found in the writings of the 2nd century Jewish author Hugesippus and 4th century Eusebius of Caesaria who describe James the Righteous as fit to be elected to the episcopal throne of the Jerusalem church.

So this marginalisation of James in the New Testament writings is all that more suspicious when contrasted to the importance given about James in the 40s to 60s CE when he was the central figure in the Jerusalem church. To have been the head of the Jerusalem church was in reality to have been the leader of the movement commenced by Jesus - whatever this may have been called or however it was structured in this period.

When this is considered against the way that the doctrine of the supernatural Christ was developed and the tradition about his miraculous birth it can be accepted that in the book of Acts and other New Testament writings there was

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163 Acts 12:17
more than just a down-playing of James and the other members of the family of Jesus.

It is fair to assert there was a 1st century lash of theologies. There was Paul's theology based on his other-worldly experience and James' theology based on his fraternal knowledge of the human Jesus. And despite what should have been the authority due to this fraternal knowledge it was Paul's theology that triumphed and has come down through the centuries as Christianity. And James and the Jerusalem followers of Jesus were effectively written out of scripture. Thus Eisenman (1997: xix) sees that it is only from extra-biblical sources that a picture of James is possible.

From these extra-biblical sources it can be determined that James died about 62 CE at the hands of a hostile establishment. This was before the events that culminated in the uprising against Rome and the destruction of the Temple in 66-70 CE. In 70 CE Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans. Later in 135 CE the Jewish community along with the Jewish and Gentile followers of the Nazarene Way were forcibly dispersed from Jerusalem. The Jamesian community was reputed to have moved to Pella beyond the Jordan. And from that point only the scantiest references can be found about this community. To all intents and purposes it can be said it disappeared from the pages of history and the religious group directly formed by the historical Jesus ceased to exist in history.

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164 This is contained in the writings of Eusebius
and in particular Christian history. Christianity, as preached by Paul and his followers, was the survivor in the rest of the Roman world.

What can be stated with some certainty is that the movement led by James was something quite different from the religion that developed under the missionary activity of Paul. Also apparently it was the followers of Paul who first called themselves Christians while the Jerusalem followers called themselves Nazarenes.\(^{165}\)

It is these developments that have been responsible for one of the most vexing problems in the history of New Testament scholarship in the relationship between Jesus and Paul. Most scholars are agreed that Paul never knew the historical Jesus or he would have made a point of saying so.

Although Paul became one of the most prolific representatives of the movement that conventional Christian thinking claims began with Jesus, Paul pays so little attention to the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth that, paradoxically, the conclusion is that Paul simply was not interested in the historical person Jesus. It is meaningful that Ernest Käsemann mentions that the astounding thing about the New Testament is that except in the gospels, the earthly Jesus has such small significance in it.

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\(^{165}\) Their special faith or cult was referred to as the Way.
A meaningful point is that Paul is shown in the New Testament writings to have had two meetings with James. This implies that Paul was personally convinced of the historicity of Jesus. If indeed Paul was a contemporary of the earthly Jesus their paths did not cross. AN Wilson (1997: 536) suggests that because there is no record of such a meeting it does not prove it did not happen. Wright (1997: 170) rejects Wilson's conjectures on this point as Wright feels it historically improbable that Saul of Tarsus ever meet Jesus. Also none of the passages in Paul's epistles which are regarded as pre-Pauline show any more knowledge of the historical Jesus than Paul himself does.

Paul's seeming lack of any real knowledge of the person, ideology and life of Jesus is what deepens the Jesus mystery. Paul as mentioned before defined Jesus as Christ Jesus. The question of the historical relationship (or lack thereof) between Paul and Jesus is both long and complex. When the vast literature devoted to the subject of the historical Jesus is surveyed one thing stands out: the major advances in the discussion have generally been achieved not by efforts to understand the apostle Paul better, but by new developments in the study of the historical Jesus and the theological program that has always attached itself to this thorny issue.

Some scholars explain Paul's indifference to Jesus' historicity by assuming that the post-resurrection Christian community in Jerusalem based its faith on the

\[166\] Having come to Paul from tradition sources
historical Jesus of Nazareth and that Paul had to seek a quite different basis if he was to explain his independence of the Jerusalem leaders. This can only be speculative. Also speculative is because there are only a few passages in Pauline writings that remotely suggest that the period of Paul's lifetime was close in date to Jesus' life on earth. There is little concrete to support inferences of this nature but the speculations should not be dismissed.

Paul claimed his preached gospel came by special revelation. Given the opposition to his ministry it is suspected that Paul had to be careful about how he set out his account of the basis for his ministry to avoid losing credibility as an apostle who had not known Jesus personally.

Paul also claimed direct contact with heaven via a mechanism Paul refers to as the Holy Spirit. Eisenman (1997: 51) may have a valid point when he asserts that the way Paul refers to Christ Jesus is in reality a carbon copy of Paul himself. Thus the dubious nature of Paul's claims result in his opponents within the church ridiculing Paul as either a person of dreams or a liar.  

A further problem in understanding Paul is that the material gleaned from Acts - despite a fundamental unity of style indicating one authorship - shows the writing actually incorporates two different categories of information about the career of Paul. The first category is indirect information related as received

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167 See Paul's defence of this charge in Galatians 1: 20; 2 Corinthians 11: 31; Romans 9:1 etcetera
from its sources, whatever they may be. Wells, (1975: 17) a fierce critic of Christianity, asserts that that what Acts says about Paul in this respect may be tendentious. The second category is direct information introduced by the writer speaking in the first person plural - therefore its designation as the we-sections. The we-sections are all about the travels of Paul and his companions.

For some scholars the we-sections are the only authenticate material in Acts because there is no conflict with the Pauline epistles. Further those scholars who hold for the authenticity of the second category claim that the parts of Acts narrated at second hand should be handled with caution and even discounted where there is variance with Paul's accounts of his life and career in his epistles. Nevertheless even this thinking has its critics and is contentious.

To return again to the relationship (or lack thereof) between Paul and Jesus it is important to consider the conventional view that Paul was promoting directly the path of Christianity that he had inherited from Jesus of Nazareth. If this is correct it seems reasonable to expect that Paul would have written fully in his epistles about the rabbi from Nazareth, the prophet and miracle-worker who ate with tax collectors and sinners. Also worthy of inclusion would have been Jesus’ sermon on the Mount, his parables especially those in reference to the Kingdom of God. Further Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees and the Scribes.

168 It intrudes variously after Acts 16: 10
should have warranted comment. And even more thought-provoking is that nowhere in Paul's letters is mention made of the Lord's prayer.

Indeed Paul's statement that we do not even know how to pray as we ought is in sharp contrast to the instruction of Jesus to his disciples that they should pray then like this. In point of fact there is an enigma why Paul is silent about teachings and the supposed biographical details of Jesus which would have enabled Paul to support the very argument which he was putting forward.

Another view of the theology of Paul is seen in the work of Ferdinand Christian Baur. Baur shifted the focus of historical study away from the gospel of John as he claimed that its christology was quite advanced and therefore a late writing. Baur also saw the synoptic gospels presenting nothing beyond extending the idea of a purely human messiah. Paul in this scheme of Baur's became a kind of theological stepping stone, still rooted in the notion of a very human Jesus, but now greatly idealised, so that the teaching of the historical Jesus was not as important as the person and activity of Jesus, the crucified, suffering saviour. Baur's work stands at the beginning of a generation of New Testament scholarship that would be characterised by an intense interest in describing the life of Jesus in the most human of terms. Johannes Weiss took up the theme and liberal theology was in vogue. The theological mentality at the time

\[169\] Romans 8: 26
epitomised in the work of William Wrede was his rallying call of back to Jesus, not to Paul. The thesis was that Christianity could not be found in Paul.

Wrede provided a yet more radical formulation of the Jesus-Paul debate to accompany the liberal synthesis. Rather it was in the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels. By the end of this period of liberal theology the chasm between the morally religious Jesus and the dogmatic Paul had opened even wider.

As Europe struggled through crisis after crisis, and the cultural optimism of the 19th century gave way to the sense of dread experienced widely in the years prior to the outbreak of World War I, the optimism of the liberal theology movement received a fatal blow.

From the point of view of cultural history it was no surprise that Albert Schweitzer's uncompromising apocalyptic presentation of Jesus could now succeed where that of Johannes Weiss in 1892 could not. The liberal Jesus was dead and his moral teaching outmoded. Schweitzer's apocalyptic Jesus well suited the theological atmosphere then current.

During this period of the early 20th century, the debate over Paul and Jesus lay dormant. This, of course, was understandable. In an apocalyptic climate stressing the imminent end of the world, Jesus and Paul were seen to be in fundamental agreement. The tension between Jesus and Paul, so exploited by Baur and Wrede, faded in importance.
A significant new contribution to the discussion would not come again until a
new synthesis had been reached first on the Jesus front. This synthesis came in
the work of Rudolf Bultmann and the form-critical school.\(^{170}\)

One of the advances offered by the form critics was a much greater awareness
of the extent to which the ancient modes of oral transmission undermine any
confidence in the scholar's ability to reconstruct something of the actual
preaching of Jesus. Bultmann never saw this radical historical scepticism to be a
theological step backward or a threat to the authentic apprehension of
Christian faith. On the contrary, Bultmann welcomed it as positive. Bultmann
vigorously reversed the liberal quest's emphasis of what it held to be the
authentic moral teaching of Jesus and its de-emphasis of the more
christologically oriented preaching of Paul. Or better stated Bultmann placed at
the center of early Christian faith the kerygma of Christ crucified and showed it
was Paul who the most important early advocate of this kerygma.

Bultmann's thinking about Paul did not undo the positions of Baur and Wrede
who had stressed the lack of continuity between Jesus and Paul. However, in
contrast to liberal theology's dismissal of Paul as one who misunderstood the
nature of Christian faith, Bultmann embraced Paul's thought. For Bultmann,
Paul's genius was his realisation that historical knowledge of Jesus' own life
neither eases nor controls the decision one is called to make about Jesus as the
eschatological in-breaking of God's reign. The decision whether to accept the

\(^{170}\) See chapter 5
Jesus event as the turning point of God's history in the world, and thus as crucial for ordering one's own existence accordingly, is a matter of faith. Knowledge about the historical Jesus for Bultmann is neither necessary nor helpful to this act of faith. It was this thinking that ironically saw theology once again accepting the great chasm between Paul and Jesus expressed by Baur and Wrede. This time, however, Paul stood in the limelight, while Jesus stepped back into the shadows.

Another aspect in the Jesus mystery is that in Paul's copious writings, so enthusiastically focused on the redemptive death of Jesus Christ, there is no mention of many important details of the passion of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no mention of the saga of the triumphal entry of Jesus on an ass, the crown of thorns, the confrontation with Pilate. It is indeed thought-provoking why Paul writing in most scholars' estimates only a decade or two after the crucifixion of Jesus did not elucidate on such theologically important details as Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane or Jesus' dying words on the cross. The only judgement is that Paul did not know about them. Thus the circumstantial evidence is that many of the features of the passion story as with the virgin-birth narrative may not have been originated at the time of Paul's writings.

Some scholars point to Paul's centrality of the crucifixion as a prime example of the relationship of his preaching to the historical Jesus. Paul certainly
showed a belief that, in crucifying Jesus in ignorance of his true identity, the Jewish leaders had forfeited their influence over the world. (Wells 1975: 70)

Scholars such as SG Brandon admit that Paul gives the crucifixion no historical context with the result that nothing can be deduced from Paul's writings when or where Jesus lived or where he had been buried or his mode of resurrection.

For good reason then Paul has fascinated many scholars. AN Wilson (1997: 207) suggests that for Paul Christ had little or nothing to do with the historical Jesus who was unimportant to Paul. Christ, for Paul, was not so much the person the Jerusalem Christians and their followers remembered but a presence of divine love in the heart of believers. Paul is seen in this approach as transforming what otherwise would have been a fading time-based, local and political message into a religion of the heart that was available to people anywhere and at any time.

The Hebrew translation of Jesus means Saviour. It is distinctly possible that Paul's beginnings of Christianity was not a reference to a human individual but, like the term Logos, to a concept of a divine spiritual figure who is the mediator of God's salvation. Also Christ which is the Greek translation for messiah is a concept. Thus a belief in a form of spiritual saviour could have been more widespread in the beginnings of Christianity than tradition suggests. To take the point further the crucifixion event in Paul's estimation did not focus on a

171 Yeshua
political tragedy of the death of an individual. The concept of crucifixion became the focus of Paul's religious attention over a period of some 30 years. Paul would mythologise it and in his writings and preaching set out the terms of its meaning. Paul in this approach turned the fact of Jesus' crucifixion into the basis of a new mystery religion. And most importantly Paul translated Jesus’ message from Judaism to Hellenism so that all could join in.

It is more than probable that Paul's ministry was the real beginning of what is today known as Christianity. In this line of thinking Paul can be credited as the founder of Christianity. Paul's energy and religious genius was such that his religious thinking became decisive and eventually was the one to prove influential in the development of Christianity.

Then questions can be raised whether Paul was a Jewish or a Greek thinker? Again scholarship is divided on this issue. If anything the debate is drawn back into the approach of either the Wrede strasse or the Schweitzer strasse. Schweitzer set out clearly his view that Paul in the history of 1st century religion is Jewish through and through and only subsequently was there a Hellenisation of Christianity. Bultmann, representing the Wrede approach, asserted that Paul belongs in his Hellenistic context. Further Bultmann said that Paul in his apostleship to the Gentiles had abandoned the Jewish categories of his early thought and now expressed his message in the categories and language of the wider Greek world.
Käsemann accepted Schweitzer's view that Paul's true background was found in apocalyptic Judaism. Further Käsemann provided a major pointer to understanding Paul in that, from Paul's Jewish context, he produced a critique of Judaism. Up until then conventional wisdom assumed that if a person was Jewish there would be little or no critique of Judaism. Conversely where Judaism was critiqued it came from outside Judaism. (Wright 1997: 17) Though it may seem paradoxical there are scholars who assert Paul's writings were more Jewish and less Christian than the author of the Matthean gospel. Probably this is because Paul came earlier in the development of that particular Jewish religious community that has since come to be identified as Christian. (Farmer 1982: 17)

It was Ed Parish Sanders who differed markedly with mainline Protestant scholars by pointing out that Judaism was and is a perfectly valid and proper form of religion and while Paul did critique Judaism, the basis of his critique was that it was not Christianity.

Another point worth considering is Paul's relationship to gnosticism. The conventional claim is that Paul inherited the tradition found in the gospels and therefore early Christianity sprang fully formed from the well orchestrated plan of Jesus. In this what became known as gnosticism was a heretical misreading of Jesus' message. But there are instances in Paul's writings which are very much like gnostic mysticism. In this Paul differentiates between two kinds of
Christian knowledge: the ordinary knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection, and a *secret and hidden* knowledge which is only for the advanced. 172

In summary it is clear that whatever the relationship - or lack of it - between Paul and the historical Jesus it was Paul who had taken a dispirited Jesus movement and transformed it into a church militant that, within three centuries after the death of Paul, became the inheritor of the Roman Empire.

Further Paul's perception of Jesus as the Christ would eventually be imposed by the church upon all Christendom. It became the new authenticated Christianity, a faith that was alien to the way in which the Jesus movement was led by James.

Truly religion, like history, is written by the victors.

Though Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles and abolished Mosaic law, he nevertheless held that Christianity and the Old Testament were indissoluble. So pervasive was Paul's influence that when at the end of the 3rd century the New Testament was canonised, it was combined with the Old Testament into one Holy Scripture. Thus, in spite of its Trinitarian formula, Jewish monotheism was maintained within Christianity. (Dimont 1991: 173)

172 2 Corinthians 12: 4, 1 Corinthians 2: 6-7
Given the thesis that Christianity as it is known today was originated by Paul, it is now time to make a judgement call in the light of this thinking and by extrapolation can be the solution of the Jewish mystery.
Chapter 14

THE JESUS MYSTERY SOLVED?

At the opening of this dissertation there was the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth is a mystery. And that the mystery will likely never be completely explained. Nevertheless the challenge for theology has to be and will continue to be to find an answer and a solution to the mystery. This has been the overriding objective of this dissertation.

In pursuance of the objective the journey which this dissertation has travelled has reflected on the debate - at times acrimonious - as well as the differing streams of thought - at times strident - about Jesus of Nazareth since it was first realised that the New Testament gospels were not written for historical reasons. And for Christianity as a religion there is the added discomfort the fact that within contemporary scientific thinking the gospel Jesus is regarded as implausible.

So it is now apposite to conclude this dissertation by bringing together the various strands of thought outlined within these writings and in a weighing of this evidence to come to a judgement on the Jesus mystery. Thus this chapter is both a summation and a reasoning.

From the evidence derived from both canonical and extra-biblical sources it is certain that a Galilean named Jesus followed a public career within the
Palestinian territory. The sphere of his activities encompassed preaching and healing.

Less certain from a historical perspective is that Jesus was executed by the Roman authorities and that there was a resurrection event followed by the heavenly ascension of Jesus. Yet these aspects are fundamental for Christian faith. Thus it must be expected that any conclusion to the contrary which may compromise the belief in the gospel outline of crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus will be polemical.

In the face of too insensitive or too liberal criticism of the gospels there is still a tendency to read the biblical material as if Jesus’ actions and words are recorded without alteration. This is known by serious scholars to be incorrect.

The data is compelling that the New Testament literature was written to support the early church’s practices and thinking that had evolved in the religious system built on the faith of the post-resurrection Jesus. It became apparent that a purely literary approach by theologians to the New Testament or Christian origins was improper and misleading. The result was an unscholarly and bankrupt theology.

It was this realisation that led many theologians to become involved in the quests to find out who Jesus really was before the Easter event.
These quests had a definite result in showing that any attempt to describe the historical Jesus was and is an examination and a testing of the meaning given to Jesus' ministry and life by the early church. Also the driving force behind the quests was to determine how much of was remembered and had been written about was in fact the person of Jesus as an notable and identifiable historical figure.

The first quest for the historical Jesus in the 19th century was effectively ended by two publications by William Wrede and Albert Schweitzer both of whom in different ways declared the quest to have reached a dead-end. What however was not discerned by Wrede and Schweitzer was that once fanned the flame of the theological fascination of resolving who the pre-resurrection Jesus really was could only be dampened down but not extinguished. This has been very clear as the 20th century has seen a continuing and in more recent times a growing debate on the subject.

Interestingly the differing cores of thinking of Wrede and Schweitzer which silenced the 19th century quest can be discerned to be basic to the subsequent searches for the historical Jesus right up to the present day. Profound scepticism was the hallmark of Wrede about the whole Jesus gospel story. Central to Schweitzer's thinking was that the path to discovering Jesus was the realisation that the Jesus story had an eschatological base.
Thus the further searches for the historical Jesus have either followed the Wrede road of scepticism or the Schweitzer road built upon eschatology.

Wredean scepticism was very much the basis of the thinking of Rudolf Bultmann in his form-critical methodology. The Bultmannian conclusion was that the search for the historical Jesus was fruitless. Given the theological stature of Bultmann his theological speculation about the subject cannot be just dismissed or rejected.

Nevertheless worth noting is the position of British New Testament scholars who in a sharp reaction against the scepticism of the Bultmannian form critics took a stand so well expressed by Thomas Walter Manson’s dictum that the further one travels along the Wrede road the more it is realised it is a road to nowhere.

In similar vein it was the feeling of some of the theologians who belonged to the Bultmannian school that Bultmann has gone too far in his scepticism about the search for the historical Jesus. As a consequence and contrary to Bultmann's thinking it was his own school that gave birth to what became known as the new quest.

In retrospect the initial confidence exuded at the start of the new quest that much could be known about Jesus from the gospels has proved to be illusory.
Yet the search for the historical Jesus has remained vigorous. It has also
become more international as opposed to what had been up till well into the
20th century had mainly been a European venture. And with a widening
international theological interest in the subject of the historical Jesus the search
has developed markedly. Nowhere is this more discernible than in the amount
of literature published on the subject since the 1970s.

Especially on the North American continent there has been a flood of
publications devoted to the historical Jesus. There is seemingly a virtually
endless appetite for books about Jesus. Particularly prominent are those
versions of Jesus' life that claim to offer something secret or salacious to a
public that for many centuries was ignorant of the idea that there was any
doubt about the historical genuineness of the gospel material and indeed the
totality of the New Testament writings.

The modern and current search for the historical Jesus can be segregated into
two camps.

The first camp consist of those who follow what has been designated the third
quest. In this the journey of the quest is pointedly down the Schweitzer road
with a view that Jesus' whole career was eschatologically based. In its favour
has been the absolute determination by third questers to locate Jesus within 1st
century Judaism and proceed from that point.
But at the same time it is evident that the third quest has encountered difficulties. The initial confidence that there was enough continuity between the evangelists’ memories of Jesus, even though their accounts were written kerygmatically, has proved itself to be very tenuous. The results achieved thus far hardly give confidence that the historic content produced by third questers can be verified. This is a fact they themselves have had to acknowledge. The probability is more and more likely that the historical Jesus was so severely downplayed in the gospels that in reality there is only the Christ left that substantiated the faith of the primitive church as it existed at the time of the gospel writings.

Amongst some of the third questers has been also an equally incorrect perception that theology has to make a choice between Jesus’ authentic actions and the inauthentic redactions of the early church. This approach is really one of false alternatives. It is not that simple.

Accordingly it is still too early - and the jury must be seen as still out - to judge whether the scholars falling within the third quest approach can produce a reasonable picture of the historical Jesus.

The second camp is the Jesus Seminar as it exists organisationally in North America and its like-minded adherents who, following the Wrede road, are basically sceptical of most of the canonical gospel material recording the Jesus sayings. Despite the vehement criticisms from fundamental and conservative
scholars of the Jesus Seminar and its well publicised results, it is nevertheless probable that the recorded gospel sayings of Jesus are in reality largely transmissions-oriented and written for consumption and support of the primitive church rather than authentic sayings of Jesus.

Much has been made within the Jesus Seminar and similar thinking scholars of the Q hypothesis and the gospel of Thomas and the impact this material has in the search for Jesus of Nazareth. As far as Q is concerned there is no corroborative manuscript evidence of its existence. Certainly Paul’s letters or the known history of the early church make no mention of such a document. It seems logical to believe that the alleged Q document, the Q people and the Q church are a historical fiction. It has been shown also that the hypothesis undergirding the two-source theory which gave rise to the idea of a Q source was based on error.

There are also too many suppositions to support a position that the gospel of Thomas was written earlier than the 2nd century. Certainly there is no reason to believe that the document was written before the Pauline writings or the canonical gospels.

Accordingly the evidence against the existence of a Q document or an earlier gospel of Thomas makes both sources unreliable and unhelpful in the search for the historical Jesus. Especially to support the position advanced by the Jesus Seminar and its adherents that these sources are more reliable than the
canonical gospels in determining accurately both authentic Jesus sayings or who the historical Jesus really was.

For all these reasons it is appropriate that the Jesus Seminar which gave much value to the extra biblical material should itself be discounted as being of any important assistance to the search for the historical Jesus.

The Seminar and its fellows are essentially a media attraction and for the most part entirely unrepresentative of serious scholarly research. And those scholars who have associated their thinking with similar positions of the Seminar will find the journey along the Wrede road to be an expedition to nowhere.

It is appropriate at this point to underline the overall problem in the search for the historical Jesus when reliance is based on the New Testament gospels. Simply put there is a paucity of material. Coupled to this must be the doubts of the historical veracity of such material.

This doubt is well illustrated by an analysis of the material. Consider, just as an example, what is depicted in the area where Jesus of Nazareth lived and moved. The scene is set of a peaceful, Hellenised countryside, where Galilean fishermen cast their nets and mend their boats. Then there are scenes of Roman officials and military officers in most favourable terms. Herod and his family are shown as bumbling but well meaning dupes of the Roman authorities. Added to this are the scenes of the vindictive and unruly Jewish
mobs. Finally consider how Jesus is shown as mostly politically disinterested and other worldly. In other words harmless in Roman thinking. Jesus seems even pro-Roman, at odds with his own people and reflecting a preaching based on a variety of Plato's representation of the Apology of Socrates or the Pax Romano.

All this would be far from the true position of a countryside and a people oppressed under Roman occupation forces. It clearly shows what was obviously a need for the redactors of the gospels to produce material which could be seen as submissive to the Roman power. It is evident that the writings were produced with a hidden agenda more to please the Roman and Hellenistic audiences as opposed to the Jewish ones.

Probably the best clue to the editorial processes of the gospels and other New Testament writings is a comparison to the Dead Sea scrolls whose compilers had no such need because this material was produced and was to be used within in what today would be described as monastic circumstances. There was no need for the authors to be concerned at the possibility that the writings would ever come to the attention of the Roman authorities.

Any reasonable judgement must be that, unless other evidence is discovered, the search for the historical Jesus based on the gospels will produce nothing of theological or historical value. All that can be gleaned must at best be supposition. Furthermore a search that concentrates only on Jesus of Nazareth
to the exclusion of other key figures in the formative period of Christianity will be inconclusive and Jesus of Nazareth will remain a mystery.

And so this should be the end of the story. It is not!

There are also sources other than the gospels which can assist in the solution to the mystery of Jesus. They are to be found in the Pauline material and extra-biblical sources other than the gospel of Thomas or the hypothetical Q document. Since the 1940s there has been a growth in the discovery of documents that are pre-70 CE and which are Jewish. In considering these alternative sources it is suggested - if not asserted - that in these references there is an answer to Jesus mystery.

One of the other key players in the Jesus story is Paul of Tarsus. Despite the counter arguments of conservative and fundamental theologians the reasoning is compelling that Paul must be credited as the being the originator of the form of Christianity which developed into a world religion. Certainly Paul was the driving force for Christianity's spread across the Roman Empire. It is also likely that when Paul broke into Christian history there were other branches of a belief system based on the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth that were scattered within the Roman empire. But the efforts of Paul overshadowed these branches and to all intents and purposes they eventually ceased to exist or threw their lot in with Paul.
There is a view which cannot be just dismissed that the Christ Jesus to whom Paul refers in his writings has little to do with the life and death of a recent person of history. Some writers put forward the deduction that Paul's Jesus was a figment of his imagination who, when people began to accept and believe in his religious system had to be made to appear like a real-life individual. But this is unlikely given that there are references in the New Testament writings to Paul meeting with another key player in James the brother of Jesus as well as other members of the Jerusalem-based Nazarene community. Were it not for these references there could be a reasonable supposition that Paul was pointing to a person who seems to have died earlier in history than was traditionally believed. But what is of reasonable and probable circumstantial evidence is that Paul based his religious foundation and thrust totally on a visionary experience which Paul then embellished into a crucified and resurrected historical figure to give foundation to his religious beliefs.

Thus the evidence is impressive that Paul was not only the founder and promoter of a particular approach to religion but that he had such religious genius that it culminated in this system becoming the main stream of Christianity. And at the same time as mentioned before Paul extinguished any other belief systems that stemmed more directly from the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. It was Paul's impetus and energy that would see the spread of his particular brand of Christianity within western civilisation.
If it were not for Paul the religion promoted by the direct disciples and followers of Jesus of Nazareth would have remained located mainly within Palestine and was probably impaired by the events of 66-70 CE which culminated in the destruction by the Roman forces of the temple in Jerusalem. The community at Qumran and the Jerusalem community led by James before his death disappeared at the same time. Whether their being cast into oblivion was either intentional or by benign neglect will likely never be known. What is important is that it is probable the leaders of the Jerusalem community never regarded themselves as the founders of a new religion. They saw themselves still very much Jews, who were differentiated from their fellow Jews only by their belief in Jesus as the messiah. They had a confidence that the resurrected Jesus would return very soon to earth and through Jesus’ agency God would perform miracles and other stupendous deeds including the defeat of the Romans with their resultant expulsion from Israel. With these happenings Jesus would then be accepted by the Jews as messiah. There was never any intention by the Jerusalem community to have a split between the Jesus movement and the main body of Jewish believers. Certainly not the formation of a new religion.

So it was Paul who took aspects of the earthly ministry of Jesus and transformed it into a world religion. But this statements begs the question how did Paul succeed in this endeavour given the political climate of the time?
It is Paul's claim to the attainment of Roman status that is the clue to his being able to survive in the turbulent times of his era. Further this claimed Roman citizenship permitted his writings to exist in a hostile climate. Paul was likely a defector to the Roman cause. And the form of Christianity which resulted from the efforts of Paul is painfully apparent in its presentation as being submissive and accommodating to the Roman power.

What differentiated Pauline Christianity from all the other forms of religion of the time and ensured that his basis of religion, unlike theirs, would not be forgotten was his inspired connection of it to Judaism. But it was contrasted as not being merely a branch of Judaism but actually superseding it. It thus gained a historical basis going back in time to the beginning of the world. In doing this there was the concomitant result that Christianity as it evolved in its primitive period could not be accused of being based solely on Paul's personality.

It is the conclusion of this dissertation that the weight of evidence gives probability - indeed confidence - to the following scenario.

After the death of Jesus there remained a community in Jerusalem which was led by James. There is no evidence that it embarked on any missionary activity. With the death of James and the subsequent destruction of the temple this community, which saw itself as a branch of Judaism, fled across the Jordan and nothing was known of them after that.
Paul, who never met Jesus personally, claimed a visionary encounter with Jesus. And this dissertation which never intends being heretical does not dispute that Jesus, as God's Son, was the instigator of this vision. It should be accepted nevertheless that Paul may have been totally unaware at the time he had the vision of the fact of the incarnational Jesus of Nazareth who only became linked to Paul's religious system later.

It was the religious genius of Paul that and out of the claimed visionary encounter he gave perception to an understanding of Jesus as a Christ figure. Such was Paul's drive and ambition that the Christian religion which is in existence today is a legacy of Paul. And although Paul attributed the Christian foundation to be Jesus Christ it had only a referential relationship to the Galilean Jesus. It would thus be more correct to define Christianity as Pauline or Gentile Christianity.

When considered on these lines it is noticeable that the New Testament writings are much more dominated by Paul than is traditionally held. Because of the manner of development of the primitive church established by Paul, the gospels were written not primarily to outline the true personage of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather they were designed to be the logical account of the person who fitted in with the then church and tied in with the Christ-idea which Paul had developed. While the gospels had a foundation of early traditions of Jesus of
Nazareth it is likely they are doctrinally based on the New Testament epistles ascribed to Paul.

Martin Kahler was correct in pointing to the separation of the historical Jesus and the Christ of the gospels. What he missed was that it was Pauline influences that invented the Christ.

Given the chronology of the New Testament it is probable that the theories of Paul were already known by the authors of the gospels at the time of writing and this coloured - more than just the evolution and development of the primitive church - their interpretations that circulated about Jesus' activities.

Pointing to the redaction of the gospels in this manner is illustrated by examples of which the following are worth noting. The disciples of Jesus are shown as weak.\textsuperscript{173} Paul repeatedly refers to the disciples in this thought in his writings. When describing the leaders of the Jerusalem community and their directives it is usually in a derogatory manner.\textsuperscript{174} Further the gospels depict Peter as losing faith when he sinks into the sea of Galilee. The intention was to underline the weakness of Peter in contrast to the Pauline concept of faith. And the disciples time and again are depicted to have a defective understanding of Jesus' teaching with particular emphasis of the most important all of Pauline doctrines, namely the Christ. The reductionism of James and the other disciples is therefore not surprising.

\textsuperscript{173} Matthew 14:31 is an example,
The result was that in the canonisation of the New Testament those involved supported the view that Paul's understanding of Jesus was superior and that Paul knew Jesus better than any other of Jesus' directly appointed apostles and companions.

Yet the early traditions and even written sources are not obliterated in the gospel material. They give valuable and intriguing indications of what the story was like before the Paulinist redactors gave final shape to the gospels. But it was the Paulinist view of what the objectives of Jesus' earthly life had been about that became imbedded into the written material and how the church developed in history.

Accordingly rival interpretations, which possibly were orthodox at some time within primitive Christianity now because they opposed Paul's individual views became heretical.

Finally the factor that must be discussed is given the foregoing scenario where does Christianity stand? One must, however reluctantly, go back to the positions of Martin Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann and conclude that it doesn't matter what really happened at the time of Christianity's foundation. The only thing that matters is what Christians think happened. And because the story of

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174 Romans 14: 1-2 and 1 Corinthians 8: 7-9:22
Jesus as portrayed in the gospels is what Christians think happened this is what counts in Christian faith and in the continuing quest to find the historical Jesus.

This quest for the historical Jesus which has held fascination over the last 200 years will continue to provide theological challenge. But the end result will remain one of an elusive Jesus. Further the Jesus produced will continue to be a mirror reflection of the searcher and, usually this Jesus will be politically correct for the time of each search.

But no future search will ever produce the real Jesus because he was virtually eliminated from the gospels by the Pauline redactors who were determined to preserve and to promote the Christ figure of Gentile or Pauline Christianity.
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